

WHAT IS DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOR THERAPY (DBT)?

There are many great tools for managing overwhelming feelings and it is important to learn about these tools so that we can practice them as resources when we need them. This is particularly true when we are feeling overwhelmed and on the brink of losing our ability to cope with stressors in life. One excellent place to learn and practice tools for managing overwhelming feelings is individual therapy. Dialectical Behavior Therapy or DBT is another excellent resource. DBT is a skill-based, group experience that can be very helpful for learning and practicing some basic tools for managing our minds and intense or overwhelming thoughts and feelings we may experience. **DBT skills training is particularly helpful if we are in the early stages of any kind of recovery or if we find ourselves stuck in old patterns that aren't good for us but that seem hard to break.** DBT stills help you to overcome these challenges.

There are four basic modules that provide a great framework for us to reflect back on and use when we are feeling overwhelmed. The modules are as follows:

1. Core Mindfulness
2. Distress Tolerance
3. Emotion Regulation
4. Interpersonal Effectiveness

1. The skill of **Core Mindfulness** is learning how to experience as well as witness our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and actions. Core Mindfulness is the skill of valuing and using both our feelings and our logic together in such a way that we can both experience the emotions associated with an experience while also observing ourselves having that experience in a nonjudgmental way. Core Mindfulness serves as a foundational skill to all of the other modules in DBT.

2. **Distress Tolerance** is the skill that's needed when we can't affect our outer world and the relationships in it using Interpersonal Effectiveness and we can't affect our inner world and the thoughts and feelings inside us using Emotion Regulation. During these times we need to have the ability to get through a difficult situation without making things worse by doing impulsive or destructive things such as lashing out at somebody, withdrawing from the world, relapsing, hurting ourselves, or any other kind of harm to ourselves or others. Distress Tolerance therefore is the skill of being able to just hold on tight—even if we are scared, even if we are feeling badly, even if other people aren't co-operating—and riding out difficult situations without making things worse.

3. **Emotion Regulation** (next 7-week skills group)

4. **Interpersonal Effectiveness** (next 7-week skills group)

Taken as whole, the four skill sets associated with DBT provide an excellent model for all of us to follow when we are faced with managing overwhelming feelings and situations. DBT groups as well as individual therapy both provide excellent learning laboratories or environments for us to identify, develop, and refine these skills.