As we go through life, we are often irritated by people, annoyed by delays, and frustrated when things do not go our way. We too often display our irritation and live our lives almost constantly upset. Being frustrated from time to time is a common fact of life. Low frustration tolerance is having oversized or extreme reactions to normal stressors and inconveniences of everyday life. Use this lesson to understand the common beliefs driving frustration. Learn to challenge your thoughts to reduce frustration and allow yourself to overlook offenses. Examine several key ways to put this material into practice and have the peace and serenity you have been looking for.
DEVELOPING FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE

Throughout life we are often irritated by people, annoyed by delays, and frustrated when things do not go our way. We too often display our irritation and live our lives almost constantly upset. Being frustrated from time to time is common and a fact of life. We all experience frustration when we face seemingly unnecessary complications or a complete roadblock on the path to our goal. Everyone gets frustrated. Low frustration tolerance is having oversized or extreme reactions to normal stressors and inconveniences of everyday life. You might feel bothered by inconsequential annoyances and become angry, irritated, and upset.

WE WANT OUR WAY

We do not want to be stuck in traffic or forced to wait for a doctor. We want fast service, respectful treatment, and have everything easily fall into place. You may be annoyed by the guy who does not use his turn signal or the clerk who does not know where anything is in the store. You want the best bed, hottest food, nicest clothes, best price, and no hassle. When you don't get your way, you may find yourself moaning, complaining, yelling, screaming, or swearing. You are upset and angry. You may feel disrespected by the inconsiderate and blocked by the unintelligent. Many feel justified in their overreaction. "Things should not be this way, and I am going to be upset that they are." Addiction to drugs and alcohol heightens your sensitivity and reactivity. This reactivity is made worse when withdrawing from a substance. However, developing a high frustration tolerance is vital to successful recovery.

COMMON BELIEFS THAT DRIVE FRUSTRATION

Check the beliefs below that describe your frustration:

- My time is important
- I shouldn't be frustrated
- This thing ought to work
- I should get my way

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Define frustration and frustration tolerance
- Recognize problems of low frustration tolerance and its destructive response
- Develop higher tolerance and challenge old thought patterns
LOW FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE CREATES PROBLEMS

Everyone goes through frustrating situations. People with low frustration tolerance often overreact and fall apart when inconvenienced. Difficult situations are seen as dreadful, unbearable, and horrendous. Many people use short-term methods such as alcohol, drugs, over-eating, shopping, gambling, sex, and other distractions to reduce or avoid the pain. Low frustration tolerance is a key factor in the development of addictions. Using substances allows you to escape a painful situation. Furthermore, it is easier to give in to the immediate pleasure of using drugs and alcohol than to withstand the discomfort of withdrawal.

GRUMBLING AND COMPLAINING

Low frustration tolerance commonly leads to distress over minor setbacks and inconveniences. Negativity, fault-finding, and complaining are common. Many people become overly concerned and highly reactive because something unfair occurred. Comparison of your situation to someone else’s will only increase frustration. There may be an intense focus on the unfairness of your treatment. Complaining and highlighting this unfair treatment often pushes other people away and increases a sense of alienation from others. When people feel overlooked,
insulted, and unfairly treated, they may become angry, aggressive, and hostile. These aggressive actions may be justified in your mind because someone did something you did not like or failed to give you what you wanted.

**DESTRUCTIVE REACTIONS**

You may have seen someone upset and frustrated over poor service in a restaurant. He was not served in a timely manner, the waiter was grumpy, and the food was served cold. At that point, the customer in the restaurant states “I can’t stand it anymore!” He comes unglued and throws an adult-version temper tantrum, complete with yelling, swearing, and name-calling. He is offended and angry. In this example, there are real problems, actual slights, and inconveniences. The customer feels entitled by these realities to react with rude, disrespectful, and immature attitudes and behavior.

Low frustration tolerance is closely linked to low discomfort tolerance. When a difficulty is experienced, a person may feel negative and uncomfortable emotions, which are perceived as extremely painful, unbearable, and intolerable. Frustration is uncomfortable and discomfort is frustrating. You may have had low frustration tolerance and low discomfort tolerance modeled by parents, caregivers, siblings, or peers. You have watched other people get what they wanted by exaggerating their frustrations and complaining about it. Maybe you were rewarded for forceful or aggressive behavior. People often give in to someone who is being rude, oppositional, and demanding. Over time, a style of complaining or being aggressive may develop and continue because these tactics seem to work; however, the behavior is ultimately harmful to you and others.

**INCREASING YOUR FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE**

Frustration tolerance can be developed through changing the way you think. You are learning to work through or work down difficulties and problems, rather than letting them get you worked up. Offenses can be pardoned, inconsistencies tolerated, oversights forgiven, and faults and mistakes overlooked. You have the ability to change your beliefs and reduce your level of frustration. Not only do you accept responsibility for your attitudes and actions, but you are able to change the thoughts and beliefs that often result in frustration and disappointment. The thoughts and beliefs that set self-centered, self-serving, and reactive attitudes into motion can be changed.

**CHALLENGE THOUGHTS**

Read through the list below and choose three to five statements that would help you in recovery.

- I can tolerate frustration
- I don’t like it, but I can handle it
- I’m getting stronger
- I can overlook an offense
- This isn’t my preference, but it’s not dangerous
- People make mistakes and I can overlook them
- Things don’t always go my way
- I’m learning how to handle difficulties
- I can stand it
- This is frustrating, but not impossible
- I’m up for a challenge
- I’ll get through this
- This is a triviality of everyday life
- This problem may be real, but frustration is a choice
Development Frustration Tolerance

NOTES

- Every choice to manage my distress is a choice to get stronger
- Practice makes progress
- Distress can be tolerated and tolerating stress makes me stronger
- Frustration is managed by changes in my thinking
- Tolerating current frustrations increases my future success

I'm letting my character, not my frustration, determine my actions
I'm increasing my ability to manage stress through practice
When I tolerate, overcome, and endure, I get stronger
I may have the same problem, but now I have a new perspective

Write down the three to five coping thoughts you selected. Review them regularly.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

In order to increase frustration tolerance, some practice may be helpful. You can drive in the slowest lane or let someone go ahead of you in the checkout line. You might choose a more scenic, but inconvenient, route. Practice managing your own level of frustration without being inconsiderate, rude, or sarcastic. Even when someone is slow or disrespectful, be considerate and respectful. Be constantly aware of your mood, attitude, and disposition. Give up your desire to use frustration and aggression to get what you want. When difficulties arise, practice letting go of the offense, overlooking slights, and forgiving mistakes.

List three things that commonly cause you to be more frustrated than you should be.
1. ________________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________________

For each item listed, write a new response you can use in the future.
1. ________________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________________

List three ways you can practice maintaining control and increase your frustration tolerance.
1. ________________________________________________________________
2. ________________________________________________________________
3. ________________________________________________________________

As you practice, you will get stronger. This is not about how to get your way, but instead how to succeed in your recovery. Highlight what you liked about an experience rather than complaining about what you did not. You can change your character by increasing frustration tolerance, and in turn, strengthen your recovery.