

MCG Women's Behavioral Health Program
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The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Program

What is DBT?

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) was developed by Marsha Linehan, Ph.D., a psychologist who was interested in helping people who had severe and overwhelming problems that seemed to not respond to other forms of therapy. She developed DBT specifically to help women who are chronically suicidal and meet criteria for a disorder called Borderline Personality Disorder. Since the development of DBT, the research has shown that DBT is helpful for many people who have multiple chronic and severe problems that make life not worth living. DBT helps people eliminate a variety of problematic and self-destructive behaviors and is effective in helping people learn to live more satisfying lives. People who benefit from DBT may have many of these problems:

Frequent and severe mood changes
Chronic thoughts about suicide
Multiple suicide attempts
Self-harming in order to feel better
Using drugs or alcohol
Traumatic experiences in childhood
Impulsive sexual behavior
Angry outbursts
Chronic feelings of emptiness
Difficulty making or keeping healthy relationships
Feeling out of control
"Spacing out" or dissociating under stress
Painful and chaotic lives

Dialectical means the synthesis of opposites. DBT helps people to stop going to extremes, and instead to find a balance between extremes, or the "middle path." Dialectical also means looking for what has been left out of a particular perspective. A dialectical perspective is an essential ingredient in DBT.

Behavior Therapy means a therapy that focuses on changing painful emotions and solving other problems by changing behavior. DBT uses a variety of behavior therapy strategies to help people learn new skills and change problematic behavior. In DBT, many self-destructive and problematic behaviors are understood as strategies for changing or escaping from painful emotions. DBT focuses on helping people learn to accept and tolerate painful emotions, regulate moods so that painful emotions occur less frequently, and solve life's problems in more effective ways.

What happens in DBT?

DBT consists of four components:

- 1) **Individual therapy**. You will meet regularly (usually weekly) with an individual therapist who help you apply new skills to your problems.
- 2) **Skills group**. Skills groups are classes that meet weekly (Tuesdays 4pm – 6pm) in which you learn the new skills you need for solving your problems. The skills taught in group are mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness.
- 3) **Skills coaching**. Your individual therapist will provide you with the ability to access him/her between sessions for skills coaching. In DBT, we believe it is important to help you be successful in applying your new skills, and so we make ourselves available to help you do it.
- 4) **Consultation team**. The individual and group therapists meet in weekly consultation meetings for continued training and consultation in DBT. We help each other stay on track and effective in our therapy with you.

How is DBT organized?

DBT is organized into stages of treatment. The goals of each stage of treatment are as follows:

Pre-Commitment: Complete a thorough assessment; learn about your diagnosis; learn about DBT; make a commitment to the agreements of DBT; make a commitment to working with your therapist

Stage 1: Eliminate suicidal and self-harm behavior; reduce behavior that interferes with effective therapy; solve problems that interfere with having a decent quality of life

Stage 2: Address and resolve past traumatic experiences; learn to allow a full range of emotional experiences

Stage 3: Solve ordinary problems in living; increase self-respect

Stage 4: Increase capacity for joy

Notice that while most people starting DBT have traumatic events in the past that bother them, DBT does not directly address or resolve traumatic events until Stage 2 - that is, until behavior is under control.

How Do I Start DBT?

The Augusta Dialectical Behavior Therapy Program is available to people in the Augusta area. If you are interested, contact the MC Psychiatry Clinic at 721-3141 in order to start the assessment process.

Where Do I Get More Information?

These books by Linehan:

Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder
Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder

This website:

www.behavioraltech.com