

# What is Dialectical Behavior Therapy?

Developed at the University of Washington by Marsha Linehan, Ph.D., DBT was originally developed to treat interpersonal chaos, intense emotional swings, impulsiveness, confusion about identity, and suicidal behavior. It is based on a biosocial theory that states that problems develop from the interaction of biological factors and environmental factors which together create difficulty managing emotions. DBT is therefore appropriate for a range of additional problems that relate to emotion dysregulation, including substance use problems, eating disordered behavior, and anger-related problems. A great deal of research has been conducted on the effectiveness of DBT and, in general, DBT appears as effective or more effective than other psychotherapies for the problems mentioned above.

To reach the ultimate goal of DBT- creating a life worth living - the therapy balances empathy and a warm acceptance (validation) with an unwavering focus on changing problem behavior (problem-solving). Through this balance, DBT aims to help change the behavioral, emotional, and thinking patterns associated with problems in living, while promoting the development of and reliance on inner wisdom (Wise Mind).

## Dialectics

DBT is based on the idea that opposites can coexist and be synthesized. This means weighing our various points of view in any situation and constantly working on balancing an effort to change things along with accepting things as they are.

## Behavior Therapy

Behavior therapy is based on the study of how things are learned. It focuses on helping people change ineffective ways of coping by learning new ways of coping and getting things done. It focuses on specific goals that can realistically be attained. For the most part, it is a *doing* therapy rather than a *talking* therapy.

## DBT Assumptions about Clients

- People in DBT are doing the best they can
- People in DBT want to improve
- People in DBT need to do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change
- People in DBT have lives that are unbearable as they are currently being lived
- People in DBT must learn new behaviors in all areas of their lives
- Clients cannot fail in DBT

## DBT Assumptions about Therapy

- The most caring thing a therapist can do is help clients change in ways that bring them closer to their goals
- Clarity, precision, and compassion are of the utmost importance in the conduct of DBT
- The therapeutic relationship is a real relationship between equals
- Principles of behavior are universal, affecting therapists no less than patients
- Therapists treating borderline personality disorder need support
- DBT Therapists can fail. DBT Can fail even when therapists do not.

## DBT Therapists

- Make every reasonable effort to conduct competent and effective therapy
- Obey ethical and professional guidelines
- Are available for weekly therapy sessions, phone consultations, and provide back-up
- Respect the integrity and rights of clients

## Weekly Individual Therapy

- Areas of desired change are identified
- An understanding is developed of what contributes to problems and interferes with change
- New and more effective alternatives are learned

## Skills Training Classes

Specific skills that are essential for regulating emotions, tolerating distress, increasing mindfulness, and being more effective in interpersonal communication are learned.

## Between-session Coaching

Skills coaching is provided between session to do real-life, in the moment skills learning.

## Consultation team

The therapy team meets regularly to assist each other in providing adherent and effective treatment