



Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Understanding DBT: Skills for Emotional Regulation and Interpersonal Effectiveness



Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) combines cognitive-behavioral strategies with mindfulness, acceptance, and validation to support individuals with emotional dysregulation (Michatowska et al., 2024).

Definition of Dialectical Behavior Therapy



DBT is a specialized type of cognitive-behavioral therapy developed to treat individuals suffering from emotional dysregulation (O'Connell & Dowling, 2013).

Integrates strategies that foster change while promoting acceptance (Martin, 2023).

Historical Background



”

“Figuring out and changing the causes of behavior work better than judging and blaming. Judging and blaming are easier, but if we want to create change, we have to change the chains of events that cause unwanted behaviors.”

MARSHA LINEHAN

DBTBITES.COM

Marsha M. Linehan

Founder of DBT

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) was developed by Marsha M. Linehan in the late 1980s, primarily to treat individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder (Chapman, 2006).

Linehan's development of DBT was shaped by her own experiences with mental health challenges (Chapman, 2006).



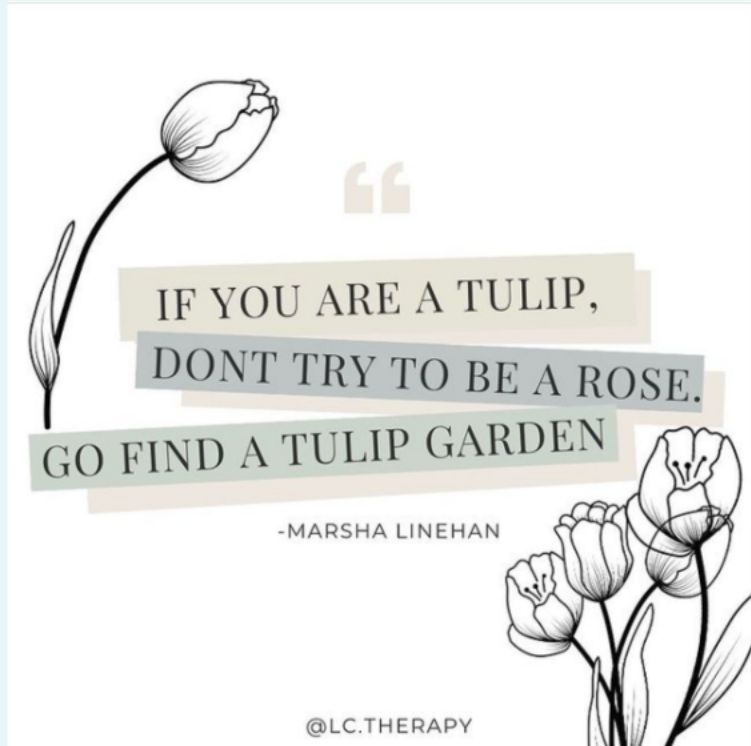
Major Tenets of DBT

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) integrates dialectical philosophy and core skills to emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness, offering a comprehensive framework for individuals facing emotional challenges (Chapman, 2006)

The concept of dialectics—the idea of holding 2 seemingly contradictory perspectives —was central to her theory and was drawn from both Zen Buddhist philosophy and cognitive-behavioral therapy (Michatowska et al., 2024).

The treatment focused on creating a balance between acceptance, validating clients' emotions, and change, helping them develop new skills to manage emotions and behaviors (Michatowska et al., 2024).

Dialectical Philosophy



Mindfulness Skills



- DBT is not just a technique, but a way of being, encouraging individuals to **approach their experiences** with greater awareness, acceptance, and presence (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017).

- This is crucial for managing emotional dysregulation, improving relationships, and **achieving long-term emotional well-being.**

- Mindfulness in DBT focuses on **enhancing awareness** of thoughts and emotions without judgment.

- By training clients to **stay present**, mindfulness helps individuals respond thoughtfully rather than reacting **impulsively**, thereby **reducing distress** and **improving emotional clarity** (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017).

- Mindfulness helps clients develop greater awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations in the **present** moment.

Distress Tolerance

- Distress tolerance skills equip individuals to manage painful emotions without resorting to self-destructive behaviors (such as self-harm or substance abuse).
- These tools focus on enduring and coping with crises, enabling clients to respond to stress adaptively rather than impulsively (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017).



Emotional regulation skills enhance individuals' understanding and management of their emotions. By increasing emotional resilience, clients learn to identify triggers and cultivate strategies that help mitigate overwhelming feelings like anger or sadness (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017).

Emotional Regulation Skills



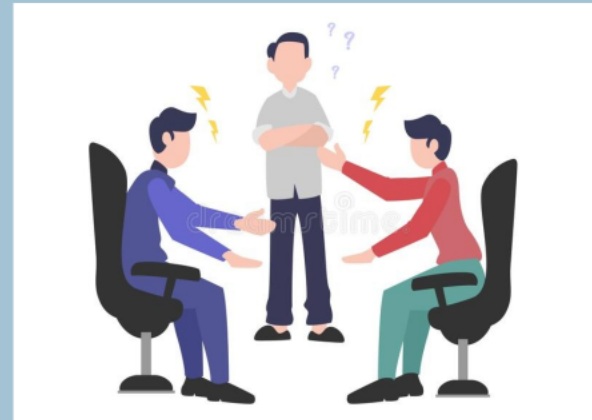
A blurred background image showing a calm lake reflecting distant mountains under a light sky. The image is partially obscured by a light orange rectangular box on the right side, which contains the text.

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Interpersonal effectiveness skills focus on improving communication and assertiveness, allowing individuals to express their needs while respecting themselves and others. By learning boundary-setting and effective communication, clients develop healthier relationships with others, reducing conflict and emotional distress (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017).

The Role of Validation

Validation in DBT involves acknowledging and accepting a client's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Decreasing emotional distress and building trust (Hadjiosif, 2013).





DBT also emphasizes the need for clients to change problematic behaviors. Examples include behaviors that are self-destructive, such as self-harm, suicide attempts, or substance abuse, as well as patterns of ineffective problem-solving or emotional regulation (Hadjiosif, 2013).

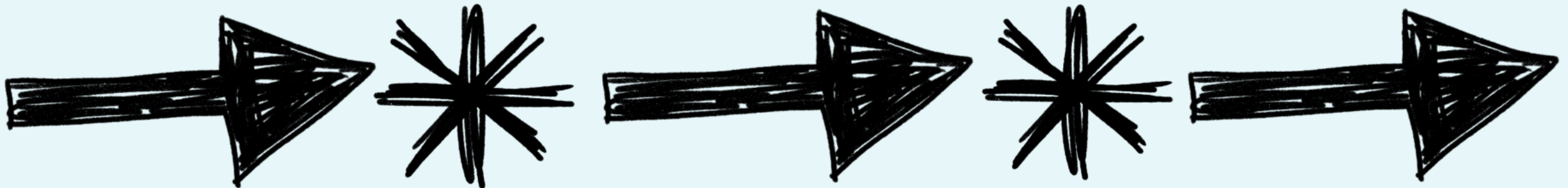
Behavior Changes

Techniques of DBT

Techniques used in DBT, including mindfulness practices, cognitive restructuring, chain and behavioral analysis, skills training, validation, and radical acceptance, work together to help individuals balance the need for change with acceptance, improving emotional regulation, self-awareness, and relationships, ultimately empowering clients to lead a life worth living by building coping skills, managing distress, and fostering positive behaviors (Michatowska et al., 2024).

Chain Analysis

Chain analysis is a process of examining the sequence of events and behaviors that lead to problematic actions, such as self-harm or substance abuse. By breaking down the "chain" of events, clients can identify specific moments where they could have applied coping skills, thus increasing their understanding of their actions (Kinch & Kress, 2012).



Steps: 1) Identifying Cognitive Distortions 2) Challenging Distorted Thoughts 3) Changing Unhelpful Thoughts

Cognitive Restructuring

Although DBT is rooted in behavioral therapy, it incorporates cognitive-behavioral techniques to help clients challenge distorted thinking patterns and replace maladaptive beliefs with healthier, more realistic alternatives (Kanczok et al., 2024).

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness is a core component of DBT. Clients learn to observe their thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without judgment. Techniques like observing, describing, and participating in their present experience help clients stay grounded and reduce emotional overwhelm (Ashworth, Mooney, & Tully, 2017).

Behavioral Analysis and Skills Training

DBT therapists use behavioral analysis to pinpoint specific behaviors that need to change. They then help clients acquire new skills to replace ineffective behaviors (Kujovic et al., 2024).

Often involves teaching emotion regulation, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness, and mindfulness skills (Kujovic et al., 2024).



Harnessing the
Power of DBT

Applications of DBT

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), originally developed to treat Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), is now widely used to address a range of mental health issues, including eating disorders, suicidal and self-harming behaviors, substance abuse, PTSD, and mood disorders, by teaching skills for emotional regulation, distress tolerance, mindfulness, and interpersonal effectiveness (Michatowska et al., 2024).

Borderline Personality Disorder

DBT helps individuals with BPD regulate their emotions, reduce impulsive behaviors, improve interpersonal relationships, and cope with emotional dysregulation (O'Connell & Dowling, 2013).

SYMPTOMS OF *Borderline Personality Disorder*

Unstable Self-Image

Intense and Unstable Relationships



Chronic Feelings of Emptiness

Impulsive Behavior

Expanded Applications

DBT has been adapted for use with individuals struggling with substance use disorders. It helps clients manage triggers for substance abuse, regulate emotions, and improve relationships, which are often key factors in addiction recovery

(Cavicchioli et al., 2023).

DBT is highly effective in treating individuals who engage in **self-harm** or have **suicidal ideation**. The skills taught in DBT help individuals manage emotional distress and reduce the risk of self-destructive behaviors (Michatowska et al., 2024).

DBT has been shown to be effective for individuals with eating disorders, such as binge eating disorder and bulimia nervosa. DBT helps clients regulate their emotions around food, body image, and self-worth, promoting healthier coping mechanisms (Hatoum & Burton, 2024).

WHAT DOES DBT TREAT



DEPRESSION
TREATMENT

SUICIDE ATTEMPTS
TREATMENT

SELF-HARMING
TREATMENT

EATING DISORDER
TREATMENT



DBT is also useful for treating chronic depression, anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It teaches clients to tolerate distressing emotions and respond to them in healthier ways

(Michałowska & Cheć, 2024).

Continued Expanded Applications

DBT has been adapted for use with individuals suffering from bipolar disorder and other mood disorders, as it helps regulate emotional extremes and impulsive behaviors associated with these conditions (Jones et al., 2023).

References

Ashworth, S., Mooney, P., & Tully, R. J. (2017). A Case Study Demonstrating the Effectiveness of an Adapted-DBT Program Upon

Increasing Adaptive Emotion Management Skills, With an Individual Diagnosed With Mild Learning Disability and Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research & Practice*, 17(1), 38–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228932.2017.1251098>

Cavicchioli, M., Movalli, M., Bruni, A., Terragni, R., Maria Elena, G., Borgia, E., Begarani, M., & Ogliari, A. (2023). The Initial Efficacy of

Stand-Alone DBT Skills Training for Treating Impulsivity Among Individuals With Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders. *Behavior Therapy*, 54(5), 809–822. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2023.02.006>

Chapman, A. L. (2006). Dialectical behavior therapy: Current indications and unique elements. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*, 3(9), 62–68.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0097-6566.3.9.62>

Hadjiosif, M. (2013). From strategy to process: Validation in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 28(1), 72–

80. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpscpr.2013.28.1.72>

- Hatoum, A. H., & Burton, A. L. (2024). Applications and efficacy of radically open dialectical behavior therapy (RO DBT): A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 80(11), 2283–2302. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23735>
- Jones, B. D. M., Umer, M., Kittur, M. E., Finkelstein, O., Xue, S., Dimick, M. K., Ortiz, A., Goldstein, B. I., Mulsant, B. H., & Husain, M. I. (2023). A systematic review on the effectiveness of dialectical behavior therapy for improving mood symptoms in bipolar disorders. *Review*, 11(6). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13612-023-00354-9>
- Kanczok, J., Jauch-Chara, K., & Müller, F.-J. (2024). Imagery rescripting and cognitive restructuring for inpatients with moderate and severe depression – a controlled pilot study. *BMC Psychiatry*, 24(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-024-05637-y>
- Kinch, S., & Kress, V. (2012). The Creative Use of Chain Analysis Techniques in Counseling Clients Who Engage in Nonsuicidal Self-Injury. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 7(4), 343–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2012.739960>
- Kujovic, M., Benz, D., Riesbeck, M., Mollamehmetoglu, D., Becker-Sadzio, J., Margittai, Z., Bahr, C., & Meisenzahl, E. (2024). Comparison of 8-vs-12 weeks, adapted dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) for borderline personality disorder in routine psychiatric inpatient treatment—A naturalistic study. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-61795-9>

Martin, S. (2023). Using values in cognitive and behavioral therapy: A bridge back to philosophy. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, 29(7), 1189–1195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jep.13872>

Michałowska, S., & Cheć, M. (2024). Dialectical Behavior Therapy in the Treatment of Trauma. *Archives of Psychiatry & Psychotherapy*, 26(1), 26–32. <https://doi.org/10.12740/app/172133>

O'Connell, B., & Dowling, M. (2013). Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) in the treatment of borderline personality disorder. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 20(8), 712–718. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpm.12116>





Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Understanding DBT: Skills for Emotional Regulation and Interpersonal Effectiveness