

An Introduction to DBT

DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOUR THERAPY · INFORMATION & PRACTICE

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) was developed by psychologist Dr. Marsha Linehan. It combines strategies of *acceptance* with strategies of *change* — teaching that both are needed together, not one instead of the other. DBT organises its skills into four core modules, shown below.

THE FOUR MODULES OF DBT

ACCEPTANCE-ORIENTED SKILLS

ACCEPT

Mindfulness

The foundational skill of DBT. Bringing non-judgemental awareness to the present moment — thoughts, feelings and sensations, as they are.

ACCEPT

Distress Tolerance

Skills for surviving crises and tolerating pain in the moment, without making a difficult situation worse.

CHANGE

Emotion Regulation

Understanding, naming and reducing vulnerability to painful emotions, and changing emotions you want to change.

CHANGE

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Asking for what you need, saying no, and navigating conflict — while maintaining self-respect and relationships.

WHEN MIGHT DBT SKILLS HELP?

- Intense or overwhelming emotions
- Urges toward self-destructive behaviour
- Difficulty tolerating distress
- Relationship or communication struggles
- Feeling stuck between "accepting" and "fixing" a problem

DBT'S CORE ASSUMPTION

- You are doing the best you can
- You want to improve
- You need to try harder, be more motivated, or change more, regardless
- You may not have caused your problems, but you have to solve them anyway

WHAT MAKES DBT "DIALECTICAL"?

- Holding two seemingly opposite truths at once
- e.g. "I am doing my best" and "I need to change"
- Balancing acceptance of what is, with active work toward what could be

WISE MIND

DBT describes three states of mind: *emotion mind* (led by feelings), *reasonable mind* (led by logic), and *wise mind* — the balanced overlap of the two, where intuition and emotion inform, rather than override, clear thinking.

EXERCISE: FINDING YOUR WISE MIND

Use this exercise next time you're facing a decision or a difficult moment.

1 · THE SITUATION

What is happening right now that needs a response?

2 · EMOTION MIND

What is my emotion mind telling me to do?

3 · REASONABLE MIND

What would purely logical thinking suggest?

4 · WISE MIND

Holding both — what response feels wise?

WHICH MODULE DO YOU NEED MOST RIGHT NOW?

Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance, Emotion Regulation, or Interpersonal Effectiveness — and why?

ONE SMALL DBT SKILL TO TRY THIS WEEK

Choose one small, specific skill from any module to practise.

SOURCES

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT Skills Training Manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. · Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder*. Guilford Press.