

Te ara o tukutuku pūngawerewere

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

This Spring I am running a series of three workshops for Grief Support in Greerton, BOP, NZ. The topic is an Introduction to DBT. At the same time, I also created a companion book available on Amazon called 'What to Expect in DBT' which is designed to be given to clients to help them understand what might be involved in a course of DBT. The Skills covered in the book and the course are both consistent with those covered on the website <https://dialecticalbehaviortherapy.com>. This issue is therefore dedicated to covering the three core principles of DBT which are Skills, Diaries and Behaviour Chain Analysis.

INTRODUCTION TO DBT

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is an adaptation of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy created by Marsha Linehan (Linehan, 1993).

DBT helps clients manage overwhelming emotions, cope with acute distress and reactive responses to trauma triggers. It also helps clients better manage their relationships.

Originally DBT was intended to treat clients with borderline personality disorder (Linehan et al., 1999). However, it has also been found to be effective for help with other conditions including:

- Anxiety & Depression:
- Substance Misuse
- Self-Harm
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Eating Disorders
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Anger Management

Linehan described DBT as applying “*directive, problem-orientated techniques (including behavioral skills training, contingency management, cognitive modification, and exposure to emotional cues) that are balanced with supportive techniques such as reflection, empathy and acceptance*” (Linehan et al., 1991 p.1061).

DBT is usually delivered by a team of therapists, who may be from various professional backgrounds who have completed the DBT training. The full treatment protocol includes a group aspect, an individual aspect and a team aspect.

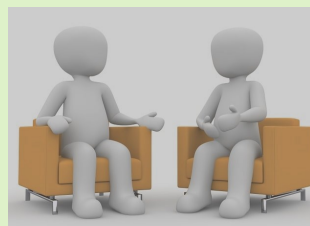
GROUP

Skills training and psycho-education in a small group.



INDIVIDUAL

One-to-one therapy weekly alongside the group training.



PHONE COACHING

Clients have access to a member of the DBT therapy team in between individual and group sessions. The telephone coaching is provided not as a response after a crisis, but to provide coaching prior to engaging in any risk-taking behaviour to support a client to use the DBT skills instead.



Since its creation in the 1980s, it has been added to and adapted including a brief intervention (Stanley et al., 2007), and a version for adolescents (Fleischhaker et al., 2011).

A full DBT intervention programme follows a manualised treatment protocol that includes:

- **Group skills training and individual coaching**
- **Homework diaries**
- **Behaviour Chain Analysis**

INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS

The individual treatment component starts with the therapist and client ranking the risk or problem behaviours in order of importance. The goal is to use the skills from the group training component to avoid engaging in the problem behaviour.

The individual treatment sessions involve reviewing the homework diary completed by the client week-to-week. The diary may log thoughts, emotions, urges, behaviours and skills used and is the responsibility of the client to complete between therapy sessions.

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DBT SKILLS

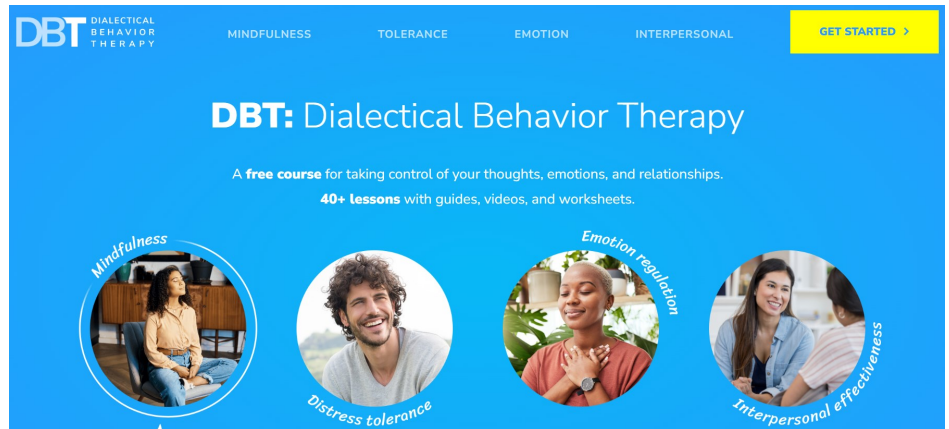
Mindfulness
Emotion regulation
Distress tolerance
Interpersonal effectiveness

DBT is most well known for its skills. This part of the programme is purely educational. The DBT website referred to here lists ten skills in each of the four categories. A trauma-responsive approach asks

‘what has happened to you?’

rather than ‘what is wrong with you?’ Thus, teaching skills is based on the premise that clients did not have opportunity to learn these skills earlier in life.

<https://dialecticalbehaviortherapy.com>



The skills listed here have associated worksheets and a supporting video which are all available on the website. One way to support a client is to direct them to the website to work on their own or with a whānau member to complete the worksheets.

It can save time in one-to-one sessions if the client uses to website in their own time to learn about and practice the skills. Time in individual therapy can then be allocated to clarifying or assisting with skills worksheets if the client is stuck, as well as working with diaries and BCA.

MINDFULNESS SKILLS

Observing
Mental Body Scan
Internal vs. External Events
Describe Your Emotions
Mental Noting
Thought Defusion
Mindful Breathing
Wise Mind
Negative Judgments
Letting Go of Judgments

DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS

Cost Benefit Analysis
Recognizing Emotional Crisis
Distracting Activities
RESISTT Technique
Grounding
Willingness vs Willfulness
Radical Acceptance
Self Soothing
Actions Based on Values
TIPP

DBT DIARIES

Diaries are used in DBT to monitor skills used and/or factors related to the problem or risk behaviour.

Skills diaries: These are used as a reminder and a way to monitor skills used. The skills diary is used by circling each day that a particular skill has been used. The skills diary can be used on its own or together with a risk diary. You can download pdfs of various diary cards for free at dbt-selfhelp.com

EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS

Recognizing Your Emotions
Being Effective
Emotions & Physical Vulnerability
Emotions & Cognitive Vulnerability
Self Validation
Myths About Emotions
Emotion Exposure
Balancing Emotional Urges
Problem Solving

INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS

Communication Styles
Skills of Assertiveness, Part 1
Skills of Assertiveness Part 2
Assertiveness Scripts and Interpersonal Rights
Listening and Validation
Barriers to Interpersonal Effectiveness
Trust in Relationships
Interpersonal Boundaries
Modulating Intensity
Resistance and Conflict

Risk diaries: These are used to monitor emotions, triggers, urges and risk-taking behaviour. It can be helpful to keep a record of the relationship between various factors related to a ‘TARGET BEHAVIOUR’, which is often some form of risk-taking behaviour (such as self-harm).

The second use of a diary is to monitor the relationship between DBT skills used during the week, and a number of other factors.

Example of DBT skills diary to keep a record of skills used each day of the week

Dialectical Behavior Therapy Diary Card	Instructions: Circle the days you worked on each skill	Filled out in session? Y N							How often did you fill out this side? Daily 2-3x Once			
		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun				
1. Wise mind												
2. Observe: just notice (Urge Surfing)												
3. Describe: put words on												
4. Participate: enter into the experience												
5. Nonjudgmental stance												

Some of the factors that may be beneficial to monitor in the risk diary are:

Urges to engage in risk-taking behaviour (intensity usually measured on a 0-5 scale).

Behaviour engaged in (for example if the person self-harmed/gave into the urge).

Emotions felt on different days of the week and their intensity (on a 0-5 scale).

Other information to record might be:

Triggers/activating events that happened during the week, such as an argument, an anniversary of something distressing or a bereavement.

Skills used to manage distressing emotions.

The reason for recording this additional information is that it may be possible to look at the diary and notice PATTERNS.

Example of DBT risk diary to keep a record of urges, emotions, skills and behaviour

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Diary Card		initials	Date Finished	How often did you fill out this card? 1 2-4								
				Target Behavior:								
Target Behavior			Emotions						Skills			
How strong was your urge to use (or avoid) your target behavior? Did you?			Rate how intense your emotion was each day						*Use this scale. Check "R" if			
(0=least intense and 5=most intense)												
Day	Urge	Action	Rx	Pain	Sad	Shame	Anger	Fear	Joy	Skills	R	
Mon											✓	
Tues												
Wed												
Thurs												
Fri												
Sat												
Sun												

Example

On Monday the TRIGGER was the anniversary of a partner's death. The URGE to self-harm was recorded as 5/5, and the EMOTIONS recorded were guilt 3/5 and sadness 4/5. Analysis showed a relationship between the trigger, the emotions and the urge to engage in the risk-taking behaviour.

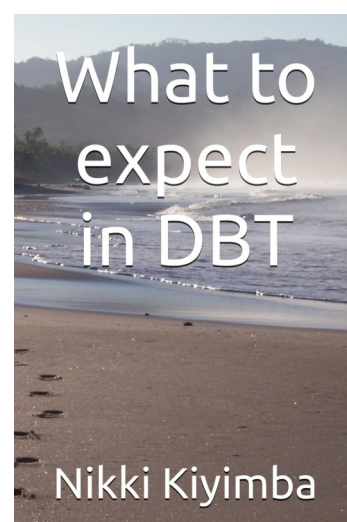
If skills are also being monitored on the same or a companion diary, it may show that although the URGE to self-harm was 5/5 there was no ACTUAL self-harm behaviour because some of the SKILLS of Mindfulness and Distress Tolerance were used.

DBT BEHAVIOUR CHAIN ANALYSIS (BCA)

Another key technique used in individual therapy sessions is behaviour chain analysis. A BCA is used to enable the client and therapist collaboratively to identify the sequential relationship between events, urges, thoughts, emotions and consequences.

The goal of Behaviour Chain Analysis (BCA) is to find 'the weakest link'.

Each 'link' of the chain is either a **behaviour**, an **emotion**, or a **thought** (sometimes urges and skills can be added). The start of the chain is the **activating event** or trigger situation that creates the chain reaction.



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[Amazon.com: What to expect in DBT: 9798327931817: Kiyimba, Dr Nikki: Books](https://www.amazon.com/What-to-expect-in-DBT-9798327931817-Kiyimba-Dr-Nikki-Books/dp/B079832793)

The end of the chain is **consequence**. This can be something problematic that happened, or may be something desirable such as being cared for or comforted. Just before the consequence is the **target or problem behaviour**.

This will relate to the problem behaviour that is being monitored in the risk diary. It will be the behaviour that the client is seeking to reduce.



It can also be helpful to add in **vulnerability factors** at the beginning before the activating event to demonstrate that the client may already have been at the top edge of their Window of Tolerance. If any **skills** were used leading up to the target behaviour they can also be added in.

- **BCA provides understanding about what led up to the problem behaviour and what happened afterwards.**

- **BCA can be completed on a blank template, a white-board, or using cards.**

Step-by-step process of Behaviour Chain Analysis

There are four key steps to completing a BCA in DBT.

Step one: Identify the problem behaviour from the past week using the risk diary. Now you know what you are completing the BCA around. A way to choose the behaviour to focus on can be by looking at the consequences.

Working backwards, fill in thoughts and emotions that can be remembered prior to the problem behaviour. When people say the behaviour 'came out of nowhere', working backwards like this can help identify what led to it.

Step two: Identify the consequences of the problem behaviour. Collaboratively work with y

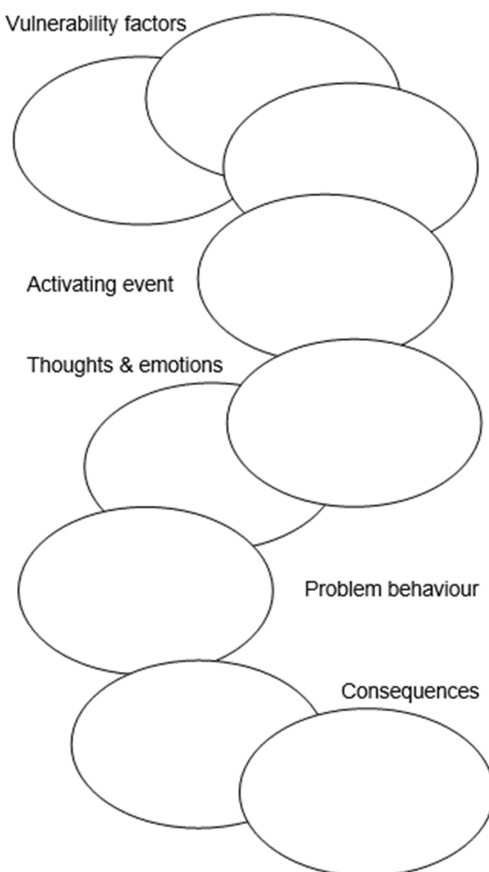
the client to look at what happened after the problem behaviour. Another approach might be to identify the 'function'.

For example, the consequence of self-harm behaviour might be being cared for or listened to, or a relief from overwhelming emotions. The great thing about a BCA is that you can start with whichever 'link' of the chain is easiest.

Step three: Identify the skills used. When you look at the chain, you can discuss any stages where the client did try some DBT skills.

Example Perhaps it is identified that there was some negative thinking at one point about what someone else was thinking. This could lead to feeling ashamed or angry, which could lead to aggressive behaviour. Perhaps the client tried to use skills of emotion regulation at the point of feeling angry, but was still not able to stop themselves from acting aggressively.

Step four: Brainstorm other skills that could be used next time. When you look at the chain, look for 'the weakest link'. Could the client have avoided some of the vulnerability factors with better self care? Could they have challenged their distorted cognitions? Or could they have used different interpersonal skills?



References

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