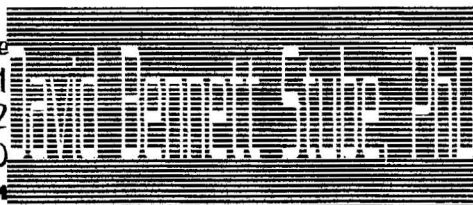


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Dialectic Behavioral Therapy¹

Dr. Marsha Linehan, a psychologist and professor at the University of Washington (go Huskies!), designed a cognitive behavioral therapy for people with intense moods--the borderline personality. Her elegant counseling targets thoughts and acts, changing how we think and what we do. The training proves quite useful for any one who wants to learn how to regulate emotion or intense moods, such as anxiety, irritability, rage, and depression. Dr. Linehan gives us more than enough ideas of what to think and do when we are most emotionally disturbed. She teaches how to think and act when we feel out of control.

Dr. Linehan's training focusses on four skill areas: Core Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance, Emotional Regulation, and Interpersonal Effectiveness. Each will be summarized below.

Core Mindfulness To hold onto our core sense of self, we merge our emotional mind set with our reason to practice wise mind skills. Wise choices arise from right thinking and balanced passion. We think and act from our solid self instead of our pseudo self. To become mindful we accept reality, practice being nonjudgemental, and turn our mind on discovering what we can do. Dr. Linehan suggests seizing control of our minds by becoming more single-minded, fully attending to one thing at a time. We increase mindfulness by accepting reality rather than resisting it or trying to impose our own spin. We look for the most effective thing to do.

Distress Tolerance Difficult feelings often seem impossible to experience or live with. But it is impossible to avoid difficult feelings in real life. To learn to tolerate distress, Linehan suggests we engage in six distracting thoughts and acts, (1) becoming active, (2) contributing to others, (3) comparing our lot in life to others, (4) engaging emotional activities the opposite of how we feel, (4) pushing away the distress, (5) thinking, (6) engaging in intense sensations like cold (or hot) showers. To better tolerate distress we learn to self-soothe by pleasing each of our five senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. We improve each moment through better imagery, finding meaning, praying, relaxing, being in the moment, vacationing, and affirming and encouraging our

¹ Linehan, M. M. (1993). Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder. New York: Guilford Press.

self. Dr. Linehan suggests we learn to observe our breath throughout our life to better accept our life more fully. She introduces the half-smile as an effective distress reduction device. In Dialectic Behavioral Therapy we replace our willfulness with willingness, doing just what is needed in each situation, in an unpretentious way. We willingly respond to distressing life events, rather than willfully. Linehan encourages "Radical Acceptance" as pain creates suffering only when we refuse to accept the pain. To better tolerate our distress she counsels us to turn our mind to accepting reality, including all agony and ecstasy.

Emotional Regulation No one wants to feel that their feelings dictate their lives. To be less at the whim of our emotions, Dr. Linehan suggests we should learn to understand each of our emotions, reduce our emotional vulnerability and reactivity, and decrease our long term emotional suffering. She asks us to explore how we experience love, joy, anger, sadness, fear, shame, and other important emotions. We learn to distinguish between our subtle emotions and our intense primary emotions. In Dialectical Behavioral Therapy we learn how we use emotions to relate to others, to motivate and organize our action, and to self-validate. Self-validation uses our feelings to take care of our bodies by affirming our sense of self. To reduce our vulnerability to emotional distress we learn to treat our ailments, balance our diet, avoid substance abuse, and get exercise. Dr. Linehan urges us to build our sense of mastery. She points out that it is important for us to fully experience the richness of our emotional world, practicing loving our emotion, wwn difficult emotions like depression, rage, and anxiety. One emotional regulation skill some find helpful is her challenge to change the emotion by acting the opposite of the current emotion. For example, when angry do something kind.

Interpersonal Effectiveness is the goal of Dr. Linehan's social skills training. She teaches us to be personally and interpersonally effective. The important skills of mindfulness, distress tolerance, and emotional regulation are the building blocks of interpersonal effectiveness. Her training asks the client to go out into the world and act assertively, inviting a friend to dinner, calling an insurance company about rates, asking a pharmacist for information on over-the-counter drugs. Skills taught include the skill of saying no, getting what you want, and graciously accepting a situation as it is. Clients learn to assert self effectively. The idea is to develop the skills to assess and set into motion the action that will best enable people to achieve their goal in conflictual interpersonal situations, even when emotions run high.