



(R)evolution Psychotherapy

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT): A Simple Guide

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is a type of therapy designed to help people manage strong emotions, improve relationships, and build a life that feels more balanced and meaningful. It was first developed by psychologist Marsha Linehan in the 1980s to support people who often felt overwhelmed by emotions or struggled with self-destructive patterns (Linehan, 1993). Today, DBT is used widely with individuals facing challenges such as depression, anxiety, trauma, and difficulties in relationships.

The word dialectical means bringing together two ideas that seem opposite and finding a balance between them. In DBT, this often means holding both acceptance and change at the same time. For example, you might accept yourself as you are right now, while also working toward healthier ways of coping. This balance helps reduce feelings of shame and creates space for growth.

The Four Main Skills of DBT

DBT teaches practical skills that can be used in everyday life. These skills are grouped into four areas:

- Mindfulness 🧘 : Learning to stay present in the moment without judgment. Mindfulness helps you notice your thoughts and feelings without being controlled by them (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).
- Distress Tolerance 🌧️ : Building ways to cope with painful emotions or crises without making the situation worse. This might include grounding techniques, self-soothing, or distraction until the intensity passes.
- Emotion Regulation ❤️ : Understanding emotions, reducing vulnerability to them, and finding healthier ways to respond. This helps you feel more in control rather than being swept away by emotional waves.
- Interpersonal Effectiveness 💬 : Strengthening communication and relationship skills. This includes asking for what you need, saying no when necessary, and maintaining self-respect while connecting with others (Linehan, 2015).

DBT is not about “fixing” you—it’s about supporting you to live a life that feels worth living. The therapy is collaborative, meaning you and your therapist work together as a team. You are the

expert on your own life, and DBT provides tools to help you use that expertise more effectively. Many people find DBT empowering because it focuses on strengths, not just problems.

Clients often describe DBT as giving them a “toolbox” for life. Instead of feeling stuck in cycles of emotional pain, DBT skills can help you pause, reflect, and choose a different path. Over time, this can lead to greater stability, healthier relationships, and more confidence in handling challenges. While learning new skills takes practice, DBT emphasizes compassion and patience—reminding you that progress is possible even when setbacks happen.

References

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hyperion.

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