Northern Lakes
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AUTHORITY
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Dialectical Behavior Therapy

What is it

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is an evidence-based treatment approach that helps people who have been having emotional and behavioral difficulties for years build a life worth living through the use of a variety of skills designed to help them develop more control over their emotions. DBT is a way of helping individuals learn how to have a less chaotic and more satisfying life.

DBT defines "dialectical" as a synthesis or integration of opposites. In simpler terms, dialectical means two opposing things being true at once. An example of this is working towards loving and accepting ourselves for who we are in this moment while also wanting to do better, try harder, and work towards our personal goals.

The therapy was developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan and combines some of the most effective components of eastern approaches to psychology with western psychological practice.

Who it is designed for

Research has shown that DBT is an effective treatment for people who are diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Research has also shown that DBT is an effective treatment for Eating Disorders, Substance Abuse Disorders, Depressed Older Adults, and other personality disorders. DBT services are for individuals 18 years or older. It is a voluntary program.

How it works

The DBT program consists of the following components, all of which are necessary aspects of the approach:

- DBT Skills Training Group
- DBT Individual Psychotherapy
- Coaching
- Phone coaching

The DBT **Skills Training Group**, also called a Skills Building Group, meets weekly for about two hours. The focus is on learning how to be mindful in your life, tolerate stress, regulate your emotions, and improve your communication skills with others. These skills consist of:

1) Core Mindfulness Skills (focusing skills) – Learning to control your mind through focusing attention and simply noticing one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is not about explaining and solving, but rather observing and describing. It is learning how to

control your own mind without letting your mind control you.

2) Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills (people skills) – Learning to get what you want in interactions with others or learning how to say no while maintaining personal integrity.
3) Emotion Regulation Skills (de-escalation skills)– Learning to identify, regulate, and change emotions when possible.
4) Distress Tolerance Skills (crisis survival skills) – Tolerating uncomfortable feelings when they cannot be changed without making matters worse.

These groups involve homework assignments and practice.

Weekly DBT **Individual Therapy** sessions are geared toward helping people apply the skills they are learning in their day-to-day lives. Individual therapy sessions are also used for encouraging people to actively solve problems in their lives and have some very clear goals. The first goal is reducing behavior that is life-threatening. Then, focus is placed on using skills in the person's interactions with the therapist, and learning effective strategies for working in partnership with the therapist. Third, focus is placed on helping the person apply the skills outside of treatment, followed by applying the skills to treating the symptoms of psychological trauma. In summary, the orientation of the treatment is to get action under control, to help the person feel better, to resolve problems in living and other problems, and to find joy and, for some, a sense of transcendence.

Telephone Consultation/Coaching – At times people become overwhelmed by their emotions and struggle using the skills they are learning. During these times the DBT Case Manager or Therapist is available to talk with you directly or by phone to help you use those skills so your reaction to your emotion don't take over your life. In addition, NLCMHA crisis services staff are trained in coaching skills so that people learn to ask for help prior to problems reaching crisis proportions. These calls provide a chance for the person to get help using the skills they are learning in the skills building group, and practicing with the therapist in their day-to-day lives.

Consultation with therapists, case managers, psychiatrists takes place as needed.

Why it is done

To help the person move from a life of misery to a life worth living as quickly and efficiently as possible. The goal of DBT is to assist individuals

- To reduce crises and/or life-threatening behaviors.
- To build interpersonal relationships
- To improve the ability to cope with stress and manage emotions.

Results/Benefits

- Significantly less hospitalization days.
- Fewer and less severe self-harm behaviors.
- Less anger and hostility.
- More control over your emotions.
- More motivation to make changes in your life.
- Better quality of life.
- More hope.