

Urge Surfing Workbook

Riding out cravings and urges with mindfulness

Research-informed use. This resource may support skill learning but is not comprehensive DBT. The four common skills domains are mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness, and emotion regulation; outcomes remain individualized.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

A client workbook on urge surfing. It explains what urges do in the body and mind, the steps and benefits of surfing rather than fighting them, and coping techniques, then moves into goal setting, the urge curve, a guided urge-surfing mindfulness script, visualization exercises, the DEADS strategy, an urge log and an ABC thought record.

HOW TO USE IT

Introduce the urge curve on page 14 in session, then use the log on page 22 to track urges between sessions.

AT A GLANCE

AUDIENCE	Client Resource
FORMAT	Workbook
FAMILY	DBT · emotion regulation

25

PAGES

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WORKSHEETS

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TEACHING PAGES

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REFERENCE PAGES

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Urge Surfing Workbook · information

But what if there were a way to ride out these urges without being controlled by them? Enter "urge surfing," a powerful therapeutic tool designed to help manage and overcome compulsions. Understanding Urge Surfing

Originating from the practice of mindfulness, urge surfing is a technique developed by the renowned psychologist Dr.

STEPS INVOLVED IN URGE

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

STEPS INVOLVED IN URGE SURFING Notice the Urge: When you feel the pull of an urge, take a moment to pause and Acknowledge It Without Judgment: Realize that urges are normal, temporary states, and everyone experiences them. Avoid self-judgmental thoughts like, “I shouldn’t be feeling this way.” Instead, try, “Here is the thought/desire, I see you.” Focus on Your Breath: Like any mindfulness practice, a cornerstone of urge surfing is the breath. Breathe deeply and steadily. Your breath can be an anchor, helping you stay present as the urge passes. Imagine you’re on a surfboard atop the wave, riding it out with your breath. Ride the Urge Like a Wave: As the urge comes and goes, envision it as ocean waves that grow and eventually fade away alongside the shore. Try to remain an observer of these waves rather than being swept away by them. Remember Your Values and Goals: It’s helpful to periodically remind yourself why

acknowledge it. Instead of reacting instinctively, observe the sensation in your body— where do you feel this urge?

Is it a tension in your chest, a tightening in your throat, or maybe a restlessness in your legs?

you’re implementing urge surfing. What long-term goals or values do you have that would benefit from managing this urge effectively?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Low / not at allHigh / fully

Urge Surfing Workbook · information

Applying Urge Surfing in Everyday Life Urge surfing can be adapted to fit into your daily routine quite effortlessly. Try it the next time you're faced with any mild to strong desire that contradicts your goals: - Food cravings: When reaching for late-night snacks, pause, and surf through your need.

How might this inform one next step?

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

IDENTIFY YOUR PHYSICAL CHANGES Our bodies are remarkably attuned to the emotional and psychological states we experience daily, often expressing what we're feeling even before we're consciously aware of it. One of the most fascinating aspects of this connection is how our bodies react to urges—those compelling desires or impulses that seem to call us to action. Recognizing these physical changes is a crucial first step in becoming more mindful and deliberate in our responses.

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

IDENTIFY YOUR PHYSICAL CHANGES

10. Flushing or Blushing: You might notice your face or skin becoming warmer or redder. **11. Headache or Pressure:** Tension can sometimes manifest as a pressure or pain in the head. **12. Changes in Appetite:** You might feel a sudden desire to eat or a noticeable suppression of hunger. **13. Rapid Thoughts:** Your mind may become more active, with thoughts racing or feeling jumbled. **14. Heightened Alertness:** An increased sense of awareness or sensitivity to your surroundings is common. **15. Feeling Energetic or Restless:** An urge might be accompanied by a surge of energy or the desire to move.

ACKNOWLEDGE WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

Urge Surfing Workbook • information

The first step in urge surfing is to acknowledge the urge when it appears. Instead of trying to suppress or fight it, you allow yourself to become fully aware of its presence. This involves noticing where you feel the urge in your body, such as a tightening in your chest, a knot in your stomach, or tension in your muscles.

You may also observe any accompanying thoughts or emotions. The key at this stage is to approach these sensations with curiosity rather than immediate judgment. Recognize the urge for what it is—an inevitable physiological and psychological response—and accept that you’re experiencing it in that moment. Acknowledging without judgment requires a deliberate shift in how you perceive the urge. Instead of labeling it as "bad" or mentally scolding yourself for having the urge, strive to view it objectively, almost as if you’re an impartial observer.

This nonjudgmental stance helps to remove the power and urgency the craving often holds over you because it detaches your identity and self-worth from the presence of the urge.

Instead of engaging in a mental battle with the urge or criticizing yourself for having it, simply notice and accept it as part of your experience. This practice of acknowledgment can be facilitated by focusing on your breath or using other mindfulness techniques to ground yourself. As you breathe through the urge, be attentive to how it fluctuates, noticing any changes in intensity or location within your body.

What stands out?

How might this inform one next step?

1. Keep in view
By viewing the urge in a nonjudgmental way, you reduce its authority and influence.

2. Keep in view
The act of "surfing" the urge allows you to ride it out like a wave until it eventually subsides on its own, an indication that urges are temporary and will pass if not acted upon.

3. Keep in view
This surf requires patience and practice, but over time, it becomes a powerful tool for gaining control over impulses, reducing their frequency and intensity, and fostering long-term resilience.

Urge Surfing Workbook

Urge Surfing Workbook · information

Deep Breathing: Practice slow, steady breathing to calm the mind and body. Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Tense and then relax each muscle group to release tension. Mindfulness Meditation: Focus on the present moment without judgment. Journaling: Write down your thoughts and feelings to process them. Physical Exercise: Engage in physical activity to release endorphins and reduce stress.

Listening to Music: Play soothing or uplifting music to change your mood. Creative Outlets: Draw, paint, or engage in other creative activities to express emotions. Reading: Dive into a book to distract and transport your mind elsewhere. Connecting with Nature: Spend time outdoors to feel grounded and rejuvenated. Taking a Walk: A simple walk can clear your mind and break the intensity of the urge.

Talking to a Friend: Reach out to someone you trust for support and distraction. Mindful Eating: Eat slowly and mindfully to focus on textures and flavors. Aromatherapy: Use calming scents like lavender or chamomile to relax. Visualization: Imagine a calming or happy place to reduce stress. Positive Affirmations: Repeat affirmations that reinforce your strength and resilience.

What stands out?

How might this inform one next step?

1. Keep in view

Grounding Techniques: Use sensory details (like the 5-4-3-2-1 technique) to stay present.

2. Keep in view

Counting Backwards: Count backwards from a high number to distract yourself
Setting Short-term Goals: Focus on achievable goals to maintain a sense of purpose.

3. Keep in view

Practicing Gratitude: Reflect on things you are grateful for to boost your mood.

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

COPING SKILLS Coping skills are vital tools that can help individuals manage urges and cravings without giving in to them. Urge surfing, which involves acknowledging an urge without judgment and allowing it to pass, can be supported by a variety of coping strategies that help redirect focus, manage stress, and build resilience. Here is a list of common coping skills that can support urge surfing:

GOALS

Urge Surfing Workbook · information

Setting goals for urge surfing is an empowering strategy that can significantly enhance one's ability to manage cravings and impulses. The concept of urge surfing involves recognizing the presence of an urge without acting on it, similar to how a surfer rides a wave. Establishing clear and achievable goals can facilitate the development of skills necessary for successfully navigating these urges and ultimately contribute to long-term behavioral change and well-being.

1. Define Specific Goals: The first step in setting goals for urge surfing is to identify specific and concrete objectives. Instead of setting a vague goal like "get better at managing urges," define precise goals such as "practice urge surfing techniques for at least five minutes every day" or "identify three triggers and develop a response plan for each." Specificity provides clarity and direction, making it easier to measure progress.

2. Set Realistic and Achievable Milestones: It's important that goals are both realistic and achievable. Start with small, incremental goals that can gradually build into more challenging ones. For instance, begin with a goal to successfully surf an urge for five minutes and then extend the duration as mastery builds. Achievable goals foster a sense of accomplishment, which can boost motivation and confidence.

What stands out?

How might this inform one next step?

1. Keep in view
3.

2. Keep in view
Time-bound Objectives: Establishing time frames for achieving goals is crucial to maintaining focus and momentum.

3. Keep in view
Implement short-term goals such as "review my progress at the end of each week" alongside long-term plans like "evaluate improvements in urge surfing every month." Time-bound goals provide structure and a sense of urgency that can drive consistent effort.

GOALS

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

Consider journaling your experiences to gain insights. Use this information to adjust your goals and techniques. Continuous reflection fosters growth and a deeper understanding of personal patterns relating to urges. 7. Seek Support and Accountability: Sharing goals with a supportive friend, family member, or therapist can provide an additional layer of accountability and encouragement. Discuss your goals, progress, and challenges. This support network can provide perspective, advice, and motivation to continue progressing despite difficulties. By setting structured, realistic, and adaptable goals, individuals can create a solid foundation for mastering urge surfing. The process not only helps in managing urges more effectively but also contributes to the development of self-discipline and emotional resilience over time. Ultimately, goal-setting can transform the way one interacts with urges, shifting from immediate reaction to mindful contemplation and crafted response.

GOALS 4. Embrace Flexibility: While structure is important, it's equally crucial to maintain adaptability. Recognize that setbacks may occur, and adapt your goals as necessary. If a particular technique isn't working, be open to trying different approaches or adjusting timelines. Flexibility in goalsetting encourages resilience and persistence in the face of challenges. **5. Celebrate Achievements:** Acknowledge and celebrate progress to sustain motivation. Each successful surf of an urge, no matter how small, is an accomplishment worth recognizing. Celebrate milestones, whether by treating yourself to a rewarding activity or taking a moment to genuinely reflect on and appreciate your dedication and effort. **6. Self-reflection and Adjustment:** Regularly engage in self-reflection to evaluate your progress. What strategies are working?

Where are the challenges?

Urge Surfing Workbook · information

Goal 1 Action plans Goal 2 Action plans Goal 3 Action plans

How might this inform one next step?

[illegible]

URGE SURFING WHAT IS MY URGE?

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

Use a recent, manageable example. Fragments are fine; skip any prompt that does not fit.

URGE SURFING WHAT IS MY URGE?

WHAT ARE THE PHYSICAL CHANGES I CAN FEEL?

THINGS I CAN DO TO HELP RESIST THE URGE?

REFLECTION

Surfingyour urge

Urge Surfing Workbook · reference list

QUICK-REFERENCE LIBRARY

- Surfingyour urge A TECHNIQUE TO HELP MANAGE YOUR UNWANTED BEHAVIORS
- URGE RISE
- PEAK Your urge starts to rise and become more intense. Physical symptoms include rapid heart beat, fast breathing, sweaty, and
- hot. Your urge is at its peak, it has
- reached its maximum capacity.
- Physical and emotional symptoms will also be at their
- peak.
- TRIGGER
- FALL
- Your urge has been triggered by your emotion, something you have done, or want to do, something you touch, hear, see, or
- taste. Your urge starts to lose its
- intensity. You start to
- recover and feel better
- both physically and
- mentally.
- URGE REMINDERS Urge surfing is a technique used to observe and experience your urge, without engaging in
- it. Fighting urges by either talking yourself out of them or distracting yourself from
- them can often make them bigger. Urges are like waves, they can be strong and
- powerful, but they eventually pass. Surf your urge with mindfulness, where you watch your breath and notice your
- thoughts without judgment. Urges rarely last longer than 30 minutes; if you don't feed them by engaging in them,
- they will pass on their own.
- Whatever you repeat gets stronger.
- Whatever you don't repeat gets weaker.

Surfing your urge

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Urge Surfing Workbook

Urge Surfing Workbook · question bank

COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— URGE SURFING

— WITH MINDFULNESS

— THROUGHOUT THIS EXERCISE, YOU WILL RIDE OUT AN URGE, JUST LIKE A SURFER RIDING THE WAVE IN THE

— OCEAN.

— WHEN A SURFER IS IN THE OCEAN, THEY EXPERIENCE ALL TYPES OF WAVES, SOME SMALL AND SOME

— OVERWHELMINGLY LARGE. HOWEVER, AS ALL SURFERS KNOW, ALL WAVES WILL BREAK UP AND DISSIPATE.

— FIND A COMFORTABLE POSITION, EITHER SITTING OR LYING DOWN.

— NOTICE THE URGE AS IT AFFECTS THE BODY:

— COULD YOU TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO FOCUS ON WHERE YOU EXPERIENCE URGES IN YOUR BODY?

— WHERE CAN YOU FEEL THE PHYSICAL SENSATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE URGE? PLEASE TAKE A LOOK

— AT WHAT THE INTENSITY OF THE SENSATION IS LOCATED.

— HOW MUCH SPACE DOES THE SENSATION TAKE UP IN YOUR BODY?

— DOES THE SENSATION FEEL TIGHT AND TENSE?

— DOES THE SENSATION FEEL HOT OR COLD?

— HOW DO THESE QUALITIES VARY WITH EACH BREATH?

— DOES THE SENSATION HAVE ANY MOVEMENTS?

— WHAT COLORS DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH THE SENSATIONS?

— BRING YOUR ATTENTION TO YOUR BREATH

— YOU CAN TRY AND NOTICE YOUR BREATH FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES.

— THINK OF A BODY PART RELATED TO BREATHING, SUCH AS YOUR DIAPHRAGM, LUNGS, OR NOSE. FOR

— EXAMPLE, AS YOU BREATHE, INHALE THROUGH THE NOSE AND SLOWLY EXHALE THROUGH THE MOUTH.

— BREATHE IN.....ONE..... TWO.....THREE..... AND OUT.....ONE..... TWO..... THREE..... AND BREATHE IN.....ONE.....

— TWO.....THREE... AND BREATHE OUT..... ONE.... TWO...THREE...

— AND REPEAT 3- 4 TIMES.

— NOTICE THAT YOU CAN BE PRESENT AND NOT REACT; YOU CAN EXPERIENCE CRAVINGS AND URGES AND

— NOT REACT.

— LET IT PASS

— THIS EXERCISE IS NEARLY COMPLETE. TAKE ONE MORE MOMENT TO OBSERVE YOUR THOUGHTS AND

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Urge Surfing Workbook · question bank

COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— FEELINGS. NOTICE IF YOUR URGE HAS CHANGED.

— OF YOUR URGE AND TRYING A DIFFERENT WAY.

— WHEN YOU ARE DONE SURFING THE URGE, TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK YOURSELF FOR BEING MINDFUL

FLOATING IN THE OCEAN

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

Breathe slowly through your nose and mouth, and repeat five times. When you are ready, you can slowly open your eyes.

FLOATING IN THE OCEAN Start by making yourself very comfortable. Find a calm and quiet place to lie down and relax; maybe you want to close your eyes now. First, relax your body. Then, starting at the top of your head, allow a feeling of relaxation to begin. Feel the peace grow with each breath you take. Inhale... Relax your scalp and head.... exhale... Let the tension go away even more... Breathe in relaxation... Feeling your face and ears relax... exhale all the tension. Visualize yourself at the beach, the white sand is glowing, and the water is warm and inviting. You walk down to the waterfront, dip your toes in, take a deep breath, and walk into the water until you can't walk any further. You roll over onto your back, and you can feel the water beneath you holding you up in the water. You relax momentarily, closing your eyes, feeling the warm sun on your skin, the water beneath your fingers and toes. You feel like you are floating on a cloud. What does it feel like?

What does it smell like?

Can you taste anything?

What can you hear?

Urge Surfing Workbook

Urge Surfing Workbook · question bank

COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— THE MAGIC SHELL

— IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE STANDING ON A BEACH. VISUALIZE THE BEACH IN YOUR MIND. CAN YOU FEEL

— THE SAND BENEATH YOUR TOES AND THE WARM SUN ON YOUR FACE.? WHEN YOU LOOK AROUND, YOU

— CAN SEE THE HUGE, SILVERY-BLUE OCEAN, AND THE SUNLIGHT SPARKLES LIKE TINY STARS DANCING ON

— THE SURFACE. IN THE SAND IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SHELL THAT YOU HAVE EVER SEEN. WHEN YOU

— PICK IT UP, IT FEELS WARM.

— IMAGINE YOU ARE HOLDING THE SHELL. WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE? IS IT SMOOTH OR ROUGH? THIS IS

— NOW YOUR MAGIC SHELL, AND YOU CAN TELL IT YOUR SECRETS, AND IT WILL KEEP THEM.

— YOU CAN ALSO TELL YOUR SHELL ANY WORRIES THAT YOU MAY HAVE. TELL IT ABOUT ANY PROBLEMS THAT

— MAY BE TROUBLING YOU. THE SHELL ALWAYS WANTS TO HEAR YOUR WORRIES, NO MATTER HOW BIG OR

— SMALL THEY MAY BE. SO WHENEVER YOU HAVE WORRIED FEELINGS, YOU CAN TELL YOUR SHELL ABOUT

— THEM, AND IT WILL MAGICALLY TAKE THOSE UNCOMFORTABLE FEELINGS AND TURN THEM INTO GOOD

— ONES.

— IN YOUR MIND, SILENTLY TELL YOUR SHELL WHATEVER YOU WISH. NO ONE ELSE WILL KNOW WHAT YOU

— SAY. ONLY YOU AND YOUR SHELL! AS YOU SAY YOUR WORDS, THEY GO RIGHT INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE

— SHELL SO THAT IT CAN TAKE THEM AWAY FOR YOU. COULD YOU TAKE A MOMENT TO TALK TO YOUR

— SHELL?

— HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW? THE SHELL HAS MADE THEM DISAPPEAR. JUST LIKE MAGIC!

— THEY ARE GONE!

— AS YOU HOLD YOUR SHELL CLOSE, YOU ALL FEEL CALM AND HAPPY. YOU FEEL PEACEFUL FROM THE TIPS OF

— YOUR TOES TO THE TIP OF YOUR NOSE. FEEL IT RIGHT NOW. NOTICE HOW IT FEELS.

— YOU CAN IMAGINE YOUR SHELL WHENEVER YOU WISH TO MAKE BAD THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

— DISAPPEAR, WHENEVER YOU WANT TO FEEL CALM. YOUR SHELL WILL ALWAYS BE THERE WAITING IN YOUR

— IMAGINATION.

— NEXT TIME YOU VISIT THE BEACH, YOU CAN ALWAYS LOOK FOR YOUR REAL MAGIC SHELL. JUST CHOOSE

— THE SHELL THAT FEELS RIGHT FOR YOU; THIS WILL BE THE MAGIC ONE.

THE BIG WHITE HOUSE

Urge Surfing Workbook · information

Imagine you are walking along a white beach. You can hear the birds and the gentle roll of the waves. You can feel the sand between your toes. It is a quiet and safe place. The sun is shining down on you, making you feel warm. You have been looking for a place to be quiet and comfortable.

You stop and stand, looking out over the huge ocean, and you notice all the colors within the water. The colors are mixing and churning, creating the bubbly white crest at the top of each wave. The role of each wave sounds like the Earth breathing. O...cean. O...cean. Over and over again with each wave. You feel the power of the ocean and the Earth. Just ahead of you, you notice a big white house. It is mesmerizing to you. It looks beautiful, like a temple or small castle.

You walk towards it, relaxed and interested. You follow a path to the front of the house and see that the door is open. You feel safe and that it is ok for you to go inside. You step inside the house. You find yourself in a hallway with decorations, lights, and paintings. A spiral staircase stands before you. You know you want to go up those stairs. You suddenly become aware of a hefty backpack you have been carrying all this time.

The backpack is full of your worries, thoughts, concerns, and uncomfortable feelings. You have been carrying them long, and this backpack is weighing you down. Your shoulders ache, and your back feels tight and tense from all these negative feelings. You slowly remove your backpack and, with it, all your troubles. Finally, you feel released, free! You can now easily go up the staircase. You become lighter, happier, and calmer with each step you take. Each step brings you closer to comfort and joy.

The comfort and joy live in you; nothing can get in the way of feeling them, reaching them, and having comfort and fun. Now at the top of the stairs, you are strong. A large window is open at the top of the stairs, and a big, white comfortable chair is in front of it. You sit down and face the window, watching the beautiful ocean again.

1. Keep in view
This time is yours.

2. Keep in view
You watch from your chair, by your window in your house.

3. Keep in view
Breathe in the soft ocean air, and know you are home.”

Urge Surfing Workbook

Urge Surfing Workbook · question bank

COLLABORATIVE PROMPT MENU · ADAPT, SKIP, OR REPHRASE AS NEEDED

— D.E.A.D.S

— IDENTIFY YOUR STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFULLY COPING WITH URGES

— D

— DENY/DELAY - DON'T GIVE IN TO THE URGE

— WHAT CAN YOU DO TO DENY YOUR URGE?

— ESCAPE

— WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ESCAPE AN URGE OR TRIGGER?

— EADS

— AVOID OR ATTACK

— WHAT CAN YOU DO TO AVOID THE URGE? WHAT WORDS CAN YOU USE TO

— ATTACK THE URGE?

— DISTRACT YOURSELF

— WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN YOU USE OR DO TO DISTRACT YOURSELF FROM THE URGE?

— SUBSTITUTE

— WHAT HEALTHY ACTIVITIES OR WORDS CAN YOU USE AS A SUBSTITUTION?

DATE: TIME:

Urge Surfing Workbook · worksheet

URGE 1-10: URGE DURATION

DATE:

TIME:

URGE TRIGGER:

WHERE AND WHO?

COPING MECHANISM USED:

☐ Not yet ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

URGE LOG WORKSHEET WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE BETTER NEXT TIME:

EVENT - IRRATIONAL

Urge Surfing Workbook · reference list

QUICK-REFERENCE LIBRARY

- EVENT - IRRATIONAL

● My belief about A.

● The irrational

● demand - The

● MUST.

● ACTIVATING

● EVENT

● The activating event

● that created the

● urge.

● BELIEF ABOUT

● How I behaved as a
- result of B.

● CONSEQUENCE

● ABOUT MY BELIEF

● How can I replace

● the irrational belief.

● DISPUTING MY

● IRRATIONAL BELIEF A,B,C,D,E,F COPING WITH URGES

● How I now feel as a

● result of D.

● EFFECTIVE CHANGE

● IN MY THINKING

surfing your urge

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Whatever you don't repeat gets

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