DBT Skills: An Introduction

Elizabeth T. Murphy, PhD
Staff Psychologist, Adult Outpatient Clinic, McLean Hospital
Instructor of Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, Part-time

BPD Patient and Family Education Webinar Series
March 30, 2017
What is DBT?

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) was developed by Marsha Linehan, PhD, ABPP.

- DBT, including DBT skills training, is based on a dialectical and biosocial theory of psychological disorder that emphasizes the role of difficulties in regulating emotions, both under and over control, and behavior.

- Emotion dysregulation has been linked to a variety of mental health problems stemming from patterns of instability in emotion regulation, impulse control, interpersonal relationships and self-image.

- DBT skills are aimed directly at these dysfunctional patterns.

- The overall goal of DBT skills training is to help individuals change behavioral, emotional, thinking, and interpersonal patterns associated with problems in living.

*Linehan, 2015, p3.*
Key Dialectic of DBT skills

DBT skills reflect a key dialectic:

“The need for me to accept myself as I am, and the need for me to change”
Treatment Goals

Dialectically informed treatment goals

Balance

ACCEPTANCE    CHANGE

Mindfulness    Emotion Regulation
Distress Tolerance    Interpersonal effectiveness

For educational use only.
©1997 by Marsha M. Linehan
Mindfulness
Core Mindfulness Skills

- “What” skills
  - Observe
  - Describe
  - Participate

- “How” skills
  - Nonjudgmentally
  - One-mindfully
  - Effectively

Distress Tolerance
Goals of Distress Tolerance

- Survive crisis situations
- Accept reality
- Become free
Crisis Survival Skills

- The STOP skills
- Pros and cons
- TIP your body chemistry
- Distract with wise mind ACCEPTS
- Self-soothe with the 5 senses
- Improve the moment

Reality Acceptance Skills

- Radical acceptance
- Turning the mind
- Willingness
- Half-smiling and willing hands
- Allowing the mind: Mindfulness of current thoughts

Radical Acceptance

- What is radical acceptance?
- What has to be accepted?
- Why accept reality?

Radical Acceptance

- Understand what is NOT radical acceptance
- Factors that interfere with radical acceptance

Emotion Regulation
Goals of Emotion Regulation

- Understand and name emotions
- Decrease the frequency of unwanted emotions
- Decrease emotional vulnerability
- Decrease emotional suffering

Barriers to Regulating Emotions

- Biology
- Lack of skill
- Reinforcement of emotional behavior
- Moodiness
- Emotional overload
- Emotion myths

The DBT Model for Describing Emotions

- **Vulnerability factors**: conditions or events that increase sensitivity/reactivity
- **Prompting event**: internal or external cues enter your awareness/get your attention that set off the emotion
- **Interpretations of the prompting event**: thoughts, beliefs, assumptions or appraisals
- **Body changes and experiences**
- **Action urges**
- **Expressions**: body language/what I said/what I did
- **Emotion name and intensity**
- **Aftereffects**

Changing Emotional Response

- Check the facts
- Opposite action
- Problem solving

Obtaining Objectives Skillfully

- Clarifying priorities
- Objectives effectiveness: DEAR MAN
- Relationship effectiveness: GIVE
- Self-respect effectiveness: FAST
- Factors to consider

Questions?