

Mindful Awareness / DBT Overview:

What is Mindful Awareness?

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

-Victor Frankl, M.D. (holocaust survivor)

Mindfulness is about being fully awake or present in our lives.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (the originator of the MBSR curriculum) describes mindfulness as an approach to life based on the understanding that "the present is the only time that any of us have to be alive – to know anything – to perceive – to learn – to act – to change – to heal"(JKZ 1990).

Mindfulness practice is the cultivation of the ability to pay deliberate attention to our internal and external experiences from moment to moment in an open, curious way that leaves judgment aside. Relating compassionately to life in this way and learning to direct (and re-direct) our attention towards the present moment allows for greater access to our own powerful resources for intuition, insight, creativity and healing.

Within the practice of mindfulness, thoughts and feelings are observed as events in the mind, without over-identifying with them, and without reacting to them in an automatic, habitual pattern of reactivity. This non-elaborative state of self-observation introduces a 'space' between one's perceptions and one's responses. In this way, mindfulness practices help us to respond reflectively to situations instead of reacting to them based on conditioned habits or reflexes. With mindfulness practice we can shift our relationship to ourselves and our life experiences in a way that allows for greater spaciousness, acceptance and compassion and in doing so can dramatically improve the quality of our life

Mindfulness practices use the immediate experiences of the moment, including the movement of the breath, sensations in the body, physical movements, sounds, smells and tastes as anchors for our nonjudgmental attention in order to facilitate a more stabilized way of relating to our inner and outer experiences.

Most of us, to some degree or another, are frequently carried away by or consumed with the ever present flow of thoughts, feelings, criticisms, worries and private stories that present themselves moment by moment through out our day. We constantly judge and evaluate what is happening within us and around us, often comparing it to our idea of how things "should be" thereby creating additional layers of dissatisfaction and anger that do not necessarily lead to any actual effort on our part to respond creatively to the challenges we are faced with.

Cultivating mindful awareness can help us to work directly with these challenges, turning towards them instead of reacting against them. In this way we can discover opportunities or solutions that become more visible and available to us once we allow our perspective to open and shift away from the "busyness" of our every day mind.

[Excerpted from <http://www.mindfulawarenessnj.com>]

What is DBT?

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) treatment is a type of psychotherapy — or talk therapy — that utilizes a cognitive-behavioral approach. DBT emphasizes the psychosocial aspects of treatment.

The theory behind the approach is that some people are prone to react in a more intense and out-of-the-ordinary manner toward certain emotional situations, primarily those found in romantic, family and friend relationships. DBT theory suggests that some people's arousal levels in such situations can increase far more quickly than the average person's, attain a higher level of emotional stimulation, and take a significant amount of time to return to baseline arousal levels.

People who are sometimes diagnosed with borderline personality disorder experience extreme swings in their emotions, see the world in black-and-white shades, and seem to always be jumping from one crisis to another. Because few people understand such reactions — most of all their own family and a childhood that emphasized invalidation — they don't have any methods for coping with these sudden, intense surges of emotion. DBT is a method for teaching skills that will help in this task.

Components of DBT:

- Support-oriented: It helps a person identify their strengths and builds on them so that the person can feel better about him/herself and their life.
- Cognitive-based: DBT helps identify thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions that make life harder: "I have to be perfect at everything." "If I get angry, I'm a terrible person" & helps people to learn different ways of thinking that will make life more bearable: "I don't need to be perfect at things for people to care about me", "Everyone gets angry, it's a normal emotion.
- Collaborative: It requires constant attention to relationships between clients and staff.

In DBT people are encouraged to work out problems in their relationships with their therapist and the therapists to do the same with them. DBT asks people to complete homework assignments, to role-play new ways of interacting with others, and to practice skills such as soothing yourself when upset. These skills, a crucial part of DBT, are taught in weekly lectures, reviewed in weekly homework groups, and referred to in nearly every group. The individual therapist helps the person to learn, apply and master the DBT skills.

The 4 Modules of Dialectical Behavior Therapy:

1. Mindfulness:

The essential part of all skills taught in skills group are the core mindfulness skills.

Observe, Describe, and Participate are the core mindfulness "what" skills. They answer the question, "What do I do to practice core mindfulness skills?"

Non-judgmentally, One-mindfully, and Effectively are the "how" skills and answer the question, "How do I practice core mindfulness skills?"

2. Interpersonal Effectiveness:

The interpersonal response patterns —how you interact with the people around you and in your personal relationships — that are taught in DBT skills training share similarities to those taught in some assertiveness and interpersonal problem-solving classes. These skills include effective strategies for

asking for what one needs, how to assertively say 'no,' and learning to cope with inevitable interpersonal conflict. The skills taught are intended to maximize the chances that a person's goals in a specific situation will be met, while at the same time not damaging either the relationship or the person's self-respect.

3. Distress Tolerance:

Most approaches to mental health treatment focus on changing distressing events and circumstances. They have paid little attention to accepting, finding meaning for, and tolerating distress. This task has generally been tackled by religious and spiritual communities and leaders. Dialectical behavior therapy emphasizes learning to bear pain skillfully.

Distress tolerance skills constitute a natural development from mindfulness skills. They have to do with the ability to accept, in a non-evaluative and nonjudgmental fashion, both oneself and the current situation. Although the stance advocated here is a nonjudgmental one, this does not mean that it is one of approval: acceptance of reality is not approval of reality.

Distress tolerance behaviors are concerned with tolerating and surviving crises and with accepting life as it is in the moment. Four sets of crisis survival strategies are taught: distracting, self-soothing, improving the moment, and thinking of pros and cons. Acceptance skills include radical acceptance, turning the mind toward acceptance, and willingness versus willfulness.

4. Emotion Regulation:

People who are typically emotionally intense and labile — frequently angry, intensely frustrated, depressed, and anxious might benefit from help in learning to regulate their emotions.

Dialectical behavior therapy skills for emotion regulation include:

- Learning to properly identify and label emotions
- Identifying obstacles to changing emotions
- Reducing vulnerability to "emotion mind"
- Increasing positive emotional events
- Increasing mindfulness to current emotions
- Taking opposite action
- Applying distress tolerance techniques