

# BALANCING CHANGE & ACCEPTANCE IN YOUTH WORK: APPLYING DBT PRINCIPLES

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## ISSUE IMPORTANCE

*Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a well-established, empirically supported treatment for helping individuals who experience recurrent, complex emotional and behavioral problems with a special emphasis on reducing self-destructive behaviors. DBT provides a comprehensive philosophy, intervention framework, and set of practical skills that youth with various behavioral health difficulties can benefit from. DBT has been adapted for use with adolescents in outpatient, inpatient, and school settings and is known to be effective in reducing a wide range of psychiatric problems.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Core skills of Dialectical Behavior Therapy include the following: **Mindfulness**, **Distress Tolerance**, **Emotion Regulation**, and **Interpersonal Effectiveness**. Some core DBT treatment strategies may include *Functional Analysis of Behavior*, *Validation Strategies*, and *Dialectical Strategies*.
- Validation (countering invalidation) provides a vital balance to the change process. There are multiple levels of validation, as well as a variety of experiences to validate & ways to do so.
- Dialectical philosophy refers to viewing reality as a dynamic set of circumstances, where two seemingly opposing perspectives can both be true, two seemingly opposing forces can co-exist. Dialectical thinking helps move us away from “either-or” and “all-or-nothing” thinking AND see others' perspectives: two seemingly opposing ideas can both have truth in them.



## VALIDATION

### THE IMPACTS OF INVALIDATION:

- Increased invalidation leads to heightened arousal & a sense of lack of control.
  - Chronic invalidation can lead an individual to question one’s own experience and reality: self-invalidation.
- In order to cope with increased arousal, individuals are motivated (urgently) to relieve distress.
  - This can lead to impulsive behaviors, shutdown, and justification of behaviors.

### LEVELS OF VALIDATION:

*Validate at the highest level possible*

- **Level 1:** Listen with complete awareness, showing genuine and unbiased interest
- **Level 2:** Accurately reflect one's experience without judging, encouraging, or evaluating
- **Level 3:** Infer and articulate non-verbalized emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
- **Level 4:** Describe how behavior makes sense due to past experiences
- **Level 5:** Actively search for & express ways behavior makes sense in current situation
- **Level 6:** *You are who you are, and I can handle it. You can too!*



# EXPLORING DBT SKILLS

## CORE SKILLS & PURPOSE

- **Mindfulness**
  - Grounding in the present
  - Improved focus & awareness
- **Distress Tolerance** (see right →→)
  - Reduce impulsiveness
  - Crisis survival skills
  - Reality acceptance skills
- **Emotion Regulation**
  - Understand, label, and regulate emotions
  - Change emotional responses
  - Letting go of suffering
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness** (see below ↓ ↓)
  - Develop & maintain better relationships
  - Improve assertiveness & reduce conflict
  - Increase self-respect



## Distress Tolerance

### Skill: Radical Acceptance



Creating change first requires accepting reality.  
Without acceptance we stay stuck in unhappiness, anger, shame, etc.

- **Accepting reality is...**
  - Accepting the things we cannot change, even if we don't like them
  - A way to manage the pain in our lives
  - Acknowledging, recognizing, and enduring
  - **NOT** giving up, invalidating, approval, or passivity
- **Moving toward Radical Acceptance:**
  1. Catch moments of fighting reality:
    - "should", "isn't", "not fair", "must"
  2. Remind: reality is what it is in this moment
  3. Acknowledge the causes for the reality
  4. Allow emotions to occur and self-validate
  5. Acknowledge: life is worth living even with pain
  6. Practice accepting & letting go of suffering

## Interpersonal Effectiveness

### Skill: DEAR MAN



DEAR MAN is an acronym that describes a communication process for asking for what one wants or needs—or when saying no to something.

- **"DEAR" is what to do; "MAN" is how to do it:**
  - **D**escribe the current situation
  - **E**xpress feelings/opinions about situation
  - **A**ssert self: ask question or say, "No," clearly
  - **R**einforce or reward other person ahead of time
  - **M**indfully approach conversation; focused; don't argue
  - **A**ppear confident (eye contact, etc.)
  - **N**egotiate
- **Notes:**
  - Be clear that effective use of DEAR MAN does not guarantee the desired outcome.
  - It is essential to use interactive teaching (role play) to teach & practice this skill.

### Skill: Pros & Cons



The Pros & Cons skill is a four-step process used for decision-making support.

- Considerations for tolerating vs. not tolerating distress (engaging in problem behavior or not)
- Helps individuals determine short & long-term consequences of actions (reducing impulsivity)
- **Process includes FOUR steps**
  - **Pros:** Act on Urge (*Engage in Problem Behavior*)
  - **Cons:** Resist Urge (*Use Adapting Behavior*)
  - **Pros:** Resist Urge (*Use Adapting Behavior*)
  - **Cons:** Act on Urge (*Engage in Behavior*)
- **Important considerations:**
  - Use only when an individual is not distressed
  - Begin process with whichever step is easiest for the individual
  - Gently assist with ideas for each area
  - Identify things as short-term or long-term consequences; cross off what holds no weight



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