



Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Introduction

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is an evidence-based therapy that is effective in treating a variety of issues including: borderline personality disorder, substance abuse, eating disorders, ADHD, depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Behavioral Tech, 2019). An evidence-based treatment has many studies supporting that it is effective for helping people that have mental health conditions. DBT focuses on helping someone cope with stress, manage emotions, and improve relationships with others by changing their behavior. At this time, more research is needed to assess the efficacy of DBT with people with disabilities (McNair). Because DBT might be a model of therapy you hear about when attending therapy, the following factsheet will help you understand more about DBT.

This fact sheet will explain:

- 1) How DBT works;
- 2) What a person can expect to do in DBT therapy;
- 3) How to make therapy successful; and
- 4) How to find a DBT provider if you feel that DBT is the right option.

1 – How It Works

DBT helps people to accept difficult experiences while also changing their behavior to be more helpful. Clients can learn skill sets including acceptance of emotional states, emotion regulation skills, and using behavioral skills to change thoughts and behaviors to be more helpful. Through collaboration, clients work with their mental health provider to apply these skills to their lives and relationships (Schimelpfening, 2020).

Strategies used in DBT therapy include: core mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal

effectiveness, and emotion regulation. **Core mindfulness** teaches you to focus on the present moment by being aware of thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as what is present in your environment. **Distress tolerance** teaches you how to accept yourself and the situation by using techniques to be prepared to deal with overwhelming emotions and cope with them effectively. **Interpersonal effectiveness** teaches you how to interact with others in a positive way by listening and communicating in effective ways. **Emotion regulation** teaches you skills to help deal with emotions that are difficult to navigate by identifying, naming, and changing emotions (Schimelpfening, 2020).

2 – What to Expect in Therapy

For first time clients, it is a good idea to have an understanding of what to expect when starting a therapy. Typically, your mental health provider will ask questions about you and your history to determine your strengths, the areas of your life you want to work on, and your specific goals for therapy. You will then likely go over different skills to learn to manage your emotions and work with others more effectively. Your provider will modify parts of DBT treatment to better fit your specific needs. You will also likely work through problem solving techniques with your mental health provider and receive homework to complete between sessions. Providers with the ability to do so will also offer groups sessions. If you attend, you will learn how to incorporate skills into your life and you can participate in role-plays to learn ways to apply the skills to relationships. Lastly, some DBT providers also provide phone call coaching sessions where you can talk to your mental health provider and receive support between sessions at any time (DiGiorgio, Glass, & Arnkoff, 2010).

Helpful Questions to Ask Your Provider

- 1) **Are you comfortable working with someone with a developmental disability?**
- 2) **How do you meet your client's needs?**
- 3) **Can you help me set some goals that focus on my strengths?**
- 4) **What will my treatment plan look like?**

3 – How to Make Therapy Successful

Though the mental health provider will have tools and activities that can be helpful, you as the client also play a significant role in making therapy successful. Before seeing a provider, start thinking about the goals that you want to accomplish in therapy and ways that you would like your life to improve (Beck, 2010). When you meet with a provider, it is important to form a trusting relationship with them. You may want to ask some questions to get to know them better and make sure they are a good fit for you. It's also important to have a conversation with a provider to find out if they have experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities and if they are able to make any accommodations you may need. As you talk more about your goals for therapy, make sure that your provider is willing to support you in these goals. If you ever feel hesitant about your goals or the therapy process, be honest with your provider and let them know how you are feeling. Often times, you will be assigned tasks to do outside of therapy sessions to help you practice the skills you are learning. It is important to do these exercises in order to get the most out of your experience in therapy. It might also be helpful to invite someone you trust to come to therapy with you. This will help

you feel supported in reaching your goals, and you will have someone that can help with your homework outside of therapy. If you choose to bring someone to therapy, make sure that therapy is still focused on you as the client (Willner, 2006)

4 – How to Find a DBT Provider

If you feel that DBT would be helpful for you, the next step would be to find a DBT provider. Providers often have websites or online profiles where they will share information about the method of therapy they use. You can also call their office to ask. Some websites have the option for you to search for providers that use DBT methods. Providers might state that they use DBT methods in their therapy, or they might be officially certified in DBT. If they are certified in DBT that means they have done additional DBT training and were observed by experts in DBT to make sure they follow the model correctly. Having a provider who is certified in DBT is not required to have a successful experience in therapy, but it could be helpful if you are looking for someone who has extra experience and expertise in DBT.

Websites that allow you to search for providers include:

[DBT-Linehan Board of Certification](#)

[Psychology Today's Types of Therapy and Find a Therapist Tool](#)

Conclusion

DBT is an evidence-based therapy that helps in the treatment of many mental health conditions. DBT helps people accept themselves and manage their emotions while working to change unhealthy behaviors. If you have difficulty recognizing and managing your emotions or you want to change your patterns of behavior and thinking, DBT may be a good fit for you.

Contributors

Lexi Bates, BS

Ty Aller, PhD

Raechel Russo, MS

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