

Wisconsin Public Psychiatry Network Teleconference (WPPNT)

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Using Dialectical  
Behavior Therapy  
Skills in Action

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## History of DBT

- Developed by Marcia Linehan to treat Borderline Personality disorder
- CBT with added Eastern philosophies which expanded into a skill-training model
- “Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder.” in 1993
- Use of the bio-psycho-social model

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## What is the biopsychosocial model?

- **Bio**logical predisposition: high sensitivity and reactivity, slow return to baseline
- **Psycho**logical response: unhealthy coping skills “worked” at one point and thus were reinforced; but are no longer effective
- Invalidating **social** environment: Childhood trauma, use of emotional language met with negative and/or erratic responses, not modeled healthy coping skills

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## Other disorders that (often) respond well to DBT

- Personality Disorders
- PTSD/Trauma
- Depression
- Mood Disorders
- Anxiety
- Substance Use Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Impulse Control/Anger Issues

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### Two examples of DBT group members:

- Tami: 50 years old. Single. Hx of Depression, Alcohol Abuse, Marijuana Dependence. Often feel “stuck” in her depression – isolation, uncontrollable crying, hopelessness. Often compares herself to others, feels empty due to not being married and having children.
- James: 30 years old. Hx of OCD, Opioid Dependence. Successfully completed residential program for OCD Sx. In a committed with relationship with mother of his children. Two young children and one teen stepdaughter. When Sx are activated, fears food contamination (loses weight), fears infant son will choke(will not leave his side for hours), skin picking.

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## Four Skill Sets

- Mindfulness
- Distress Tolerance
- Emotional Regulation
- Interpersonal Effectiveness

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## Mindfulness

- How to be aware of and present with all thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Becoming responsive vs. reactive
- Experience thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a non-judgmental fashion – *thoughts are not facts!*
- Differentiate ourselves from our thoughts and behaviors – *we are not our thoughts!*
- Learn to accept vs. avoid thoughts and feelings

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### Example: Observe and Describe

- Observe
  - Just notice the experience
  - Have a “Teflon Mind”
  - Control your attention
  - Be alert to thoughts, feelings, and action that you are considering
  - Watch your thoughts come and go
  - Notice all five senses
- Describe
  - Put words to the experience in non-judgmental way
  - Put experiences into words

From Linehan, 1993

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### Teaching Observe and Describe

- Review worksheet explaining concept
- Practice in session with the current moment
  - Ask people to take a Moment to Pause
  - Take a moment to notice what's going on inside
  - Write down, in concrete and specific terms, what you are thinking, feeling, any urges to act
  - Take another Moment to Pause
  - Take a moment to notice what is going on outside of you (all five senses)
  - Write down, in concrete and specific terms, what you are sensing
- Invite people to share the experience, and what they wrote down
- Discuss how this could be a helpful way to participate more effectively in situations

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### Example of Observe and Describe: Tami

- Upon doing the activity, she was able to notice that she was “judging her depression” which was making her sadness stronger. She also cried during the activity, and recognized that she was “judging her crying.”
- She concluded, with group input, that she would like to work on “not being depressed about being depressed” to see if that will help with the intensity of the depressive Sx
- She will try and do this through slowing down and observing her Sx in non-judgmental terms.

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## Distress Tolerance

- How to cope with distressing situations without engaging in unhealthy coping skills
- Skills to cope “in the moment” as opposed to solving problems
- Balance of willingness and active strategies
- Learn to distract without avoiding

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### Example of Distress Tolerance Skill: Half Smile

- An active way to work on finding balance, moving away from all or nothing thinking
- When we experience activation, consciously softening our face muscles and engaging in a slight, unforced smile
- This creates less tension in our face, neck, shoulders, etc, and allows us to be less reactive to the stress
- Allows us to challenge black and white/catastrophizing reactions

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### Teaching Half Smile

- Explain the concept of Half Smile
- Have the group participate in a Half Smile Meditation (I like to use one created by Thich Nhat Hanh)
- After the meditation, process as a group
- Have a homework assignment for the week: use half smile over the week in one of the following situations:
  - When you first wake up
  - During free moments
  - While listening to music
  - When irritated
  - When lying down
  - When sitting

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### Example of Half Smile: James

- James identified feeling anxiety and irritability upon awaking, due to having to take care of his kids in the morning.
- Committed to taking “one minute” to engage in half smile before jumping out of bed
- Found his irritability lessened, and his day went better
- Decided to put a piece of paper next to his bed that said “SMILE”
- He also told his partner, who would remind him to half smile when he seemed stressed

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## Emotional Regulation

- Understanding emotions
- Choosing how to react to our emotions
- Believing all emotions are valid, move away from judging emotions
- Develop resiliency to dealing with emotions
- Increase behaviors that lead to less emotional distress
- Develop emotional balance – experience emotions congruent with situation

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Example: MEDDSS

- Acronym for healthy habits that increase potential of regulated mood
- **M**astery
- **E**xercise
- **D**iet
- **D**rugs (Medication)
- **S**leep
- **S**pirituality

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Teaching MEDDSS

- Use worksheet to discuss rationale for this skill. Discuss how there are things we can do to decrease moods we are uncomfortable with and increase moods we enjoy.
- Define each of the skills
- Give out worksheet to come up with examples from each skill set that you have done or are willing to try.
- Come back together as a group and share ideas.
- Have each member commit to doing at least one of the skills over the next week.

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### Example: MEDDSS: James

- James reported that he has been eating very little due to concerns about food being undercooked and unsafe. He reported he is losing weight, and will only eat things that he prepares. He agreed to discuss this with his partner. He decided he would try asking her to make pasta and canned sauce. He would look at the packages, then leave the room to allow her to cook it. After it was cooked, he would eat it with his partner. He also used relaxation techniques to accomplish this.
- The next week, he was able to eat the spaghetti. He continues to discuss ways to increase his exposure, but decided to stick with this step for awhile.

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## Interpersonal Effectiveness

- Seeking to get needs met in relationships that is respectful to all involved (Objectives Effectiveness)
- Learn and use skills to obtain and maintain healthy relationships (Relationship Effectiveness)
- Learn ways to build and improve self-respect (Self-Respect Effectiveness)

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### Example: FAST

- Used for self-respect effectiveness
- (be) **F**air to yourself
- (no) **A**pologies
- **S**tick to values
- (be) **T**ruthful

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### Teaching FAST

- Discuss FAST worksheet
- Break up into dyads, complete and discuss FAST worksheet, which asks:
  - I can be Fair to myself in relationships by:
  - I can Apologize less in relationships by:
  - I can Stick to values in my relationship by:
  - I can be Truthful with myself and others by:
- Discuss in larger group

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### Example: FAST: Tami

- During discussion, Tonya mentioned being a relationship with someone who she uses with regularly. She reported she wants to stop using, but doesn't want to make him feel bad.
- Recognized that her values have changed during the relationship. She now values being sober, and he does not. She does not need to apologize for her change in values.
- She never told him that she was trying to stay clean and sober, and committed to being honest with him.
- To date, he has decided to try and be sober also

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## Format for our DBT group

- 90 minute group
- Group members check-in about homework and skills
- Introduce skill set
  - On rotation every 4 weeks
- Guided meditation
- Remainder of time: Introduce and practice 3 skills
  - Lecture
  - Worksheets
  - Dyads
  - Group discussion
  - At end: assign homework for the coming week

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## Considerations for forming a group

- How to screen for appropriateness
- Group rules/expectations
- Safety plan and safety expectations
- Open vs. Closed group
- Format: balance of process and education
- Ability to communicate/coordinate with primary therapist
- How to address Treatment Interfering Behaviors
- How to get your own support

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## Considerations when teaching

- Repetition is the key!
- Consider teaching grounding techniques prior to DBT skills (like meditation!)
- Expect outside work (homework)
- Teach the concept before the individual skill
- Address biopsychosocial needs
- Use dialectical language
- Balance acceptance and change-based skills

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[www.dbtselfhelp.com](http://www.dbtselfhelp.com)

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# Thank you!

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Counseling  
  
together we recover

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