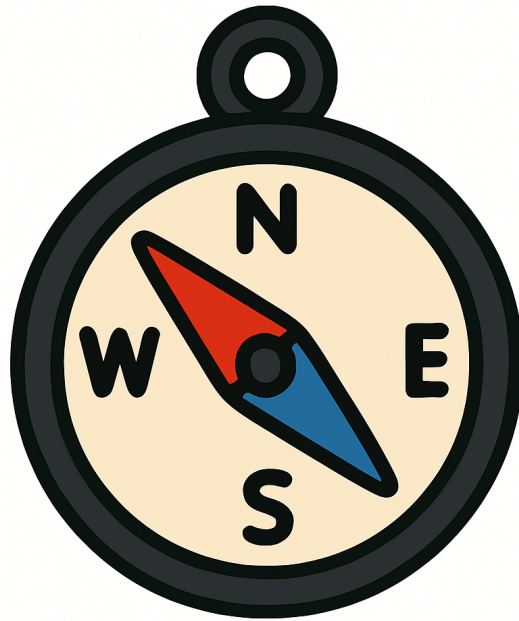


Session One: Orientation and Dialectics



Welcome to the DBT U Program

Tools for Mental Health, Academic Success, and a Life That Works

Welcome! We're really glad you're here. This DBT Skills Program was designed for students like you who are dealing with mental health challenges that have impacted school, functioning, and overall well-being..and who are ready to learn skills to change that.

Maybe you've experienced some of the following:

- Intense emotions, panic attacks, or burnout
- Trouble keeping up with school because of depression, anxiety, ADHD, or other concerns
- Struggles in relationships that leave you feeling isolated or overwhelmed
- Ongoing stress or crisis, even with individual therapy or other supports
- Fears about hospitalization or having it happen again

If any of this sounds familiar, you're in the right place. This program is about building strength, stability, and the skills to help you stay in school, out of crisis, and on a path toward thriving.

Why This Program?

Many students use crisis counseling, therapy, or academic accommodations, and while those supports can help, they're not always enough. What's often missing are practical tools that can be used day-to-day, especially when stress runs high. That's where DBT skills come in.

This program teaches evidence-based strategies to help you:

- Get through intense emotions and stress without shutting down or spiraling
- Reduce behaviors that interfere with your success (avoidance, outbursts, people-pleasing, etc.)
- Stay grounded and focused in your classes, relationships, and daily life
- Build a foundation of emotional resilience so you can stay in school and live a life that works

We know college can be tough. And we also know that when you learn to work *with* your mind instead of against it, things start to change.

What is DBT?

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a skills-based, action-focused approach to treating mental illness and achieving well-being. It was originally created to help people who struggle with intense emotions, self-destructive habits, and frequent crises, and it's been adapted for use in colleges and universities across the country because it *works*.

Dialectics are at the core of DBT. Being dialectical means more than one thing can be true at once. For example:

- You can be struggling *and* also be capable of getting stronger.
- You can accept the challenges you have today *and* commit yourself to change.

With dialectics, you move from “all-or-nothing” thinking and actions toward more balanced, flexible responses to cope effectively, even when life is hard. In a nutshell, dialectics reduce stress and conflicts within yourself and between others because being dialectical increases your options to be skillful.

What Skills Will I Learn?

This program is divided into five skills modules, or categories of skills. Each module focuses on real-world skills that support your mental health and academic life. The modules include:

- **Dialectics:** Taking a “yes, and” approach to find the shades of gray between black and white.
- **Mindfulness:** Learning how to attend to the present moment nonjudgementally.
- **Distress Tolerance:** Surviving through crisis without making it worse.
- **Emotion Regulation:** Understanding, managing, and balancing your emotions.
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness:** Building self-respect, creating healthy relationships, and being assertive.

These skills are useful in classrooms, dorms, group projects, jobs, relationships, and most importantly, in how you relate to yourself.

What Makes This Different From Therapy?

This program is different from traditional therapy. It's not about digging through your past or talking in great detail about your problems. Rather, it's about building a toolkit for your present and future. The skills you will learn will help you feel better, have stronger relationships, and increase your success in school and life with one catch:

The skills only work if you work the skills!

In other words, you have to show up, be engaged, and practice the skills everyday between sessions. The good news is that most of the skills can be enjoyable to practice, and the efforts that you put into the program translate directly into what's needed to succeed in school and life. The bottom line is showing up and doing it!

What to Expect from the Program

The program meets for 12 weekly sessions. The sessions are divided into three parts:

- The first part is **Skills Training**...basically a class where you learn the skills, participate in discussions, and do experiential practice.
- The second part is a **Brief Check-In** using the Daily Tracking Sheet (introduced later).
- The third part is **Targeted Skills Application**. Think of this as a lab where we work together to apply skills to address your most important concerns and problems.

The program is group-based, with approximately eight people in each group. Does group sound stressful? Try not to worry...most people find that learning the skills with a group gives them extra support, ideas, and it's validating to learn that you're not alone with your struggles.

Your program therapist, and other program members, will be supportive, validating, yet will challenge you and hold you accountable to showing up, being engaged, and practicing the skills.

What the Program Expects of You

- **Show Up:** As with classes, you cannot realize the benefits if you skip. This program gives you the tools to succeed in other areas of life too...if you make the choice to attend.
- **Participate:** You get out of this program what you put into it. Everyone has up and down days. We simply ask that you give your best effort on any given day.
- **Be Prepared:** Complete the Tracking Sheet, Skills Practice, and any other assignments. Following through in the program helps build the same follow-through skills needed in other areas of life.
- **Practice the Skills:** This isn't homework; it's life work. Skills are acquired through consistent practice. Try applying them to real-life situations as often as possible.
- **Treat Everyone with Respect and Dignity:** Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, or otherwise discriminatory behavior will not be tolerated. Every person deserves to feel safe, heard, and valued in this space.
- **Respect Privacy and Keep All Confidential:** What's said in the program stays in the program without exception. It is strictly prohibited to share any personal information disclosed in the group, including who is participating. *Violation of confidentiality will result in immediate discharge.*
- **If You Attend Online:** Present yourself as you would in person (dress, hygiene, posture) Do not vape, eat, lie down, or engage in other out-of-place behaviors during sessions. Treat virtual attendance with the same level of decorum and respect as an in-person appointment.
- **In Regard to Safety Concerns:** Address suicidal urges that you are struggling to manage with your individual therapist and/or to your program therapist for appropriate safety planning.

Closing Thoughts:

You don't need to have everything together to be here. You just need to be willing to be open, do your best, and receive and give supportive and skills-based feedback. DBT is about *building a satisfying life*...whatever that means to you. Let's do this together!

Daily Tracking Sheet

What you track is what you change

The Tracking Sheet that follows is designed to help you notice patterns in your emotions, skill use, and other areas over the course of a week. By filling it out daily, you'll build awareness of what you feel, which DBT skills you're practicing, and how effective those skills are in real life.

In addition, tracking your experiences shows you where you're improving and where you might need more practice. Over time, you'll start to see patterns:

- Do certain skills help most during exams?
- Do you rely more on some skills than others?
- Are there times when your emotions are more intense and harder to manage?

This sheet is not about perfection. Rather, it's about awareness and progress. The more you practice noticing and tracking, the stronger your skills will become (Note that the skill use you report will grow each week as you progress through the program).

Let's go over the areas on the sheet together to understand the importance of each area.

Daily Tracking Sheet

Your guide to tracking progress

Use this sheet to track your emotional experience and skill use across the week. Each day, rate your experiences (0–5 scale) and check off the skills you used.

Daily Ratings Grid (0–5 Scale)

Rate each item once per day:

0 = None/Low 5 = High/Intense (Positive w/Mood)

Category	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Emotional Intensity							
Stress Level							
Mood (Low–High)							
Academic Engagement							
Social Connection							

Skill Use: Place a ✓ under the day if you used the skill.

Dialectical Skills

Skill	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Both/And Thinking							
Middle Path Actions							

Mindfulness Skills

Skill	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Wise Mind							
Observe One-Mindfully							
Describe Nonjudgmentally							
Participate Effectively							

Distress Tolerance Skills

Skill	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
ACCEPTS							
IMPROVE the Moment							
TIPP Skills							
Self-Soothe							
Pros & Cons							
Radical Acceptance							
Other:							

Emotion Regulation Skills

Skill	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
PLEASED							
Check the Facts							
Build Mastery							
Build Positive Experience							
Opposite Action							

Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

Skill	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
FAST							
GIVE							
DEAR MAN							

Overall Effectiveness of Skills:

- ☐ Not Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Very Effective
- ☐ Extremely Effective

Intro to Dialectics

The Art of "Both/And"

In DBT, dialectics is more than just a big word from philosophy class; it's a *way of thinking and being* that can change how we handle relationships, decisions, emotions, and even our identity.

At its heart, dialectics is about holding two seemingly opposite ideas at the same time. Instead of choosing between "either this or that," dialectics teaches us to look for the truth in both to hold a "*both/and*" mindset.

Dialectical thinking allows us to get unstuck from black-and-white thinking, stop fighting with ourselves and others, and find flexible, realistic solutions to life's challenges. Instead of staying trapped in rigid mindsets or emotional tug-of-wars, dialectics allows us to move forward with greater clarity and balance, rather than spinning in conflict or avoidance.

Why Dialectics Matter

Have you ever had thoughts like these:

- *"I want to be independent, but I also want support."*
- *"I'm angry with them, but I also miss them."*
- *"I have to get everything right, or I'm a total failure."*
- *"If they cared about me, they would've texted back."*
- *"I either push through or I give up."*

Getting stuck in contradictions can lead to inner tension and conflict; dialectics offers a way through. Think of dialectics as a mental bridge that helps you hold and connect two seemingly opposite ideas at the same time, creating space to stand in the middle rather than choosing one extreme.

This bridge links conflicting thoughts, emotions, and desires, making it easier to find peace, understanding, and forward movement.

Life isn't just one thing or the other. People are complex. Emotions are layered. Situations are messy. Dialectics helps us navigate that complexity with clarity and grace. To do that, we embrace these key dialectical truths:

- There is more than one way to see a situation
- Two things that seem opposite can both be true
- We are doing the best we can **and** we need to try harder
- Change is constant and so is the need for acceptance
- Every person has wisdom (including you!)
- You can be strong **and** need help

Ways to Put Dialectics Into Practice:

Just like learning a new language or sport, dialectical thinking and action is something you can practice. Here's where to start:

Look for the Middle Path

When you notice you're stuck in "either/or" thinking, pause and ask:
"Is there a *both/and* here I'm missing?"

- You might want to drop a class that's overwhelming *and* still feel proud that you tried.
- You might love your friends *and* need alone time to recharge.
- You might be really upset *and* still choose to act skillfully in a hard moment.
- You might believe in growing as a person *and* accept yourself as you are right now.

Be Curious, Not Certain

Challenge rigid thinking by wondering:

- "What else could be true?"
- "What might they be feeling or thinking?"
- "Is there a different perspective?"

Validate and Expand

Instead of rejecting ideas, try adding:

- "Yes, and..." instead of "Yeah, but..."
- "I can understand that... and here's how I see it."

Next, let's look at dialectics in action through vignettes and exercises.

College Life Vignettes

Dialectics in Action

The Overloaded Planner

Taylor has three deadlines, two exams, and barely any sleep. They feel torn between trying to do everything perfectly or giving up entirely. They pause, take a breath, and think, *"I feel overwhelmed...and I can still take one step at a time."*

Taylor picks one assignment to focus on, sends an email to a professor asking for an extension, and takes a short walk to reset.

Roommate Conflict

Jordan's roommate left dirty dishes in the sink again. Jordan feels angry and disrespected but doesn't want to blow up or damage the friendship. They think, *"I'm frustrated, and I care about this relationship. I'm going to bring it up calmly."*

Jordan talks to their roommate using clear, respectful language to express their needs and suggest a solution.

Disappointment & Self-Judgment

Alex didn't get the internship they were hoping for. The thought, *"I'm not good enough,"* starts to spiral.

They take a moment and remind themselves, *"I'm disappointed, and I still have potential. I can learn from this and try again."*

Social FOMO

Maya is drained from a long week, but her friends are going out and she doesn't want to miss out. She tells herself, *"I want to stay connected, and I need rest."*

She decides to stay in and recharge, then texts a friend to make plans for another time.

Identity & Family

Eli is exploring their gender identity and worries about how their family might respond. They reflect, *"I care about my family, and I deserve to be myself."*

They begin preparing for honest conversations, finding support and building confidence in the process.

Practice Prompts

Use the vignettes above to reflect on your own challenges:

1. Write about something you're struggling with.
2. Identify two truths that seem to pull in different directions.
3. Practice saying both out loud, "*I feel ____, and I also ____.*"
4. Then ask: What small action can help me move forward?

Dialectical Strategies

Practice Working the Dialectic with These Techniques

These exercises help you practice dialectics in real life, especially in the kinds of situations that show up during college. You'll explore how to balance acceptance and change, increase self-compassion, look at things from multiple angles, and develop more flexible ways of thinking.

Balancing Acceptance and Change

One of the most important dialectics in DBT is learning to accept the moment as it is *and* still work toward meaningful change. Acceptance doesn't mean giving up or liking something; it means seeing it clearly, without judgment. And change doesn't mean rejecting the present; it means deciding how you want to move forward. For example, you might think, "*I don't like how behind I am on assignments, and instead of panicking or avoiding it, I can accept where I am and make a plan to catch up.*" Here are more examples:

- You accept that your professor grades tough, *and* you decide to meet with them for help instead of silently struggling.
- You accept that you feel socially anxious, *and* you still go to a club meeting to meet people.

Describe a situation where you're practicing (or could practice) acceptance and change at the same time:

What's Going Well (Even in a Hard Week)

College can feel like it's *always* stressful. But when we zoom out, we usually find that not everything is falling apart. Dialectics asks us to notice what's going well, even when other things aren't. You might note that, "*I cried twice this week...and I also made it to every class. Both are true.*" More examples include:

- You're overwhelmed with finals, *and* you had a really good convo with a friend.
- You've been anxious, *yet* you cooked a real meal instead of skipping dinner.

Name one thing, big or small, that's going well right now:

Compassion for Self and Others

We're often our own worst critics, and we tend to judge others quickly too. But sometimes what looks like laziness, disrespect, or failure is really stress, fear, or overwhelm. Dialectical thinking helps you balance accountability with compassion. As an example you might say, *"I was really short with my roommate. I didn't love that, and I know I was running on no sleep and feeling anxious."* Consider these examples:

- You forgive yourself for procrastinating because you're going through a breakup. And you still recommit to your goals.
- You give a classmate grace for flaking on group work once you learn they're working two jobs.

Describe a time when showing yourself or someone else compassion improved the situation:

Working on Incremental Change

Instead of thinking in all-or-nothing terms, ask, *"What would I be doing if I felt just 10% better?"* Then do that thing now, even before you feel better. That's a dialectical move. As an example you might say, *"If I felt a little less anxious, I'd actually go to the library. So I'm going to go anyway and see what happens."* Here are more examples:

- If your depression improved by 10%, maybe you'd shower or go outside, so you do that.
- If your anxiety was slightly lower, maybe you'd send the email you've been avoiding. Write it now.

Think of something that's hard for you right now. What would change if it improved just a little?

Find the Silver Lining

Not everything happens for a reason, and *sometimes* something helpful can come out of something hard. Dialectical thinking helps you hold both: the pain *and* the growth. You might contemplate, *"That breakup sucked, and it helped me figure out what I want in future relationships."* Consider these:

- Being waitlisted for your top school led you to a program where you've thrived.

- Failing an exam pushed you to finally get a tutor and improve your study skills.

Describe a time when something difficult had a hidden benefit or lesson:

Perspective-Taking

When we're upset, it's easy to assume people are doing things *to* us. Dialectical thinking reminds us that other people's behavior often comes from their own stress, confusion, or limitations. You don't have to agree with someone to try to understand where they're coming from. You might think, "*My professor seemed cold. But maybe they're overwhelmed, not angry at me personally.*" Here are more examples:

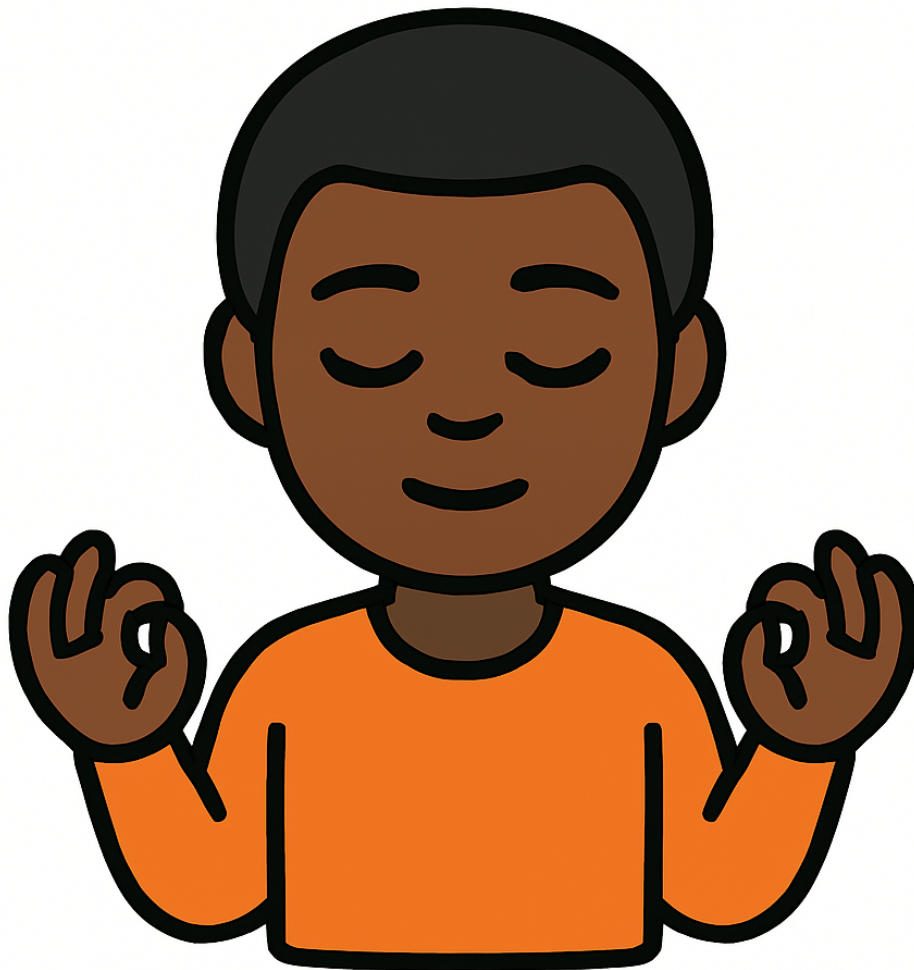
- Your friend snapped at you, *and* they're going through family stuff.
- Your parent criticized your choices *because* they're scared and unsure how to support you.

Describe a time when considering another perspective helped you understand more or judge less:

Closing Thoughts

In a world that often tells you to pick a side, dialectics remind you that you don't have to live in the extremes. This week, actively engage in dialectical thinking and actions and note the positive changes that result!

Session Two: Mindfulness and States of Mind



Intro to Mindfulness

Choosing to be in the Moment, Without Judgement

Let's be real: college can feel like a pressure cooker. Balancing academics, social life, jobs, family expectations, and your own well-being is no small feat. When life feels overwhelming, it's easy to get stuck in your head, check out completely, or react in ways that don't reflect who you really are or what you truly want. That's where mindfulness comes in.

At its core, mindfulness is the practice of choosing to notice what's happening right now without judgment. That includes what's going on inside you (thoughts, emotions, physical sensations) and around you (the room you're in, the sounds, the people). It's a way of mentally slowing down so you can actually be in the moment rather than lost in anxiety, stress, or overthinking. In short:

Mindfulness is choosing to pay attention to the present moment without judgment.

Direct the Camera Lens of Your Mind

Think of your mind's ability to attend like it's the lens on a camera. You can zoom in to study a single idea in class or zoom out to take in the big picture of your semester or social dynamics. The key is this: you're the one holding and aiming the camera. You can learn to direct and focus your attention instead of letting your mind jump around or get hijacked by stress, worries, or emotions. In DBT terms, we call this:

"Taking Hold of Your Mind."

Learning to focus your attention gives you more choice in how you respond to situations. You stop living in automatic mode and start making conscious decisions about how you study, how you interact with people, and how you take care of yourself. This isn't about being perfect or zen all the time. It's about giving yourself a chance to respond wisely instead of reacting impulsively.

Why Mindfulness Matters

Research shows that mindfulness supports mental health, emotional balance, and academic performance. Here are just a few of the ways it helps:

- **More emotional regulation** so you don't spiral when things get tough.

- **Less stress, anxiety, and depression** through awareness and intentional responses.
- **Better focus** so you can study more effectively and be present in conversations.
- **More flexible thinking** to help with problem-solving, creativity, and shifting gears.
- **Improved relationships** by being more tuned-in to yourself and others.
- **Physical benefits** like lower blood pressure and reduced muscle tension.

That said, lots of people have hang-ups or misconceptions about mindfulness. Let's clear up some myths before we dive deeper.

Mindfulness Myths

Address These Misconceptions to up Your Mindfulness Game

Use this list to check in with yourself. What beliefs about mindfulness might be getting in your way?

Myth: Mindfulness is just for monks or spiritual people.

Fact: While it has roots in Buddhist meditation, mindfulness today is a secular, evidence-based practice. It's for anyone regardless of belief system.

Myth: Mindfulness is just about relaxation.

Fact: Relaxation can be a side effect, but mindfulness is about awareness of your thoughts, emotions, and body as well as making intentional choices. In fact, sometimes it's important to be mindful of what's uncomfortable or even painful.

Myth: It's easy.

Fact: It's simple, but not always easy. Like any skill, it takes consistent practice, especially in a high-pressure situations.

Myth: It takes too much time.

Fact: You can be mindful in 30 seconds. Mindfulness can happen anywhere, anytime. Including this moment.

Myth: It's a one-and-done solution.

Fact: Mindfulness is more like going to the gym for your brain: it's ongoing and builds results over time.

Myth: You're supposed to "clear your mind."

Fact: Nope. Minds think. The goal is to notice your thoughts, not erase them, and then to choose how much attention to give them.

Myth: Mindfulness is only for people with mental health problems.

Fact: It's helpful if you're struggling, but it's also useful for anyone who wants to live a more grounded, intentional life.

Myth: You need a quiet room with candles.

Fact: You can practice mindfulness in the middle of a crowded lecture hall or while brushing your teeth. No fancy setup needed.

Myth: It's only for calm people.

Fact: Actually, if you're feeling anxious, angry, or scattered, then that's a great time to practice. Mindfulness helps you ride the waves of emotion rather than get pulled under.

The States of Mind

Your Wise Mind is the Dialectical Balance of Emotions and Reason

In DBT, we describe three different ways your mind can operate from: Emotion Mind, Reason Mind, and Wise Mind. These aren't "good" or "bad" states; they're simply different modes that shape how you think, feel, and act in any given moment.

Sometimes you lead with emotion, sometimes with reason, and sometimes, ideally, you find a balance between the two. We call that dialectical balance Wise Mind.

Learning to recognize which state you're in can help you understand your reactions and guide you toward more balance to make grounded, effective decisions from Wise Mind. Let's examine each state of mind.

Emotion Mind

Emotion Mind is when your feelings run the show. You might feel totally overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety, excitement, or anger, and act on those feelings without thinking things through. Emotion Mind might show up as:

- Lashing out at a roommate over something small.
- Ghosting a professor or skipping class after getting a bad grade.
- Hooking up impulsively when you're feeling lonely.
- Getting overly wild at a party.
- Doomscrolling or bingeing Netflix when you're anxious about your workload.
- Drinking or using to avoid uncomfortable feelings.

Emotions are powerful and important because they give us information, motivation, and connection. But when they're in the driver's seat, we often make choices we regret.

Reason Mind

Reason Mind is your logical, analytical mode. You're focused on facts, plans, and problem-solving. College is full of moments where Reason Mind helps:

- Making a schedule to balance classes, work, and studying.
- Looking up deadlines, budgeting money, or prepping for finals.

- Weighing pros and cons before dropping a class or changing your major.
- Creating a plan for staying sober or managing your mental health symptoms.

The downside of Reason Mind? You might overthink or become emotionally numb. People stuck in Reason Mind might say “I’m fine” but feel totally shut down inside. Or they might rationalize unhealthy behavior instead of confronting their emotions honestly.

Wise Mind

Wise Mind is your inner compass...the part of you that integrates emotion and reason. It’s the part that knows when you need to take a break, when to reach out, when to say no, or when to power through. Wise Mind helps you respond to life in a way that reflects your values and long-term goals, even when things are hard. You know you’re in Wise Mind when:

- You feel grounded, clear, and calm.
- You’re able to acknowledge your emotions without being overwhelmed by them.
- You let your values guide your behavior.
- You make choices that reflect both your heart and your head.
- You can say: “This is hard. *And* I have a plan to handle it.”

Checking in and Activating Wise Mind

When you’re not sure what to do, or you’re about to make a big decision, pause and ask:

- What state of mind am I in?
- What would the opposite state of mind say or do?
- What would my Wise Mind say or do?

Then listen. And act from that Wise Mind place.

States of Mind Worksheet

Dig deeper into the States of Mind

This worksheet examines the States of Mind: Emotion Mind, Reason Mind, and Wise Mind. Each has strengths and limitations. Learning to recognize which state you're in, and how to shift toward Wise Mind, can help you make better choices, improve your relationships, and reduce suffering.

Emotion Mind

Emotion Mind is when feelings take over, and your actions are driven by emotion without thinking through the consequences. Common signs include:

- Impulsive behavior
- Intense emotional reactions
- Thinking in black-and-white (e.g., "*I always fail,*" "*Nobody cares about me*")

College Life Examples:

- Skipping class after a breakup or bad grade because "what's the point?"
- Lashing out in texts during a heated argument
- Turning to alcohol, weed, or other substances to numb intense feelings
- Ghosting friends or professors because you feel ashamed or overwhelmed

Reflection:

Think of a recent time you were in Emotion Mind. What happened?

- What were you feeling?
- What did you do?
- What might Wise Mind have done instead?

Reason Mind

Reason Mind is when you're logical, focused on facts, and detached from emotions. It helps with planning and problem-solving but can ignore emotional needs. Common signs are:

- Overthinking or analyzing without checking in with how you feel
- Suppressing or minimizing your emotions
- “Pushing through” even when you’re overwhelmed or burned out

College Life Examples:

- Making a perfect study plan but ignoring signs of burnout
- Rationalizing toxic friendships or behaviors because “I’ve known them forever” or “it’s not that bad”
- Ignoring loneliness or sadness and pretending everything is fine
- Focusing on academic success while neglecting mental or emotional health

Reflection:

When have you been stuck in Reason Mind?

- How did it help?
- What did it miss?
- What would it have looked like to bring in Emotion Mind or Wise Mind?

Wise Mind

Wise Mind is the balanced part of you that honors both emotion and reason. It helps you make choices based on your deeper values, not just how you feel in the moment or what seems logical. Common signs include:

- Feeling grounded or clear
- Making decisions that align with your values and long-term goals
- Acknowledging your emotions while choosing helpful actions

College Life Examples:

- Talking yourself through test anxiety instead of skipping the exam
- Taking a mental health day and emailing your professor to stay on track
- Recognizing the urge to cope with substances and choosing to go for a walk or text a friend instead

- Deciding to seek help (therapy, support group, advisor) even when you feel scared or unsure

Reflection:

When was a time you acted from Wise Mind?

- What helped you access it?
- How did the outcome compare to acting from Emotion or Reason Mind?

Quick Check-In: What Mind Are You In Now?

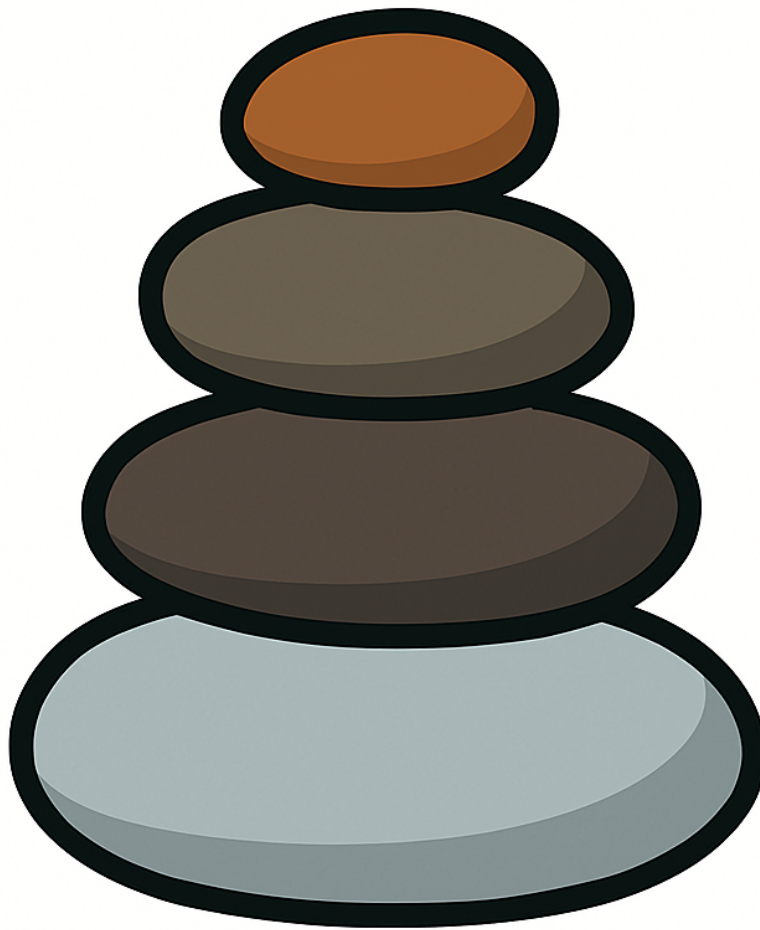
Circle one:

 Emotion Mind  Reason Mind  Wise Mind

Ask yourself:

- What am I feeling?
- What are the facts?
- What would Wise Mind say or do?

Session Three: Core Mindfulness and the Path to Wise Mind



Core Mindfulness Skills

The Path to Wise Mind

Life can be chaotic. You're juggling academics, relationships, identity, work, finances, and the pressure to "figure it all out." In the middle of all that, it's easy to get caught in reactivity: saying something you regret, checking out, spiraling into self-judgment, or acting on impulse. The good news is that you don't have to live in crisis mode.

Mindfulness gives you tools to slow down, tune in, and respond from your Wise Mind place—the balanced part of you that integrates emotion and reason. To reach this place you use the the six Core Mindfulness Skills that are broken down into three "What" skills and three "How" skills:

- The **"What"** skills are what you do to get to Wise Mind
- The **"How"** skills are how you do what you do to get to Wise Mind

Think of these six skills as the pistons in the engine that powers your way to Wise Mind. When you use them together, you'll reach that Wise Mind destination. The What and How skills break down as follows:

The "What" Skills are the actions of mindfulness. They include:

- Observe
- Describe
- Participate

While the "How" Skills are how you go about doing those actions. They include:

- One-Mindfully
- Non-Judgmentally
- Effectively

Now, let's break down and define these skills with real life examples.

Observe

Observe means stepping back and just noticing without trying to change or fix anything. It's the first step in tuning into your experience. You can observe what's happening inside (your thoughts, emotions, body sensations)

or outside (your surroundings, other people, your environment). When you observe you are just taking in information, without adding to or subtracting from the experience. Be with it as it is.

Examples:

- You're about to present in class and feel your heart pounding. Instead of pushing it away, you notice: *"racing heart, sweaty palms, shallow breath."*
- You sit in the dining hall and just notice through your senses: the sights, the sounds around you, the feeling of your body in the chair, the aromas, and the taste of your food.

"Observe" is what you doing. "One-Mindfully" is how you will do it.

Describe

Put your observations into words, avoiding opinions and commentary. Instead, be like a journalist using descriptive words or like a scientist, sticking to facts.

Examples:

- Instead of *"I'm a failure,"* try: *"I got a C on my chemistry exam, and I'm feeling disappointed and anxious."*
- Instead of *"He's ignoring me,"* try: *"My friend hasn't replied to my last text in 3 days, and I'm feeling hurt."*

This helps to separate what's happening from what your mind is saying about it.

"Describe" is what you do. "Non-Judgmentally" is how you will do it.

Participate

Participate means jumping in with your whole self...no second-guessing, no overanalyzing, just being fully in the experience. When you participate, you give the experience everything you have! This skill is about being in your life, not watching from the sidelines.

Examples:

- You're at an open mic and your anxiety is loud—but you go up and perform anyway, fully present in the moment.
- You're studying with friends and instead of zoning out or scrolling, you lean in, ask questions, and stay engaged.

"Participate" is what you do. "Effectively" is how you will do it.

One-Mindfully

This means being fully present with whatever you're observing and/or doing...and coming back when your mind drifts or when a distraction arises. To be one-mindful means you begin again, over and over. Distractions are the weights that build the mindfulness muscles, so don't judge them. Instead, simply re-focus. Again. And Again.

Examples:

- You're writing a paper. Instead of jumping between emails, TikTok, and Spotify lyrics, you close the extra tabs and just write.
- You're talking to a friend. You silence your phone and focus fully on what they're saying, not what you'll say next.

"One-Mindfully" is how you "Observe".

Non-Judgmentally

This means noticing your experience without labeling it as right, wrong, stupid, weak, or any other judgement. Judgments fuel shame, conflict, and disconnection, and they rarely consider the whole picture. What appears to be pleasure might be suffering in disguise, and what you think is a huge problem might actually be an opportunity. In short, judgments create needless suffering. When you notice a judgement, treat it as a distraction, and simply let it go like a weather pattern.

Examples:

- You're crying after class and think, *"I'm so dramatic."* Instead, you say: *"I'm feeling overwhelmed, and my body's releasing emotion. That's okay."*
- You miss a deadline and start spiraling into *"I suck."* Non-judgmentally, you reframe: *"I missed the deadline. I feel anxious. I'll talk to the professor."*

"Non-judgementally" is how you "Describe".

Effectively

Being effective means responding to life in a way that helps you reach your goals, even if your emotions are pulling you in another direction. It's about playing the hand you're dealt with wisdom and skill, and not just reacting based on mood, pride, or old patterns. In short, acting effectively means getting out of your own way and doing what works!

Examples:

- You want to skip class because you're tired and stressed. Instead, you remind yourself: "*Showing up today will reduce my anxiety later.*" So you go.
- You feel disrespected by a roommate and want to yell. Instead, you pause, breathe, and use DEAR MAN to ask for what you need.

"Effectively" is how you "Participate"

The more you Observe, Describe, and Participate, One-Mindfully, Non-Judgmentally, and Effectively, the more you build your ability to respond from Wise Mind... even when life gets chaotic. Here's a quick map to remember it:

What You're Doing	How You're Doing It
Observe	→ One-Mindfully
Describe	→ Non-Judgmentally
Participate	→ Effectively

A Day in the Life: Practicing Mindfulness

See How a Student Works Mindfulness Into The Day

Meet Jaden.

They're a second-year college student juggling a full course load, a part-time job at the campus coffee shop, and the usual swirl of friendships, FOMO, and figuring life out. They've recently started a DBT skills program because their anxiety, procrastination, and burnout were starting to tank their academics and their mental health.

Here's what mindfulness looks like in Jaden's real life.

7:30 AM – Waking Up (Emotion Mind vs Wise Mind)

Jaden's alarm goes off. It's a chilly, overcast Tuesday. Their first thought?

"Ugh. I can't. I'll skip my 9 a.m. just this once."

That's **Emotion Mind** talking with anxiety, dread, and low motivation taking over. Jaden *notices* that they're in Emotion Mind and doesn't shame themselves for it.

They take a breath, and use the skill of **Observe** to notice their body, the heaviness in their chest, and the loop of thoughts in their head.

Then they **Describe** the situation nonjudgmentally:

"I feel tired. My bed is warm. I'm having the thought that I can't do today. I don't have to act on that thought."

They pause and ask:

"What would Wise Mind do?"

Wise Mind answers: *"Get up slowly. Wash your face. Just start."*

So Jaden gets up. Not because they feel like it, but because they're practicing **Effectiveness**.

8:00 AM – Social Media Spiral (One-Mindfully + Setting Limits)

After breakfast, Jaden opens Instagram “just for a minute.” Suddenly it’s 8:32, and class is in 28 minutes. They’ve been comparing themselves to friends who seem more productive, fit, and happy.

Emotion Mind: *“Everyone else is ahead. You’re a mess.”*

But this time, Jaden **Observes** how they feel: tight shoulders, racing thoughts, shame.

They pause and then **Describe** their experience:

“I got pulled into scrolling. I’m feeling anxious. This isn’t helping.”

Instead of spiraling further, they set the phone down and **One-Mindfully** focus only on packing their backpack. No multitasking. No shaming. Just movement and breath.

9:00 AM – In Class (Participate + Nonjudgmentally)

Jaden arrives on time. The professor jumps right into a discussion on a reading Jaden barely skimmed.

They feel embarrassment creep in with their shoulders tense and heart beating faster.

Emotion Mind: *“I’m so behind. Everyone’s smarter than me.”*

Reason Mind: *“Actually, I’ve been to every class, and I’m doing okay.”*

Jaden finds **Wise Mind** by **Observing** their thoughts and emotions, and **Describing** them silently:

“I’m uncomfortable. That doesn’t mean I don’t belong.”

They take a breath, let go of self-judgment, and **Participate** by jotting down a question and listening intently.

They aren’t perfect, but they are *present*.

12:00 PM – Lunch with Friends (Mindfulness in Relationships)

At lunch, Jaden’s friends are gossiping about a classmate who bombed a presentation. Part of Jaden wants to join in to feel included.

But they check in with their **Wise Mind**:

"Does this align with how I want to show up?"

They **Observe** the pressure to join in, **Describe** the conflict they feel, and decide to **Participate Effectively** by changing the subject in a kind way.

"Hey, speaking of presentations, when's your history one due?"

It's a subtle shift, but one that feels grounded. Jaden feels more aligned with their values and less regretful later.

3:00 PM – Studying (One-Mindfully + Effectively)

Back in their dorm, Jaden has a paper to write. But their brain is all over the place. They want to watch YouTube. Their group chat is blowing up. They remember something cringey they said yesterday.

Instead of powering through or giving up, Jaden sets a timer for 25 minutes, silences their phone, and commits to writing **One-Mindfully**.

When distractions come, they **Observe** them and gently return to the task.

"I'm thinking about TikTok. I'm coming back to my paper now."

They repeat this about 17 times. That's okay.

Mindfulness isn't staying focused; it's returning to focus. Over and over again.

5:00 PM – A Wave of Sadness (Emotion Mind, Grounded)

Out of nowhere, a heavy wave of sadness hits. No clear trigger. Just a foggy sense of *"What's the point?"*

Jaden doesn't try to push it away.

They sit on the edge of their bed and do a **Five-Sense Check-In**:

- **See:** The soft light through the window
- **Hear:** The hum of the heater
- **Touch:** Their sweatshirt sleeve
- **Smell:** A candle burning
- **Taste:** The mint gum in their mouth

They ride the wave by not resisting, not judging. Just **Being With**.

Eventually, the sadness passes like a storm cloud. Not gone, but softer.

10:00 PM – Reflecting (Wise Mind + Gratitude)

Jaden journals before bed...just a few lines.

"Today wasn't easy. I wanted to skip class, snap at my friends, and doom scroll. I used mindfulness instead. Not perfectly, but I'm proud I tried."

They end with one thing they're grateful for:

"That I didn't let a hard moment become a hard day."

As they turn out the light, they smile, not because the day was perfect, but because they showed up for it, skillfully.

Closing Thoughts

Jaden didn't float through the day in perfect Zen. They felt anxious, distracted, irritated, and low, just like most college students do at times.

But instead of reacting automatically, they:

- Noticed their state of mind
- Practiced the Core Mindfulness Skills
- Acted from **Wise Mind** as often as they could

And that changed everything.

Your Mindful Day: Practicing Mindfulness

Create a Mindful Day for Yourself

This exercise helps you visualize how you might use mindfulness and DBT skills throughout a typical college day.

Step 1: Sketch Your Day

Think about a *typical* day and list 5–7 moments that usually happen.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Step 2: Check Your State of Mind

For each moment, reflect on what **State of Mind** you're typically in:

- Emotion Mind
- Reason Mind
- Wise Mind

Write the state and briefly describe your usual reaction.

Step 3: Add a Mindfulness Skill

Now choose one or more **Core Mindfulness Skills** to apply to each moment, and describe how that skill could help you respond differently.

Moment #1:

- State of Mind:
- Mindfulness Skill(s):
- What would you do differently?

Moment #2:

- State of Mind:
- Mindfulness Skill(s):
- What would you do differently?

Moment #3:

- State of Mind:
- Mindfulness Skill(s):
- What would you do differently?

Moment #4:

- State of Mind:
- Mindfulness Skill(s):
- What would you do differently?

Moment #5

- State of Mind:
- Mindfulness Skill(s):
- What would you do differently?

Step 4: Wise Mind Reflection

Write a short reflection from Wise Mind using this prompt: "Even though my day wasn't perfect, I used mindfulness to...":

Mindfulness Challenge Worksheet

Accept the Challenge to Build Your Mindfulness Skills

This worksheet helps you apply mindfulness skills to real-life challenges you may face. Complete this worksheet and be prepared to discuss what you discover with your group.

Step 1: Identify Your Challenge

You may check one or more; just remember to do one at a time.

- ☐ Academic Overwhelm / Perfectionism
- ☐ Social Anxiety
- ☐ Breakups / Relationship Pain
- ☐ Fear of Failure
- ☐ Substance Use as Coping
- ☐ Procrastination
- ☐ Body Image Struggles
- ☐ Loneliness / Disconnection
- ☐ Family Pressure / Expectations
- ☐ Imposter Syndrome
- ☐ Sleep Difficulties / Insomnia
- ☐ Grief / Loss
- ☐ Homesickness
- ☐ Friendship Conflict / Roommate Issues
- ☐ Identity Struggles / Not Feeling Seen

Step 2: Reflect Mindfully

Use these prompts for personal journaling or group sharing. You may write, think quietly, or share during group.

- Which challenge are you focusing on today?
- What thoughts, emotions, or urges come up when you think about it?
- What does your inner critic or judgmental mind say?

- How could Core Mindfulness skills and Wise Mind help you respond instead of react?
- What Wise Mind action(s) could you take this week?

Step 3: Track the Intensity

On a scale of 0–10, rate the intensity of this challenge before and after applying mindfulness:

0 = Not intense at all
5 = Moderately intense
10 = Extremely intense

- Before mindfulness practice: _____ / 10
- After mindfulness practice: _____ / 10

Step 4: Wise Mind Reflection

- What was it like to slow down and name your challenge?
- Did anything shift for you during the mindfulness reflection?
- How can the group support you in using Wise Mind this week?

Core Mindfulness Practice Exercises

These Short Exercises Help You Build Each of the Six Core Mindfulness Skills

Observe

Exercise: Sit in silence for 2 minutes.

Notice your breath, sounds, and body sensations without trying to change anything. Just observe.

Describe

Exercise: Watch people walking across campus for 5 minutes.

Describe what you see using only factual language (e.g., “Person in a green jacket typing on phone”). No opinions or assumptions.

Participate

Exercise: Choose one activity today—like brushing your teeth, playing music, or gaming—and give it 100% of your attention. Let yourself be fully in it.

One-Mindfully

Exercise: Pick a routine task (e.g., walking, eating, doing dishes). Do it with full attention. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back.

Non-Judgmentally

Exercise: Write down five thoughts or emotions from today. Practice describing them without labeling them as “good” or “bad.”

Effectively

Exercise: Think of one task you’ve been avoiding.

Ask yourself: “What would move me toward my goals?” Then do that—even if it’s hard.

Mindfulness Exercises for Fun and Enjoyment

Mindfulness Skills Can be Fun!

- **Campus Safari** – Find 5 things on campus you’ve never noticed before.
- **Savor the Sip** – Slowly drink your favorite beverage, paying full attention to flavor and temperature.
- **One-Song Dance Break** – Dance to one song with full body awareness.
- **Color Hunt** – Choose a color and find 10 matching items.
- **Mindful Music Listening** – Choose one song and notice every layer of sound.
- **Five-Sense Check-In** – What can you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste right now?
- **Slow Motion Selfie** – Take a selfie slowly, noticing lighting, expression, and your reaction.
- **Cloud Watching** – Lie on your back and watch clouds without analyzing.
- **Mini Nature Sit** – Sit under a tree or in a green space for 5 minutes, just observing.
- **Slow Snack Attack** – Eat one bite of something slowly, noticing texture and flavor.
- **One Beautiful Thing Walk** – Walk with the goal of finding one beautiful detail.
- **Mirror Breathing** – Look in the mirror and simply breathe with yourself.
- **Photo Mindfulness** – Take a photo of something ordinary that feels meaningful.
- **Mindful Coloring/Doodling** – Color or doodle for 10 minutes with no end goal.
- **Main Character Walk** – Walk like you're in a movie. Notice how it changes your posture and attention.
- **Hand Awareness Game** – Watch what your hands are doing for 5 minutes.
- **One-Minute Eye Contact** – Make silent eye contact with someone you trust. Be fully present.

- **Mindful Shower** – Notice water, temperature, texture, and scent while you bathe.
- **Campus Sound Map** – Sit in a public space and track all the sounds you hear.
- **Gratitude Snapshot** – Take a daily photo of something you're grateful for.
- **Mindful Social Scroll** – Scroll social media slowly. Observe your emotional responses without judgment.
- **Plant Check-In** – Water or tend to a plant, focusing only on the task.
- **Elevator Silence** – Stand quietly in an elevator and observe thoughts and sensations.
- **Bag Inventory Pause** – Go through your backpack slowly and reflect on each item.
- **Power Pose Breathing** – Stand strong, breathe deeply, and observe how your body feels.
- **Public Art Pause** – Stand in front of a mural or sculpture and observe for 2–3 minutes.
- **Sensory Scavenger Hunt** – Find something soft, textured, bright, scented, and loved.
- **Gum Meditation** – Chew a piece of gum or candy very slowly.
- **Laptop Login Pause** – Breathe mindfully for 10 seconds before opening your computer.
- **Playlist Grounding** – Create a playlist that calms or centers you.
- **Library Soundscape** – Sit in silence and list all background sounds you hear.
- **Chill and Chew** – Choose a favorite food and eat slowly with full awareness.
- **Nature Touchpoint** – Touch a leaf, rock, or patch of grass and focus on texture.
- **Mindful Walk Between Classes** – Don't rush. Notice your steps, breath, and surroundings.
- **Ceiling Gaze Reset** – Lie down and just stare at the ceiling for 2 minutes without agenda.
- **Notebook Gratitude List** – Write 3 things you're grateful for, slowly and thoughtfully.

- **Room Reset Ritual** – Tidy or rearrange one area of your room slowly and intentionally.
- **Window Watch** – Sit by a window and observe people, weather, or light.
- **Mindful High-Five** – Share a high-five and really feel it land.
- **Stillness Challenge** – Sit in silence for 60 seconds, noticing thoughts without following them.

Mindfulness Exercises for Specific Challenges 1

Practice Mindfulness in Response to These Common Challenges

Challenge: Academic Overwhelm

- **Exercise:** *Homework Reset Button:* Close your laptop, breathe 3 times, and choose one next step.
- **Why it works:** One-mindfully reduces paralysis by shifting from overwhelm to single-task focus (One-Mindfully).

Challenge: Test Anxiety

- **Exercise:** *Box Breathing:* Inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4. Repeat.
- **Why it works:** Slows physiological stress response and centers attention on the present moment.

Challenge: Procrastination

- **Exercise:** *Set a Timer, Do One Thing:* Work for 5 minutes mindfully on one task.
- **Why it works:** Engaging in the present interrupts avoidance and builds momentum.

Challenge: Social Anxiety

- **Exercise:** *Wise Mind Check-In Before Social Events:* Ask yourself what State of Mind you're in. Emotion Mind? Reason Mind? What does Wise Mind say?
- **Why it works:** Encourages balanced, values-based choices instead of fear-based avoidance.

Challenge: Rumination/Overthinking

- **Exercise:** *Leaves on a Stream Visualization:* Picture thoughts floating by on leaves in a stream.
- **Why it works:** Builds cognitive defusion and prevents getting "hooked" by thoughts.

Challenge: Self-Criticism/Shame

- **Exercise:** *Nonjudgmental Mirror Practice:* Look at yourself and describe only what you see.
- **Why it works:** Reduces harsh inner dialogue and builds self-compassion.

Challenge: Feeling Stuck/Numb

- **Exercise:** *Cold Object Wake-Up:* Hold a cold object, like a can of soda, and notice the sensation as it slowly warms in your hand.
- **Why it works:** Mindful sensory input activates awareness and embodiment.

Challenge: Intense Emotions

- **Exercise:** *Name it to Tame it:* Sit quietly and name what emotion you're feeling without analyzing.
- **Why it works:** Labeling emotions activates the prefrontal cortex and reduces emotional overwhelm.

Challenge: Loneliness

- **Exercise:** *Compassionate Letter to Self:* Write yourself a kind, mindful note as if to a friend.
- **Why it works:** Combats isolation by activating inner care and mindful self-connection.

Challenge: Disconnection from Body

- **Exercise:** *Body Scan Meditation (5 min):* Notice each body part in sequence, without judgment.
- **Why it works:** Anchors attention in the body, increasing awareness of what is.

Challenge: Sleep Difficulties

- **Exercise:** *Bedtime Breathing + Gratitude:* Breathe slowly and name 3 small wins from your day.
- **Why it works:** Combines nervous system calming with a positive cognitive focus.

Challenge: Conflict with Roommates/Friends

- **Exercise:** *3-Breath Pause Before Speaking:* Inhale, exhale, pause. Then respond.
- **Why it works:** Creates space for wise, skillful communication.

Challenge: Imposter Syndrome

- **Exercise:** *Fact vs. Feeling List:* Mindfully write facts about your achievements vs. anxious thoughts.
- **Why it works:** Engages Reason Mind and grounds self-perception in truth.

Challenge: Emotional Numbing

- **Exercise:** *Texture Awareness:* Rub fabric or an object between your fingers and describe it.
- **Why it works:** Re-engages sensory awareness gently and mindfully.

Challenge: Identity Invalidation

- **Exercise:** *Affirmation Anchoring:* Choose a phrase like “I know who I am.” Repeat with your breath.
- **Why it works:** Strengthens self-connection and centers Wise Mind in the face of erasure.

Challenge: Feeling Trapped or Panicked

- **Exercise:** *Name 5 Anchoring Objects:* Look around and name 5 visible things slowly.
- **Why it works:** Disrupts panic by engaging sensory detail and external grounding.

Challenge: Depression / Low Motivation

- **Exercise:** *Get Up and Walk 10 Steps Mindfully:* Focus on each step and breath.
- **Why it works:** Action + attention activates body and mind without pressure to “fix” anything.

Challenge: Anger or Resentment

- **Exercise:** *Write Then Rip:* Write your angry thoughts out without censoring, then mindfully tear up the paper.
- **Why it works:** Allows expression and release in a contained, mindful way.

Challenge: Body Image Distress

- **Exercise:** *Thank Your Body for One Thing Today:* Say it aloud or write it.
- **Why it works:** Shifts attention to gratitude and embodied functionality.

Challenge: Fear of the Future

- **Exercise:** *Present Moment Inventory:* List what is true, right now, in this moment.
- **Why it works:** Anchors the mind in the only place it has control...now.

Mindfulness Vignettes for Specific Challenges 2

Note the mindfulness used in response to these common challenges

For each category below, read the vignettes and discuss the mindfulness skills and strategies each person used to address their challenge and get back on track.

Also note the mindfulness tips for under each category and give them a try!

Academic Overload & Procrastination

The Struggle: You're carrying so much...assignments, work, relationships, family. Sometimes it feels like you can't even *breathe*, and it's hard to know where to even start.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness slows things down so you can take stock of what's really happening, what your immediate priorities are, and what actually needs your energy right now.

- Maya stares at her overdue paper. Her mind spirals: "*I'll never catch up.*" Instead of panicking, she pauses: *tight chest, racing heart, shame*. She names it, then types just the title. One step. **What skills were used?**
- Sam feels frozen by his to-do list. He sets a timer for 10 minutes, picks one task, and sticks to it...*just this, right now*. **What skills were used?**
- Isabel's head spins with unread emails and unfinished assignments. She places both hands on her desk, takes a breath, and says, "*Just this.*" Then opens the first email. **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- Use the **5-Minute Rule** to get started when you're feeling overwhelmed, stuck, or resistant to starting something and commit to doing it for just five minutes.
- Tell yourself you don't have to finish it or even make a lot of progress. **Just begin.**
- As you start, pause and notice what you're feeling. Name the emotion without trying to push it away or judge it. For example, you might say to yourself, "*I'm feeling dread,*" or "*I feel anxious and unmotivated.*" **Simply identifying your emotion helps reduce its intensity and brings you into the present moment.**
- Once you've named the feeling, gently ask yourself: "*What's the most effective next step I can take right now?*" **Not the perfect step. Not**

the whole plan. Just the next helpful move...like opening your laptop, gathering your materials, or writing one sentence.

- Often, **the hardest part is just getting started**. The 5-Minute Rule lowers the pressure and creates momentum, helping you move from avoidance to action with self-awareness and compassion.
- Remember, **mindfulness interrupts the avoidance cycle**. It helps you be with discomfort (like overwhelm or fear of failure) without letting it drive your choices.

Handling Perfectionism

The Struggle: You feel like everything has to be *just right*. You edit papers endlessly, re-read every message, and feel crushed by anything less than perfect.

How Mindfulness Helps: Perfectionism often stems from fear and self-judgment. Mindfulness creates space to observe those thoughts non-judgmentally, and to act effectively instead of obsessively.

- Leo keeps editing his lab report for hours. He notices his fatigue and says, *"Done is better than perfect."* He clicks submit and rests. **What skills were used?**
- Sally cannot get beyond the first sentence on her paper because she feels it has...to...be...PERFECT! Suddenly, she catches herself and decides to begin writing without attachment to what comes out. **What skills were used?**
- Johnny misses deadlines because he cannot let go of finished work. He decides to talk with his professors and come up with a plan to submit completed work as is, reminding himself that he can let go of the struggle when it's in. **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- Ask, *"Is this helping me meet my values, or is it fear talking?"*
- Practice **nonjudgmental describing**: *"This paragraph is clear and communicates the idea."* (Not: *"It's bad"* or *"It's not enough."*)
- Set time limits: *"I'll work on this for 30 minutes, then submit."*

Using Social Media Mindfully & Setting Limits

The Struggle: Endless scrolling. Comparing yourself to everyone's highlight reel. Feeling more anxious, drained, or distracted after you log off than before you got on.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness helps you recognize your *internal experience* while using social media...noticing when it feels enjoyable, when it shifts into stress or comparison, and when it's time to stop.

- Jess gets into endless scrolling, losing hours of her day with nothing to show for it but missed deadlines and increased stress. She decides to be more aware of this habit and set a timer when she scrolls. **What skills were used?**
- Angie compares herself to everyone's highlight reels, feeling less worthy with each view. She decides to take a break from social media and seek out in-person connections instead. **What skills were used?**
- Brad feels more drained and distracted after logging off his electronics than before you got on. He decides to go to the rec center whenever he gets tempted to log on. **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- **Before opening an app**, pause and ask, "*Why am I opening this right now?*"
- **Check in mid-scroll:** "*Am I feeling better or worse than when I started?*"
- Try a "**mindful scroll**" session: Scroll for 3 minutes *slowly* and notice every emotion, comparison, or bodily sensation without reacting.
- Set a **daily time cap** and stick to it. Use mindfulness to *notice urges* when you hit your limit, and simply ride them out.

Social Anxiety, Identity & Visibility

The Struggle: You're physically with people, but mentally elsewhere. You're pre-occupied by how you think others see you, by your perceived shortcomings, or by your own questions about your identity. Sometimes you feel invisible.

How Mindfulness Helps: Being present makes your relationships deeper, safer, and more authentic. It also helps you clarify your own values and identity, and how to navigate conflicts that might arise with family, culture, or old belief systems.

- Jared sits outside a student org meeting thinking, "*They'll think I'm weird.*" He walks in anyway, focusing on being present, not perfect. **What skills were used?**
- Amber freezes in class, heart pounding. She breathes, says one sentence aloud, and afterward feels pride and not panic. **What skills were used?**

- Jules feels invisible in a class where no one shares their background. They pause and affirm, "*My story matters. I matter.*" **What skills were used?**
- Andre is misgendered again. Instead of spiraling, he breathes and reminds himself, "*I know who I am.*" **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- In moments of doubt or fear, anchor into your body, your breath, or a mantra: "*I deserve to be here.*" Participation doesn't mean perfection; it means presence.
- Allow mindfulness to anchor you to your truth, allowing you to stay grounded when others don't understand, support, or affirm who you are.
- Before engaging with family, set a mindful intention: "I'll be clear. I'll be kind to myself. I don't need to change anyone today."

Emotional Pain, Breakups & Grief

The Struggle: Breakups. Disappointment. Loneliness. When you're hurting, the urge is to numb, avoid, or spiral.

How Mindfulness Helps: It teaches you to be with your emotions, not drown in them or run from them. You can learn to observe pain without being consumed by it.

- Alina replays the breakup on loop. She interrupts with Radical Acceptance: "*It ended. I didn't want it to, but it did.*" Her body softens. **What skills were used?**
- Chris sees a photo of his ex with someone new. He feels the punch of grief and journals through it, letting the wave pass. **What skills were used?**
- Bridget cries after calling home. Instead of avoiding the sadness, she lights a candle and writes about what she misses, and what she's learning to value here. **What skills were used?**
- Kai walks across campus feeling invisible. He tunes into the breeze, rustling leaves, distant laughter and feels just a little more connected. **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tip: Use the RAIN practice:

- **R**ecognize what you're feeling
- **A**llow it without pushing it away
- **I**nvestigate gently
- **N**urture yourself with kindness

Urges, Avoidance & Ineffective Coping

The Struggle: Strong emotions trigger urges to escape, numb, or criticize ourselves. These reactions feel automatic and hard to resist in the moment.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness creates space to notice urges without acting on them. It helps us respond wisely instead of reacting on autopilot.

- Taylor wants to smoke after a tough day. She sets a timer and watches the craving rise, peak, and fade. Then she takes a walk instead. **What skills were used?**
- Devon feels a wave of rage and the urge to drink. He names the emotion, "*rage*", then texts a friend, and takes a cold shower. The urge passes. **What skills were used?**
- Naomi bombs an interview and immediately calls herself "*stupid*." She catches the thought, breathes, and reframes: "*I didn't do my best, and I still learned something.*" **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- **Treat urges like weather patterns. They come and go.** Observe them without judgment and choose actions aligned with your values and not your emotions.
- Accept urges with our judgment to decrease their intensity.
- Tell yourself, "*What goes up, must come down,*" and simply watch as the urge eventually subsides.
- Choose to turn your mindful attention to a healthy distraction or positive behavior.

Time Management, Focus & Being Present

The Struggle: You feel constantly behind or overwhelmed, unsure how to prioritize or start. Time becomes a stressor in itself, interfering with your ability to be focused and present.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness anchors you in the present task and helps you respond instead of react. It turns "time" from a vague pressure into a *tool* you can use wisely.

- Eli can't sleep before an exam. Instead of spiraling, he focuses on his breath: *in... out... in... out*. His body calms. **What skills were used?**
- Rae scrolls in bed at 2am. She places the phone down, feels the weight of the blanket, and listens to the hum of the room. Her mind slows. **What skills were used?**

- Tim is physically in class, but mentally somewhere else. When he notices internal distractions or drifting, he re-focuses again, and again. **What skills were used?**
- Maria eats lunch alone. She slows down and notices every bite...flavor, texture, warmth. It feels peaceful and not lonely. **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tip:

- Wherever you are, try a **5-senses check-in**: *What do I see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Feel?* You're always somewhere. Let yourself fully arrive.
- Focus on one task at a time with no switching, no multitasking.
- After every class or task, pause and ask, "*What's my next most effective step?*"
- If distracted, don't judge. Just return. Every return is a rep for your focus.

Communication, Conflict, & Relationships

The Struggle: Strong emotions and thoughts can hijack our reactions and relationships. It's tempting to lash out, withdraw, or spiral into loneliness or resentment.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness slows us down and brings awareness to what we feel and need. It helps us act with intention, connect openly, and care for ourselves skillfully.

- Zane is angry at his roommate. He breathes before speaking, choosing words from clarity and not rage. **What skills were used?**
- Mei stewes over a comment from a friend. She waits, then initiates a kind, direct conversation. They talk it out. **What skills were used?**
- Ali misses home. She grounds herself using her five senses with tea, a soft blanket, and campus sounds. She reminds herself, "*I can miss home and still belong here.*" **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- Before speaking in conflict, ask: "*What is my goal?*" Respond from Wise Mind, not Emotion Mind. **Mindful communication strengthens every relationship, starting with the one you have with yourself.**
- During a convo, **practice mindful listening**: No phone, no multitasking, just listening.
- When relationships are painful, place a hand on your chest and **breathe into emotional pain**. Say: "*This hurts. I can feel it and still be okay.*"

Dating, Boundaries & Self-Respect

The Struggle: Dating in college can be thrilling and also confusing, overwhelming, or messy. You might find yourself merging too quickly, ignoring red flags, or saying yes when you mean no.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness lets you pause, check in with yourself, and recognize what's real *right now*. It gives you space to notice your values, your emotional state, and your boundaries before acting or reacting.

- Before responding to a late-night text, Jules pauses: "*What does Wise Mind say?*" **What skills were used?**
- On a date, Jordan notices tension in her stomach when her date pressures her to be intimate. She's smiling on the outside, yet she feels uncomfortable on the inside. She listens to that signal and decides to end the date and go home. **What skills were used?**
- Talia checks in with herself before saying yes: "*Am I doing this because I want to, or because I feel I have to?*" **What skills were used?**

Mindful Tips:

- Practice checking in with your body during interactions. Your gut, your breath, your posture...they all carry wisdom. Notice what they're saying before you act.
- Before saying yes to a hangout, hookup, or text back, ask: "What does Wise Mind say?"
- During dates or convos, do a body scan: What is my body telling me about how I feel with this person?

Illness, Chronic Pain & Invisible Struggles

The Struggle: Being sick or living with a chronic condition while managing school, friendships, and mental health can feel lonely, frustrating, or invisible.

How Mindfulness Helps: Mindfulness doesn't cure pain, but it can ease suffering by reducing resistance, self-judgment, and fear. It brings attention back to *what is*, moment by moment.

- Jordan lives with chronic pain while juggling school. When pain flares, he names it like weather, "*Angry like a storm cloud.*" He says to himself: "*This is how it feels right now. It won't always feel this way.*" Then he offers quiet gratitude: "*I can quiet my mind in the storm. I'm still here.*"

Mindful Tip:

- Don't fight the pain...be with it, describe it, breathe through it. Suffering decreases when resistance softens.
- Say to yourself: *"This is how it feels right now. It won't feel this way forever."*
- Practice gentle gratitude for what your body is doing: *"My breath still works. My brain is learning."*

Closing Thoughts

Remember, you don't have to feel "zen" to be mindful. You just have to notice what's real, stay present with it, and choose the next best step.

Mindfulness isn't about escaping your experience. It's about arriving inside it with clarity, compassion, and courage.

Session Four: Distress Tolerance



Intro to Distress Tolerance

Surviving the Moment Without Making It Worse

College can feel overwhelming with deadlines, breakups, social drama, money stress, identity questions, burnout...and somehow you're supposed to keep showing up for class?

When life feels like it's too much, it's normal to want relief fast. But sometimes the ways we try to cope (scrolling for hours, drinking, ghosting people, bingeing, exploding, shutting down) can end up making things worse. Much worse.

So why do we these ineffective "coping" behaviors? It's because even dysfunctional and harmful behaviors have a brief payoff like distracting from pain or providing a temporary high feeling or sense of relief. Unfortunately, the temporary gain is not worth the long-term pain! That's why we have Distress Tolerance.

Why Distress Tolerance Matters

Distress Tolerance is the answer to the unhealthy behaviors we resort to when under too much stress or when in crisis. When we learn these new skills to manage life when it gets hard we can:

- Get through intense emotional moments
- Avoid destructive behaviors
- Manage crisis situations with more control
- Stay grounded until the storm passes
- And even thrive under stress!

That said, these skills aren't magic fixes. They won't erase pain, yet they *will* help you ride out tough waves without crashing your whole life. And the great news is that most Distress Tolerance skills are enjoyable to practice.

The Two Paths of Distress Tolerance

There are **two categories** of distress tolerance skills:

1. Crisis Survival Skills

These skills help you make it through moments when you're just trying to survive without hurting yourself, anyone else, or making the situation worse. Think of these skills as emotional life vests.

2. Reality Acceptance Skills

These skills help you stop fighting things you can't change and make peace with the present moment even if you hate it. That doesn't mean giving up. It means softening your suffering so you can use your energy to move forward.

Guidelines for Using Distress Tolerance Skills

Distress Tolerance is designed to get you through the tough times; it's not used to engage in avoidance when you can solve the problems that cause you distress. That's why we follow these guidelines:

DO use these skills when:

- You're in an emotional crisis
- You feel overwhelmed or out of control
- You need to get through something intense without doing damage

DON'T use these skills to:

- Avoid problems that could be solved
- Escape from responsibilities long-term
- Numb or ignore your feelings forever

Think of these skills as **temporary support** and not permanent solutions. They help you *get through it* so you can *deal with it* when you're ready and in Wise Mind.

Closing Thoughts

As with all the skills, it is important to practice the Distress Tolerance skills pro-actively and when you're not in distress so they're at the ready when you need them. Practice doesn't make perfect; it does make you prepared!

Wise Mind ACCEPTS

When in crisis, engage in healthy distractions to get a break

ACCEPTS is a set of skills to distract yourself in healthy ways when you're in crisis and emotionally overwhelmed. Remember this acronym to call up these seven skills.

A – Activities (see the Activities List)

Do something that *occupies your body or mind*. This isn't running from your feelings. Rather, it's giving your nervous system a break from distress. Importantly, you can't wait to feel better or be motivated to do activities. Instead, you have to do the behavior first, and then feeling better and more motivated follows.

Examples:

- Go for a walk or do a quick workout.
- Do your laundry, dishes, or clean your room.
- Play a game, doodle, cook, or re-watch a comfort show.
- Go hang out with a friend, or study at the library.

List 3 activities you could do when you feel overwhelmed:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

C – Contributing

Do something for someone else to shift your focus outward. Helping others can build your own sense of purpose and calm, and it feels good! Take a break from yourself.

Examples:

- Send a kind message to a friend.
- Volunteer, tutor, or support an important cause.
- Help your roommate out with something.
- Listen to and validate a peer.

How can you contribute today?

C – Comparisons

Compare your situation to a time when things were worse or to how others might be struggling in their own way. It can help put your pain in context. One caveat: This skill is used to gain perspective, not to invalidate your own distress. In other words, you can be hurting *and* recognize that others struggle too.

Examples:

- "I've survived worse than this."
- "Other students are struggling too—I'm not alone."
- "I'm lucky that I have support. Not everyone does."
- "A year ago this would have put me in the hospital."

Name one helpful comparison you could use in tough moments:

E – Emotions

Do something that creates a *different* emotion than what you're feeling. Remember that what we feel is largely the result of the behaviors we do.

Examples:

- If you're sad, watch a funny video.
- If you're angry, listen to calming music.
- If you're hopeless, dance it out to something loud.
- If you're unmotivated, go for a brisk walk.

List 2 things that help you shift emotions:

P – Pushing Away

Mentally set the problem aside *for now*. Do remember that this is a short-term strategy...work on solving your problem at the earliest opportunity.

Examples:

- Tell yourself: "I'm putting this in a box. I'll come back to it when I'm ready."
- Visualize locking the problem away for a while.
- Journal on the issue and close the notebook.

- Tell yourself, “This is a tomorrow problem.”

What’s something you could “push away” for a few hours today?

T – Thoughts

Distract your brain with something mentally engaging. Because we can’t think about two things at once, distracting with thoughts pushes your depression, anxiety, and other distressing thoughts to the back-burner.

Examples:

- Try to recite the alphabet backwards.
- Do a word puzzle or trivia quiz.
- Plan a trip in your head or list every city you've been to.
- Read an engaging book or get into a discussion on an interesting topic.

What are your favorite “thought” distractions?

S – Sensations

Use intense physical sensations to jolt you out of emotional spirals. Sensations are about revving up as opposed to Self-Soothe (discussed later) which are about calming down.

Examples:

- Take a cold or hot shower.
- Eat something sour, spicy, or crunchy.
- Go for a run or do another intense exercise.
- Listen to loud music and sing along or dance.

What physical sensations help you shift your emotional state?

Wellness & Coping Activities

Find joy, Manage Stress, Boost Focus, and Build Resilience

Try checking one off at least one activity from each category this week.

Creative & Expressive

- ☐ Paint or draw something abstract
- ☐ Try digital art or design a meme
- ☐ Make a vision board or mood board
- ☐ Start a bullet journal or art journal
- ☐ Learn calligraphy or hand lettering
- ☐ Write a poem or short story
- ☐ Start a personal blog or vlog
- ☐ Decorate your dorm or apartment
- ☐ Do a DIY or craft project
- ☐ Try a photography challenge
- ☐ Create a playlist that fits your current mood
- ☐ Record a voice memo to your future self
- ☐ Design your dream class or major
- ☐ Write a letter to someone (or yourself)
- ☐ Make a gratitude list with illustrations
- ☐ Learn a TikTok dance
- ☐ Make a meme about your week
- ☐ Try blackout poetry from an old textbook
- ☐ Crochet, knit, or embroider something simple
- ☐ Collage with old magazines or flyers

Relaxation & Self-Soothing

- ☐ Take a warm shower with music
- ☐ Do deep breathing for 3–5 minutes
- ☐ Listen to nature sounds or ambient noise
- ☐ Drink tea or hot chocolate slowly and mindfully
- ☐ Wrap up in a blanket and stare out the window
- ☐ Try progressive muscle relaxation
- ☐ Stretch your body gently
- ☐ Use a face mask or scented lotion
- ☐ Watch clouds, stars, or a sunset
- ☐ Color a mandala or do mindful coloring

- ☐ Look through old photos or videos
- ☐ Watch a comfort movie or nostalgic show
- ☐ Pet an animal or watch pet videos
- ☐ Use a fidget toy or stress ball
- ☐ Sit in sunlight and do nothing
- ☐ Use a mindfulness or grounding app
- ☐ Try a body scan meditation
- ☐ Do a scent-based activity (like essential oils)
- ☐ Journal about what's calming for you
- ☐ Play with textures (fabric, objects, water)

Movement & Energy Shift

- ☐ Go for a walk around campus
- ☐ Try a group fitness class
- ☐ Dance to one high-energy song
- ☐ Ride a bike or scooter
- ☐ Do yoga with a YouTube video
- ☐ Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- ☐ Join intramurals or a rec sport
- ☐ Do a 10-minute beginner workout
- ☐ Shoot hoops or play a pickup game
- ☐ Walk and talk with a friend
- ☐ Try rollerblading or skateboarding
- ☐ Toss a Frisbee or football
- ☐ Play an active video game like Just Dance
- ☐ Visit a climbing wall or rec center
- ☐ Try martial arts or self-defense class
- ☐ Do jumping jacks for 60 seconds
- ☐ Build a playlist that makes you move
- ☐ Walk laps while listening to a podcast
- ☐ Do stair sprints for 5 minutes
- ☐ Try a new physical challenge just for fun

Focus & Mental Engagement

- ☐ Solve a puzzle (Sudoku, crossword, jigsaw)
- ☐ Read a novel, short story, or zine
- ☐ Try Duolingo or learn a few phrases in a new language
- ☐ Listen to a podcast about something random

- ☐ Watch a documentary on a weird or cool topic
- ☐ Research something just for fun
- ☐ Organize your class notes or study space
- ☐ Declutter your room or backpack
- ☐ Create flashcards for a class
- ☐ Do a Pomodoro study session
- ☐ Apply for a scholarship or internship
- ☐ Write or revise your resume
- ☐ Watch a TED Talk and write a reflection
- ☐ Learn a skill on YouTube
- ☐ Journal a "What I Learned Today" entry
- ☐ Study in a new campus spot
- ☐ Teach a friend something you just learned
- ☐ Create a personal productivity challenge
- ☐ Visit a museum or cultural center
- ☐ Try speed reading and summarize the chapter

Social & Connection

- ☐ Text someone you haven't talked to in a while
- ☐ Call your family or a friend
- ☐ Plan a "walk and talk" with someone
- ☐ Host a movie or game night
- ☐ Study with a group
- ☐ Join a student club or org
- ☐ Volunteer at a campus or community event
- ☐ Sit with someone new at lunch
- ☐ Send a thank-you to a professor or mentor
- ☐ Have a vulnerable conversation with someone
- ☐ Attend a club meeting
- ☐ Visit a resource or cultural center
- ☐ Share your playlist with a friend
- ☐ Start a group chat for your dorm or class
- ☐ Leave kind notes around campus
- ☐ Compliment someone genuinely
- ☐ Ask a classmate how they're doing *really*
- ☐ Say "yes" to a social invite
- ☐ Share a meme with someone you care about
- ☐ Ask someone for coffee or lunch

- ☐ Help a peer prep for a test
- ☐ Host a “create night” with music & crafts
- ☐ Organize a themed dinner with friends
- ☐ Make a connection goal for the week

Fun, Random & Just Because

- ☐ Try a new snack or drink you’ve never had
- ☐ Rearrange your dorm or desk setup
- ☐ Make a new playlist (theme: chaos, nostalgia, joy)
- ☐ People-watch and make up stories
- ☐ Write silly or “bad” poetry
- ☐ Buy a small toy or squishie
- ☐ Explore a hidden corner of campus
- ☐ Try a TikTok or IG trend just for fun
- ☐ Dress in a bold outfit for no reason
- ☐ Do solo karaoke in your room
- ☐ Create a playlist for “future you”
- ☐ Invent your own holiday and celebrate it
- ☐ Go on a campus scavenger hunt
- ☐ Doodle your dream apartment or band poster
- ☐ Eat dessert first
- ☐ Watch a random documentary or reality show
- ☐ Give your objects or plants fun names
- ☐ Pretend you’re a tourist and take selfies on campus
- ☐ Write a fake Yelp review of your favorite class
- ☐ Create a bingo board of things you want to try
- ☐ Do a “no spend” adventure day

IMPROVE the Moment

Let's Make a Time of Crisis Less Miserable

Sometimes you can't change what's happening or immediately solve a problem, yet you *can* make the moment a little more bearable with IMPROVE the Moment. Remember the acronym to call up the skills.

I – Imagery

Imagine a place, memory, or future that feels peaceful or empowering. Use all your senses in the visualization to bring it to life. Alternatively, find guided imagery on You Tube and immerse yourself with it. Or, practice using skills in your mind's eye.

Examples:

- "I picture myself sitting by the lake in summer, feeling the breeze, hearing water."
- Rehearse having a difficult conversation successfully in your mind.
- Play guided imagery as part of a bedtime routine.

What calming or empowering image could you imagine?

M – Meaning

Ask yourself if there something you can learn, grow from, or find meaning in with this experience? Alternatively, list your reasons for "why" you want to stay safe, not use substances, or avoid another unhealthy behavior.

Examples:

- "This is awful, but maybe it's teaching me how strong I am."
- "This anxiety shows how much I care."
- "I'm not drinking tonight because I need to stay healthy and stable"
- "This problem sucks, but it's an opportunity to practice my skills"

What meaning could you create from something hard?

P – Prayer or Purposeful Connection

Connect to something bigger than yourself, spiritual, religious, or personal. This might mean praying, meditating, journaling, or talking to your future self. Alternatively, go to your place of solace. It may be a temple, mosque, synagogue, church, or out in nature.

How do you connect with a sense of purpose or inner strength?

R – Relaxation

Try calming your body and mind through relaxation techniques or behaviors that you find relaxing.

Examples:

- Deep breathing
- Stretching or yoga
- Music, nature, or aromatherapy
- Progress muscle relaxation (find a guide on YouTube)

List 2 relaxation strategies that work for you:

O – One Thing or Moment at a Time

Focus your attention on *just one thing*. Notice every detail. When you find yourself doing more than one thing, stop and choose the most important thing to focus on. Alternatively, break down surviving a crisis into manageable chunks of time (e.g., make it through a day, an hour, or a moment at a time).

Examples:

- Focus just on completing just one assignment.
- Drink tea slowly and notice the warmth.
- Put your phone away to focus on the task at hand.
- When feeling impulsive, commit to not act on urges for short time periods (e.g., making it through 10 minutes, or one hour at a time).

What's one small thing you could do *fully* today?

V – Vacation (Mini Mental Break)

Take a brief escape from your stress, not your responsibilities. Step away for a short time and come back stronger.

Examples:

- Listen to a favorite playlist.
- Watch a show that makes you laugh.
- Go sit outside and breathe for 10 minutes.
- Lie in bed and pull the covers over your head for 20 minutes.

What's your go-to "mini vacation"?

E – Encouragement

Use kind, uplifting words to support yourself. Out loud or in your head. Write them down and rehearse them. We all talk to ourselves, so we might as well say something helpful!

Examples:

- "I can get through this."
- "This feeling won't last forever."
- "I've survived 100% of my worst days so far."
- This problem will not matter one month from now."

Write down 2–3 affirmations or words of encouragement for yourself:

Self-Soothe with the Five Senses

Comforting Yourself From the Inside Out

When you're feeling emotionally overwhelmed, burned out, anxious, or heartbroken, it's natural to want relief. But sometimes we don't have access to external support or it's more practical to do something helpful for ourselves.

Self-soothing is the ability to comfort yourself using simple, grounding actions that connect to your five senses: Sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. It's not about "fixing" the problem, it's about allowing your body and mind settle so you can ride out the storm without doing harm.

Think of it as emotional first aid: calm, comforting, and totally okay to need.

Barriers to Self-Soothing

Sometimes people feel weird or even guilty about using soothing skills. You might think:

- *"This is childish or weak."*
- *"I don't deserve to feel good right now."*
- *"This is only for women."* (Stereotypes pop up!)
- *"There's no time for this. I need to just push through."*

But here's the truth: Soothing is not a luxury. It's a survival tool. And everyone, yes *everyone*, deserves moments of peace and care, especially during stress. Here are ways to practice Self-Soothe:

Self-Soothing with Vision (Sight)

Use your eyes to take in things that feel calming, pleasing, or inspiring.

Examples:

- Watch the sunset, clouds, or trees blowing in the wind
- Light a candle or string lights and just look at the glow
- Scroll a photo album or mood board of images you love
- Visit a museum or campus art exhibit
- Reorganize your space in a way that feels cozy and visually calm

What are 2 ways you can soothe with sight?

Self-Soothing with Hearing (Sound)

Use sound to ground, uplift, or relax you.

Examples:

- Put on a playlist that fits your *mood goal* (calm, empowered, nostalgic)
- Listen to ambient noise, like rain sounds or ocean waves
- Sing, hum, or play an instrument if you have one
- Pay close attention to the sounds around you without judgment—just listen
- Try an audiobook, podcast, or YouTube video with a soothing tone

What sounds help you feel more grounded or calm?

Self-Soothing with Smell

Smell can shift your mood and bring comfort fast—it's closely tied to memory and emotion.

Examples:

- Burn incense or use essential oils if allowed in your space
- Use scented lotion, shampoo, or candles
- Brew herbal tea and inhale the steam
- Take a walk outside and notice the smells (fresh cut grass, flowers, rain, etc.)
- Bake cookies or make something with spices that smell like home

What scents make you feel calm or comforted?

Self-Soothing with Taste

Taste can bring you back to the moment. Use it mindfully—slow down and savor.

Examples:

- Sip something warm like tea, coffee, or soup
- Suck on mints or chew gum
- Eat a snack you associate with safety or good memories
- Try something new and focus on the flavor
- Slow down during meals and really notice what you're tasting

What tastes help you feel grounded or soothed?

Self-Soothing with Touch

Touch is powerful for calming your nervous system. Engage your body with warmth, pressure, or texture.

Examples:

- Wrap up in a cozy blanket or hoodie
- Hug a pillow, stuffed animal, or even yourself
- Put your hand on your chest and breathe deeply
- Squeeze a stress ball or run your fingers over something textured
- Try a gentle self-massage on your shoulders or scalp

What forms of touch help you calm down?

Self-Soothe Checklist Worksheet

Putting Self-Soothe into (Calming) Action

When you're feeling stressed, anxious, or emotionally overwhelmed, try one or more self-soothing activities from each sensory category. Check them off as you go...or brainstorm your own!

Vision (Sight)

- ☐ Watch a sunset or clouds
- ☐ Light a candle or string lights
- ☐ Look at photos or art you love
- ☐ Walk through a garden, park, or art exhibit
- ☐ Rearrange your space to feel visually calm
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Hearing (Sound)

- ☐ Listen to calming or favorite music
- ☐ Play ambient sounds (rain, waves, nature)
- ☐ Sing or hum to yourself
- ☐ Mindfully listen to your surroundings
- ☐ Try a comforting podcast or audiobook
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Smell

- ☐ Use scented lotion, oils, or body wash
- ☐ Brew tea and inhale the scent
- ☐ Light incense or a scented candle (if safe)
- ☐ Step outside and notice natural smells
- ☐ Smell something nostalgic (coffee, spices)
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Taste

- ☐ Sip something warm and soothing
- ☐ Enjoy a small treat—savor it slowly
- ☐ Chew gum or mints
- ☐ Try a new snack or recipe mindfully
- ☐ Hydrate with water and focus on the taste
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Touch

- ☐ Wrap in a soft blanket or hoodie
- ☐ Hug a pillow or stuffed animal
- ☐ Do a self-massage (neck, hands, scalp)
- ☐ Use a stress ball or textured object
- ☐ Run hands under warm or cool water
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Sensory Station Activity

Self-Soothe with the Senses

To practice engaging with the senses, create five sensory “stations” using the ideas below. Use one to three for each sense and have participants shift stations every few minutes. Leave time to process the activity as a groups.

Vision Station:

- Mood lighting or lava lamp
- Photos of nature, art, or peaceful scenes
- Coloring books, visual mandalas
- Window view or plant display

Hearing Station:

- Headphones with music playlists
- Sound machine with rain or waves
- Guided meditation audio
- Journaling about a favorite song

Smell Station:

- Essential oils or scented lotion
- Herbal teas, spices, or coffee grounds
- Dried lavender or citrus peel

Taste Station:

- Offer small pieces of fruit, tea, candy, or gum
- Mindful eating prompt: “Eat this bite using all five senses.”
- Hydration: Infused water (lemon, cucumber, mint)

Touch Station:

- Stress balls, textured fabrics, fidget toys
- Warm/cool objects (stones, hand warmers)
- Lotion for hand massage

Debrief Questions (Group Discussion):

- Which sense was easiest for you to connect with?
- What was surprising or new for you?

- How might you use one of these skills on your own this week?

Session Five: Distress Tolerance



The Pros & Cons Skill

Making Thoughtful Choices When Emotions Are Loud

Have you ever felt like you were about to make a decision *in the heat of the moment*..like skipping a class, ghosting someone, rage-texting, or blowing off a responsibility? Of course, we've all been there!

When we're upset, our emotions can make impulsive choices feel right. That's where the Pros & Cons skill comes to the rescue. This skill allows you to:

- Pause and think through your choices
- See short-term vs. long-term consequences
- Tap into Reason Mind to balance out Emotion Mind
- Make Wise Mind decisions you're proud of later

How to Use Pros and Cons

Step 1: Define the Choice

Start by clearly stating the decision you're considering. It could be anything from:

- Skipping class
- Texting an ex
- Getting high or drunk
- Venting on social media
- Having a hard convo
- Dropping a class
- Going to therapy or asking for help

"Should I skip class because I'm overwhelmed?"

Step 2: List the Pros (Upsides) and Cons (Downsides)

Think about both the **short-term** and **long-term** outcomes of the choice.

Decision: *Skip class today*

	Short-Term	Long-Term
PROS	Get to stay in bed, avoid stress	Maybe one class won't matter? But probably none
CONS	Feel guilty, miss important info Maybe hurt my grade Won't see my friends	Fall behind, more stress later Plays into an ineffective pattern Probably will hurt grades

Step 3: Flip It. List the Pros & Cons of the *Opposite* Decision.
Sometimes it helps to weigh both choices side-by-side.

Opposite Decision: *Go to class anyway*

	Short-Term	Long-Term
PROS	Stay caught up, feel productive Help my grade See my friends	Less stress later, sense of control Better grades Raise my self-esteem
CONS	Might feel tired, hard to focus	None

Step 4: Weigh It All. Is It Worth It?

Look at the big picture. Which option has the most long-term benefits and helps you move toward your goals? Ask yourself, "*What would Wise Mind say?*"

Step 5: Make a Choice and Own It

No one can decide for you. But once you've considered all sides, commit to your decision. This process builds confidence and personal power, even if it's hard.

In the present example...go to class!

Pros & Cons Examples

See if These Examples Relate to You

Here are some everyday situations where the Pros & Cons skill can help you make smarter, self-respecting choices (note that you can expand greatly on these examples):

Academic Decisions

Choice: Drop a class vs. push through

- Pros: Reduces immediate stress
- Cons: Might delay graduation, create regret

Choice: Stay up all night studying vs. go to sleep

- Pros: Cramming might help short-term
- Cons: You're wrecked the next day, worse retention

Relationship & Social Scenarios

Choice: Texting someone you're trying to move on from

- Pros: Temporary relief, validation
- Cons: Reopens pain, prolongs healing

Choice: Go out vs. stay in and recharge

- Pros of going out: Connection, fun
- Pros of staying in: Rest, boundaries, self-care

Emotional Coping Choices

Choice: Venting online vs. journaling or texting a trusted friend

- Pros of venting: Quick release
- Cons: Regret, drama, public vulnerability

Choice: Use distress tolerance skills vs. substance use

- Pros of skills: Build long-term strength, no hangover
- Cons: Takes effort, emotions stay raw (for now)

Your Examples:

Pros & Cons Worksheet

Use This Worksheet to Guide Your Choices

Step 1: Decision I'm Considering:

Step 2: Pros and Cons of This Choice

	Short-Term	Long-Term
PROS		
CONS		

Step 3: Pros and Cons of the Opposite Choice

	Short-Term	Long-Term
PROS		
CONS		

Step 4: What Does Your Wise Mind Say?

Step 5: What's Your Decision?

I've decided to: _____

Bridge Burning & Barrier Building

Protecting Your Progress by Removing or Disrupting Triggers

Sometimes, when we're trying to break a habit or stop a harmful behavior, motivation alone isn't enough, especially in moments when stress is high or we feel emotionally overwhelmed.

That's where Bridge Burning comes in. It means intentionally removing access to things that provide the means to self-sabotage. Think of it like deleting the shortcut to the thing you're trying to avoid.

Yet sometimes burning the bridge completely isn't realistic. In those instances we can build barriers instead, effectively creating layers of space or pause between an urge and the behavior.

Whether you're breaking a habit, ending a toxic connection, or making a big life shift, these tools keep you on course when your motivation is shaky.

Bridge Burning = No Turning Back

Burning a bridge means removing the opportunity to backslide. Let's do this!

Examples:

- **Unfollow/block** a toxic ex or online influencer who triggers body image issues
- **Delete delivery or hookup apps** you use impulsively when you're lonely or sad
- **Trash your vape or stash** instead of telling yourself you'll "*quit later*"
- **Drop out of a group chat** that encourages gossip, drinking, or risky behavior
- **Tell your friends about your boundaries** ("*I'm done drinking*"/"*No more all-nighters*") and ask for support
- **Cancel streaming subscriptions** if they're fueling late-night binges and avoidance (and save some money too!)

Why Bridge-Burning works:

- You stop relying on willpower in vulnerable moments.
- You make future sabotage more difficult.
- You show up for your *values*, not just your feelings.

Barrier Building = Space and Pause Before You Act

When you *can't* cut something out completely, build space between the urge and the behavior. Barriers interrupt the automatic loop. They give you time for urges to subside naturally and to use skills.

Examples:

- **Put your credit card deep in a drawer** when you know you online shop while stressed.
- **Create a 15-minute rule:** When you want to binge, text an ex, or avoid a task, wait 15 minutes and use skills first.
- **Set screen time limits** with password protection so you think twice before doom-scrolling
- **Change your room setup** to avoid gaming or working from bed.
- **Mute certain apps or people** instead of unfollowing (when you're not ready to burn the bridge).
- **Write a "*why I'm doing this*" note to your future self** to reread when urges hit.

Questions for Reflection

- What behavior or habit do I want to reduce or stop?
- Can I eliminate access to it entirely (burn the bridge)?
- If not, what barriers can I build to interrupt the cycle?
- What healthy or effective behavior will I do instead?
- Why does this matter to me long-term?

Urge Surfing

Ride the Wave Instead of Getting Pulled Under

Urges are like emotional waves...they rise, peak, and fall. They feel urgent, but they are temporary. All urges will naturally subside!

Urge Surfing is the skill of noticing and riding out an urge without acting on it. You don't resist the wave. You don't let it sweep you away. You just surf it until it passes.

The more you surf, the less power the urge has over you.

Step-by-Step Practice (with Small Waves First):

1. **Name the urge:** *"I feel the urge to ____."*
2. **Notice where you feel it in your body.**
3. **Visualize a wave:** See it rising... cresting... falling.
4. **Breathe through it:** 4 in, hold 4, out for 6, exhaling completely.
5. **Use a mantra:** *"This will pass."* *"I am not my urges."*
6. **Distract or redirect** if it feels too intense.

Examples:

- Urge to drop out during a panic spiral? Surf the wave for 15 minutes and then reassess.
- Urge to text an ex after a bad day? Name the urge, breathe, and journal instead.
- Urge to rage quit an assignment? Set a timer, surf the wave, and walk away for a break.
- Urge to binge-eat or overspend? Notice the pressure, ride it out, and delay the action.

Remember that if the wave is too big or intense to ride it out, that you can always go to other Distress Tolerance skills to get you through.

TIPP Skill

Reset Your Nervous System Fast

Sometimes emotions are so intense, we can't think clearly. Logic? Out the window. Skills? Hard to access. That's when we need biological hacks like the TIPP skill. It calms your body fast so you can think again. Remember the acronym TIPP to access its skills:

T – Temperature

Use cold to activate the “dive response” and slow your heart rate.

- Splash cold water on your face
- Hold an ice pack, cold drink, or soda can to your neck or wrists
- Step into the cold night air for 2–3 minutes
- Try a cold compress on your forehead

When to use: Feeling panicky, flooded with emotion, or starting to dissociate.

I – Intense Exercise

Burn off adrenaline fast. Even 30 seconds can help.

- Run in place, do jumping jacks, or air box
- Take a brisk walk up stairs or around the block
- Blast music and dance like a maniac
- Do 10 squats, push-ups, or crunches

When to use: When you feel like screaming, running, crying, or punching a wall.

P – Paced Breathing

Inhale slow, exhale even slower. This regulates your nervous system. Try the box breathing method or 5-5-7 breathing:

- Inhale 4 → Hold 4 → Exhale 6 → Pause 2
- Inhale 5 → Exhale 5 → Repeat 7 times

When to use: Before a test, presentation, difficult conversation, or when you're spiraling.

P – Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tense and release muscles to ground your body and release tension. Try these:

- Tense your fists → Hold 5 seconds → Release
- Tighten your shoulders → Breathe → Relax
- Move from toes upward, tensing and releasing each area

When to use: When you're holding stress in your body, after a panic attack, or before bed

Session Six: Distress Tolerance



The STOP Skill

A Moment-to-Moment Tool to Keep You from Making Things Worse

The STOP skill is one of the most practical distress tolerance tools in DBT. It helps you interrupt automatic, impulsive, or emotionally reactive behaviors when you're triggered, overwhelmed, or in conflict. Think of it as a "skillful pause button"...a way to stop, center yourself, and choose your next move with intention. Remember the acronym STOP to engage this skill:

S – Stop

Freeze...no speaking, texting, or reacting. This might look like:

- Not clapping back in a heated group chat
- Not ghosting a friend right away after a hurtful interaction
- Not rage-quitting a class when you feel embarrassed or overwhelmed
- Not hitting "submit" on an angry email to a professor

T – Take a Step Back

Remove yourself mentally (and physically, if needed) from the situation. Put space between you and the moment. This doesn't mean avoiding the issue. It means gathering yourself before engaging. This might look like:

- Going for a walk before responding to a passive-aggressive roommate
- Putting your phone down when your ex texts late at night
- Leaving the library after a panic spiral and regrouping with a friend or support service
- Taking a few deep breaths before raising your hand in class if you're nervous

O – Observe

Tune in to what's going on inside of you and around you. Become the observer of your thoughts, emotions, and environment. Ask:

- What am I thinking right now?
- What am I feeling emotionally?
- What's happening in my body? (Tense muscles? Racing heart?)
- What is the other person doing? What's their tone, posture, facial expression?

P – Proceed Mindfully

Respond from Wise Mind based on your goals, not your urges. Ask yourself:

- What are my values right now?
- What would my future self thank me for?
- What's the most effective move...not just the easiest or loudest?

This might mean:

- Choosing to have a calm conversation instead of lashing out.
- Doing one homework assignment instead of dropping the class.
- Setting a boundary instead of avoiding the person forever.
- Sending a thoughtful text instead of venting on social media.

Real-Life STOP Practice Scenarios

You get a bad grade on a group project

S: Don't immediately lash out at your group chat.

T: Take a break to cool off.

O: Notice you feel shame and frustration.

P: Write down feedback for your professor or schedule a meeting.

A roommate crosses a boundary

S: Don't passive-aggressively slam doors.

T: Step outside or take a breather.

O: Notice your urge to avoid, but also your desire for resolution.

P: Have a respectful, assertive conversation later that night.

You see a triggering post on social media

S: Pause instead of reacting or doom-scrolling.

T: Put the phone down.

O: Notice angry, jealousy, fear of missing out, loneliness, or other emotions.

P: Choose to mute the account, journal, or reach out to a friend.

Radical Acceptance

Facing Reality To Release Suffering

Sometimes life hands us situations that we *wish* were different such as experiencing anxiety, trauma, family tension, academic failure, rejection, or health issues. Our first instinct is often to fight reality: *"This isn't fair," "This shouldn't have happened,"* or *"I can't deal with this."*

But when we fight reality, we suffer more. Radical Acceptance means saying:

"This is where I am right now. I don't have to like it. But I don't have to suffer extra by denying it."

The concept of Radical Acceptance can be captured in the following formulas:

Pain + Resistance = Suffering

Pain + Acceptance = Strength + Growth

Radical Acceptance in Action

- **Situation:** You didn't get into your dream internship.
- **Non-Acceptance:** *"This ruins everything. I'm a failure."*
- **Radical Acceptance:** *"I didn't get it. I feel disappointed. I can explore other options."*

- **Situation:** You're homesick at school
- **Non-Acceptance:** *"I shouldn't feel this way. I'm weak."*
- **Radical Acceptance:** *"I miss home. This is hard. And this is part of adjusting."*

- **Situation:** You're in a depressive episode
- **Non-Acceptance:** *"Why can't I just get over this?"*
- **Radical Acceptance:** *"This is my reality right now. I can take small steps to care for myself."*

- **Situation:** A friend ghosted you
- **Non-Acceptance:** *"They should explain themselves. I deserve closure."*
- **Radical Acceptance:** *"They may never explain. I can still honor my need for connection and move forward."*

Myths + Truths

Radical Acceptance can be difficult because a lot of people have misconceptions about what acceptance is, and isn't. Look over the myths and realities to see if any of these resonate with you.

- **Myth:** *"If I accept it, I'm giving up."*
- **Reality:** Acceptance helps you *stop spinning your wheels* and start moving forward.
- **Myth:** *"If I accept this, I'm okay with it."*
- **Reality:** You can accept something as true without agreeing with or liking it.
- **Myth:** *"If I accept this pain, I'll be stuck in it forever."*
- **Reality:** Acceptance makes space for healing—not just pretending things are fine.

Journal Prompts

- What's something I've been fighting against emotionally?
- What would change if you accepted it, even just for today?
- What can you practice letting go of that's adding suffering to my pain?

Turning the Mind

Practicing Acceptance Again and Again and Again

Acceptance isn't a switch you flip. It's a direction you turn toward often over and over again. Turning the Mind is the moment you *realize* you're stuck in resistance and *redirect* yourself toward acceptance.

Turning the Mind means choosing acceptance, even when it's hard. It might sound like, *"I notice I'm stewing about this again, and I choose to accept what I can't control today,"* or *"This situation sucks, but it's real. I don't have to like it to live with it."* It's about saying, *"I'm willing to face this, even though it hurts,"* and turning your mind toward reality with willingness instead of resistance.

Examples of Turning the Mind

- **Scenario:** You keep replaying a breakup
- **What Turning the Mind Might Look Like:** *"I miss them. This is painful. But they're not here. I choose to accept that today."*
- **Scenario:** You got a bad diagnosis
- **What Turning the Mind Might Look Like:** *"This isn't what I wanted. I choose to work with what's real so I can care for myself."*
- **Scenario:** You feel stuck in your major
- **What Turning the Mind Might Look Like:** *"I'm afraid to switch paths, but staying miserable won't fix it. I'm willing to face change."*

How to Practice Radical Acceptance

- **Notice the resistance:** *"This shouldn't be happening."*
- **Name the reality:** *"It is happening."*
- **Redirect gently:** *"Even though I don't want to, I'm turning my mind toward acceptance."*
- **Repeat** every time your thoughts drift back to resistance.

Radical Acceptance Worksheet

For When Life Gets Messy and You're Stuck in the Fight

Use this worksheet when you're struggling with something painful, unfair, or just plain hard, and find yourself resisting reality, replaying the situation, or getting emotionally stuck.

Remember, Radical Acceptance doesn't mean you like it...it means you're choosing to face it so you can move forward.

What's the situation that's causing you pain or suffering?

Be specific. What happened? Who was involved? Why is it so painful?

Example: *"I didn't get into the program I wanted. I've been comparing myself to others and spiraling."*

What can you realistically change about this situation?

Use problem-solving or dialectical thinking here. Can anything be improved? Can your thoughts shift?

Example: *"I can talk to my advisor and explore other options. I can remind myself that rejection doesn't define me."*

3. What part of the situation may need to be radically accepted (at least for now)?

What are you resisting that might need to just be faced and acknowledged?

Example: *I didn't get in. That's real. I feel embarrassed and disappointed, but I can't undo the decision.*

What other DBT skills might help you practice Radical Acceptance?

How could your life be better if you *stop fighting reality* in this situation?

What would acceptance give you emotionally, mentally, or practically?

Example: *"I'd have more energy to focus on the next step instead of feeling stuck in shame. I'd feel more at peace."*

Affirmation or Mantra

Write a phrase or affirmation to help you remember your decision to practice Radical Acceptance. Here are some options:

- *"I can't change what happened, but I can choose how I respond."*
- *"It is what it is, and I'm doing the best I can."*

Write yours here:

Ways to Practice Radical Acceptance

Try these additional ways of practicing acceptance

Mindset Shifts

- **Say the words out loud:** *"This is what's happening. I may not like it, but it's real."*
- **Stop saying "should"** about yourself or others (e.g., *"They should have texted back..."*). Trade it for: *"They didn't. I don't like it. And it happened."*
- **Write it down:** Journal about what happened *without blaming or editing the truth.*
- **Use a mantra:** Try phrases like *"It is what it is," "This is the way it is right now,"* or *"Fighting this isn't helping me."*
- **Practice "not liking but accepting":** Remind yourself, *"I can radically accept this and still want it to be different."*

Mindfulness Plus Turning the Mind

- **Turn the mind—again and again:** Notice resistance and gently redirect. You might need to do it 100 times a day.
- **Use STOP + Observe:** Pause, breathe, and just notice what's happening inside you when you're upset.
- **Drop into your body:** Name what emotions feel like physically (tight jaw, heavy chest, fluttery stomach) instead of pushing them away.
- **Watch your thoughts like clouds:** Practice seeing thoughts as passing not facts to fight.
- **Practice One-Mindfully:** Stay in the now. One cup of coffee. One breath. One paper. One moment at a time.

Relationships and Rejection

- **Accept ghosting without self-blame:** *"They stopped responding. I don't know why. And I may never."*
- **Let others have their opinions:** You don't have to agree or argue. *"They see it that way. I see it differently."*
- **Release closure fantasies:** Stop waiting for the perfect apology or explanation. It may never come and you can still heal.

- **Honor your feelings without letting them take over:** *"I feel hurt. And I still choose to take care of myself."*
- **Don't personalize everything:** Sometimes it's not about you. Really.

School and Life Stress

- **Accept that not everything will be an A+ effort:** *"I did what I could with the energy I had."*
- **Radically accept burnout as a signal and not a flaw:** Rest is allowed. Imperfection is expected.
- **Acknowledge the gap between expectation and reality:** *"College isn't what I thought. But it's where I am."*
- **Accept the slow process of healing or growth:** You're not behind. You're just living your life.
- **Own your mistakes without self-hate:** *"I messed up. I can make it right or learn from it."*

Self-support and Healing

- **Reframe acceptance as a gift to yourself:** You deserve peace more than you deserve to win the argument in your head.
- **Try loving-kindness phrases:** *"May I accept this moment. May I be kind to myself. May I let go."*
- **Create a playlist that grounds you:** Choose music that helps you sit with hard feelings, not avoid them.
- **Visualize releasing resistance:** Imagine a clenched fist opening, a heavy backpack dropping, or an ocean wave carrying your resistance away.
- **Practice acceptance with your inner critic:** *"You're showing up again. I see you. I'm not fighting you today."*

Teflon Mind for College Students

Let It Slide

Our brains are constantly being bombarded with thoughts: deadlines, grades, what someone said (or didn't say), social stress, self-criticism, future panic. It's easy to get stuck ruminating, spiraling, or reacting in ways that don't help.

Teflon Mind is a skill that teaches you to let your thoughts, emotions, and urges *come and go* without clinging to them just like food sliding off a non-stick Teflon pan.

Instead of gripping every thought like it's true or important, you notice it and let it pass. You're not denying or pushing away your experiences. You're letting them *exist* without letting them take over.

Teflon Mind in Action

- **The Grade Spiral:** You get a disappointing grade. The thought pops up: *"I'm a failure."* Instead of buying into it, you notice the thought. *"There's that thought again."* You let it pass and choose to study or take a break instead of spiraling.
- **Roommate Drama:** Your roommate left dishes out *again*. You feel irritation. Instead of launching into a fight, you say to yourself, *"I feel frustrated, but I don't have to act on it right now."*
- **Social Comparison:** You're scrolling on Instagram and suddenly feel less-than. You notice the feeling and the urge to keep scrolling or delete your account. Instead, you take a breath and let it slide. You close the app, go outside, or text a friend.
- **Performance Anxiety:** Right before a class presentation, your heart races and your brain says, *"I'm going to mess up."* You breathe. You acknowledge the nerves. You don't fight them. And you keep going.
- **Overthinking Texts:** You texted someone and they haven't responded. Instead of rereading your message 10 times and assuming the worst, you observe the anxiety and let it go. You focus on something else.

Teflon Mind Practice Phrases

- *"That's just a thought, not a fact."*
- *"Feelings are not commands. I'm letting this go."*
- *"Like water off a duck's back."*
- *"This is a bump in the road. I can just move on."*

Teflon Mind helps you stop sticking to what doesn't serve you and stay in the present where you have the most power.

Grounding Techniques for Presence and Calm

Anchor yourself in the moment

Sometimes, stress or trauma can make you feel like you're *not even in your body*. Your thoughts might race, you might feel numb or disconnected or even like you're watching your life from outside yourself.

This is where grounding comes in. Grounding brings you back to *this* moment, *this* body, *this* breath. It reminds your nervous system that you are safe enough, here, now.

Here are grounding techniques you can use in your dorm, class, therapy, or wherever you feel overwhelmed:

Visual Grounding

Look around and name:

- 5 things you see
- 4 things with color
- 3 objects with texture
- 2 moving things (fan, leaves, people)
- 1 thing you've never noticed before

Sensory Engagement

Engage all 5 senses:

- **Sight:** Notice colors, lights, shadows, motion
- **Sound:** What can you hear right now? The hum of a vending machine? Birds? Voices?
- **Smell:** Coffee, grass, the library, your sweatshirt
- **Touch:** Press your feet to the floor. Touch your jeans, your hair, your pen.
- **Taste:** Suck on a mint, drink cold water slowly, chew gum mindfully

Mindful Breathing

Try box breathing:

- Inhale for 4
- Hold for 4
- Exhale completely for 4
- Hold for 4
- Repeat 3–5 times.

Anchor the Body

- Feel the chair under you
- Notice your back against the wall
- Press your feet into the floor
- Place a hand over your heart and feel the warmth

Ground With Objects

- Carry a grounding stone, crystal, fidget, or textured item in your pocket or bag
- Hold it when you're feeling spaced out or overwhelmed

Connect with Nature

- Sit under a tree
- Watch clouds pass
- Run your hand through grass
- Touch the bark of a tree and feel its texture

Affirming Phrases

- "This is now. Not then."
- "I am safe enough in this moment."
- "I am here, and I'm doing the best I can."

Willingness vs. Willfulness

Where There's a Willingness, There's a Way

Willingness is choosing to participate in reality instead of fighting it. It's the open-handed "yes" to what's happening, even when you don't like it. It doesn't mean you approve or give up...it means you stop fighting what is and start doing what works. In many ways, willingness incorporates elements of acceptance and effectively. Willingness sounds like:

- *"I don't like this assignment, but I'll get started anyway."*
- *"I'm anxious about therapy, and I'm still going to show up."*
- *"I wish things were different, but I'll respond wisely with what I've got."*

By contrast, **Willfulness** is the arms-crossed "no" to reality. It's refusal. Resentment. Stubbornness. Control. Your way or the highway! Willfulness sounds like:

- *"If I'm not in the mood, I'm not doing it."*
- *"I won't ask for help. People should already know."*
- *"This sucks, so I'm not even trying."*

Examples of Willingness versus Willfulness

- **Willingness:** You wake up exhausted but still go to class because showing up matters.
- **Willfulness:** You skip class again, telling yourself it's pointless since you're already behind.
- **Willingness:** You tell a friend you're overwhelmed and ask if you can talk.
- **Willfulness:** You isolate for days, assuming no one wants to hear from you anyway.
- **Willingness:** You submit a paper even if it's not perfect.
- **Willfulness:** You procrastinate until it's too late and then blame the professor.

When you feel resistance rising in you, ask yourself:

- What am I resisting and why?
- What would it look like to soften into willingness?
- Can I do one thing today with openness instead of over-control?

Session Seven: Emotion Regulation



Intro to Emotion Regulation

Understanding, Managing & Thriving with Your Emotions

Let's be honest: emotions can be a wide ride. One day you're feeling hopeful and excited... the next, you're overwhelmed, anxious, or spiraling. Whether it's due to classes, relationships, financial pressure, identity exploration, or figuring out your future, college puts your emotions to the test.

The **Emotion Regulation** module is here to help you build a toolkit for understanding your emotions, responding skillfully, and creating more positive experiences in your life.

You'll learn that emotions aren't the enemy. They're messengers, and when we understand and work with them, we're more balanced, in control, and confident.

Why Emotion Regulation Matters

You've probably had many moments when you thought, "*I wish I didn't feel this way.*" Maybe it was intense anxiety before a big presentation, heartbreak after a breakup, or the kind of anger that makes your whole body tense up. And while it's totally valid to *not enjoy* those moments, it's also important to know this: Your emotions exist for a reason.

They're not random. They're not your enemy. In fact, they're wired into your brain and body to help you survive, connect, and navigate life. Like any tool, emotions can be incredibly useful *when they're regulated and understood*. Let's break down what emotions do for you:

Emotions Give You Information

Emotions are like little messengers. They help you understand what's happening around and inside you. Emotions help you make sense of your environment and your values. They can say, "Hey, this matters!"

- If you're walking alone at night and feel fear, it might be your brain picking up on something unsafe.
- If you feel angry after a friend talks over you repeatedly, it might be a signal that your boundaries are being crossed.

Emotions Motivate Action

Emotions push us to respond. Without emotions, we wouldn't be moved to act, or even care.

- **Fear** prepares you to run or protect yourself.
- **Sadness** may tell you to slow down and seek support.
- **Joy** encourages you to savor a moment and connect with others.
- **Guilt** can motivate you to make things right.
- **Love** pulls you toward people who matter.

That anxious pit in your stomach before a test? It might push you to finally start studying. The excitement you feel when a professor praises your work? It might motivate you to sign up for that cool research project.

Emotions Help You Communicate

Even without saying a word, people can often tell how you're feeling—and vice versa. That's because your facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language carry emotional messages.

- When you look disappointed after receiving a grade, your professor might notice and ask if you want to meet.
- Smiling when someone enters the room can make them feel welcome and strengthen your social connection.

In short, emotions help you signal your needs and understand others.

But What About *Painful* Emotions?

All of that sounds great, but what about the emotions that feel *awful* like shame, grief, anxiety, or rage?

They're important too. The problem usually isn't the emotion itself; it's when the emotion becomes too intense, too long-lasting, or out of proportion to the situation. That's what we call emotional dysregulation.

Dysregulated Emotions = Problems

Let's look at the difference:

- **Regulated** anger motivates you to set a boundary with a roommate.
- **Dysregulated** anger leads to screaming or punching a wall.
- **Regulated** sadness encourages you to reach out to a friend or rest.
- **Dysregulated** sadness turns into weeks of isolation and missed classes.
- **Regulated** anxiety pushes you to prepare for a speech.
- **Dysregulated** anxiety stops you from going to class at all.

Emotions only become a problem when they overwhelm you and take over your behavior, thoughts, and choices.

The Goal is Emotion *Regulation*, not elimination. The purpose is not to shut your emotions off. Instead, it's to help you ride the wave without getting pulled under. In this module you'll learn:

To understand your emotions.

- What am I feeling?
- Why am I feeling this way?
- How is this emotion affecting my thoughts and behavior?
- How can I influence my emotional life for the better?

Reduce emotional vulnerability.

- Sleep, nutrition, exercise, meaningful connection, and structure = the basics that keep your emotional foundation steady.

Build a more satisfying life.

- Master your day-to-day by taking on challenges, creating positive moments, and taking steps toward your goals.

Break free from "Mood Traps."

- Learn to act opposite to destructive urges and stop your emotions from running the show.

Closing Thought

Emotions are not problems to solve, but signals to understand. Ready to build your emotional resilience toolkit? Let's go!

How Common Emotions are Experienced

Recognizing Emotions is a Step Toward Engaging With Them

Emotions might seem mysterious yet they leave clear clues. They show up in your body, how you talk, how you behave, and how you relate to others. And whether they're big or small, pleasant or painful, emotions give us important information.

Noticing your emotions *early*, when they're mild, is one of the best ways to keep them manageable. Think about it: it's a lot easier to deal with being *annoyed* than *enraged*, or *nervous* than *in full panic mode*.

This section will help you recognize emotions when they show up in your daily life and guide you toward effective ways to respond to them.

Happiness

Synonyms: *Contentment* → *Pleasure* → *Joy* → *Delight* → *Elation* → *Ecstasy*

How It Feels in Your Body:

You might feel lighter, more energized, and warm in your chest. You may smile or laugh more easily and feel relaxed and open.

How You Communicate It:

Smiling, making eye contact, laughing, being more affectionate, posting something positive online, engaging more with others.

Ways to Work With It:

- Soak it in! Practice gratitude.
- Share the moment with a friend or on social media.
- Use it as a motivator to keep doing what works.

Examples:

- You ace an exam after studying hard.
- You finish a paper early and feel free.
- You spend time with someone you care about.

Describe a recent moment where you felt happiness:

Sadness

Synonyms: *Disappointment → Sorrow → Grief → Despair*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Heavy limbs, teary eyes, low energy, chest tightness, maybe wanting to lie down or sleep a lot.

How You Communicate It:

Less eye contact, slower speech, avoiding social situations, venting about feeling “off” or down.

Ways to Work With It:

- Let yourself cry or feel it—don’t bottle it up.
- Reach out to a friend, roommate, or therapist.
- Do gentle activities like journaling, walking, or watching comfort shows.

Examples:

- You didn’t get into your first-choice program.
- You’re feeling homesick and out of place.
- A friendship or relationship ended.

When have you felt sadness recently? What helped?

Anger

Synonyms: *Annoyance → Irritation → Frustration → Rage → Fury*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Tight jaw, clenched fists, fast heartbeat, tension, heat in your face or chest.

How You Communicate It:

Snapping at others, sarcasm, pacing, raised voice, venting intensely.

Ways to Work With It:

- Use exercise or movement to discharge energy.
- Take space. Go for a walk or listen to music.

- Use Opposite Action: if you want to lash out, try expressing yourself calmly.

Examples:

- A roommate keeps eating your food without asking.
- A group project member ghosts the group.
- You feel disrespected by a professor or advisor.

What's a recent anger moment—and how did you handle it?

Anxiety

Synonyms: *Nervous* → *Worried* → *Panicked*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Racing thoughts, shallow breathing, tight chest, sweaty palms, fidgety or restless.

How You Communicate It:

Rambling or talking fast, asking for reassurance, biting nails, avoiding eye contact.

Ways to Work With It:

- Practice deep breathing or grounding techniques.
- Write down your worries to make them clearer.
- Break tasks into smaller steps and use time management tools.

Examples:

- You're behind on deadlines and don't know where to start.
- You're meeting with a professor to talk about your grade.
- You're starting your first internship or job interview.

What are your anxiety triggers and what helps you cope?

Fear

Synonyms: *Uneasy* → *Scared* → *Dread* → *Terror*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Frozen, dry mouth, racing heart, feeling cold or panicked.

How You Communicate It:

Avoidance, hypervigilance, nervous laughter, hesitating to speak or act.

Ways to Work With It:

- Identify what you're afraid of and evaluate the real risk.
- Take small, brave steps (exposure).
- Use calming self-talk: "I can handle this."

Examples:

- Speaking in front of a class for the first time.
- Walking home alone and feeling unsafe.
- Facing consequences for a missed exam or assignment.

Think of a time you felt fear. What helped you feel safer?

Surprise

Synonyms: Startled → Amazed → Shocked

How It Feels in Your Body:

Wide eyes, raised brows, stillness, gasp, moment of frozen awareness.

How You Communicate It:

Exclaiming "Whoa!" or "No way!", sharing the news excitedly, asking questions.

Ways to Work With It:

- Take a pause to process the surprise...especially if it's negative.
- Talk it out with someone.
- Use humor when appropriate.

Examples:

- You're accepted into a competitive program you didn't think you'd get into.
- You get a last-minute test or pop quiz.
- A friend throws you a surprise party.

What's a time you were surprised recently?

Disgust

Synonyms: *Dislike* → *Repulsion* → *Loathing*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Nausea, gag reflex, scrunched face, pulling back, wrinkling your nose.

How You Communicate It:

Saying “gross” or “ew,” turning away, shaking your head, avoiding contact.

Ways to Work With It:

- Remove yourself from the trigger.
- Talk through the reaction with curiosity.
- Refocus attention or shift to a neutral activity.

Examples:

- Seeing something gross in the shared bathroom.
- Learning about unethical practices in a course.
- Being around someone who broke your trust.

What kinds of things bring up disgust for you?

Curiosity

Synonyms: *Interest* → *Fascination* → *Obsession*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Leaning in, wide eyes, fidgeting, head tilt, eagerness to explore.

How You Communicate It:

Asking questions, Googling something immediately, signing up to learn more, excited conversation.

Ways to Work With It:

- Follow the thread: watch a documentary, take a class, try a club.
- Share your interests with others.
- Let curiosity motivate rather than distract.

Examples:

- You hear something intriguing in a lecture and want to learn more.

- You get hooked on a research project.
- You want to understand yourself better and explore therapy or a journal.

What are you curious about right now?

Embarrassment

Synonyms: *Sheepish → Mortified → Humiliated*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Blushing, warm face, trying to shrink or disappear, nervous laughter, fast heartbeat.

How You Communicate It:

Making jokes, avoiding eye contact, apologizing quickly, saying “*That was so dumb...*”

Ways to Work With It:

- Practice self-kindness (“*Everyone messes up sometimes.*”)
- Laugh with yourself, not at yourself.
- Talk it through with a friend.

Examples:

- You trip in front of classmates.
- You say the wrong answer out loud.
- You send a message to the wrong person.

What’s an embarrassing moment you’ve survived?

Jealousy

Synonyms: *Envy → Resentment → Possessiveness*

How It Feels in Your Body:

Tight chest, clenched jaw, stomach twist, tense shoulders.

How You Communicate It:

Irritability, silent treatment, comparison comments, sarcasm.

Ways to Work With It:

- Identify the unmet need behind the feeling.
- Focus on your goals and strengths.
- Talk it out with someone or journal it through.

Examples:

- A friend gets into a grad school you wanted.
- A partner gives more attention to someone else.
- You feel left out when friends hang out without you.

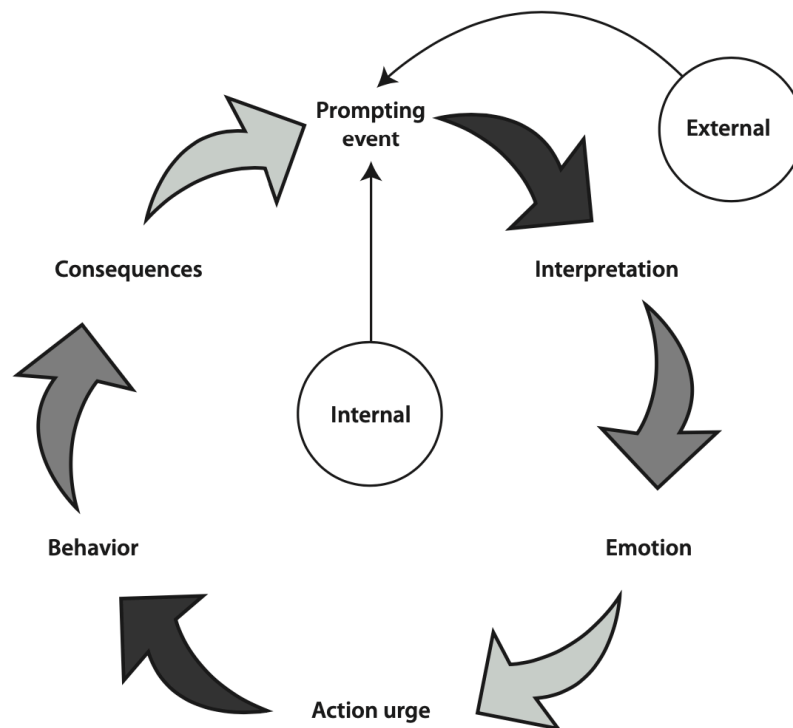
When have you felt jealousy? What helped you work through it?

The Cycle of Emotions

Identify the Cycle to Find Points of Influence

Understanding how emotions *happen* can give you more power over how you *respond*. In the Cycle of Emotions there are specific areas of intervention once you slow down and identify each of them.

Every emotional experience has six key parts:



Prompting Event: Something happens inside or outside of you. For example, you get a C- on a big test.

Interpretation: Your brain makes sense of it (though not always accurately!). For instance, you think, *"I'm failing and I'll never succeed."*

Emotion: You feel it physically and mentally. In this case panic, shame, shame, and sadness might ensue. You feel your stomach drop and tears stream down your face.

Action Urge: You feel pulled to do (or not do) something. For example, you consider skipping class, giving up, and hiding out in your bed.

Behavior: You act-or react. You isolate in your room, ignore messages, and sleep all day.

Consequences: There's an outcome for better or worse which may feed, or become the event, for the next emotional cycle. Isolating and sleeping results in missed classes, more stress, less motivation, and lingering feelings of guilt, sadness, and anxiety. And around it goes.

Yet there's good news: **you can intervene at multiple points** to change the course of your emotions and behaviors.

Examples of Ways to Influence Emotions at Each Step of the Cycle

● **Change the event**

- Skip the late-night scroll and go to bed earlier.
- Drop a class that's crushing your mental health (after consulting your advisor).
- Choose to study in the library instead of your noisy dorm.

● **Change your interpretation**

- Thought: *"My roommate hates me because they're quiet."*
- Reframe: *"Maybe they're just introverted or having a bad day."*

● **Name and validate your emotions**

- Instead of numbing or ignoring emotions, say, *"I'm feeling overwhelmed. That makes sense...it's midterms and I haven't had a break."*

● **Pause at the action urge**

- Urge: *"Skip this class and watch Netflix."*
- Pause: *"What will help long term?"*
- Skill: *Opposite Action*: go to class to build mastery and reduce shame.

● **Choose effective behaviors**

- Instead of yelling in a fight with a partner, take a break and come back to talk calmly.
- Instead of ghosting friends when anxious, send a text that says, *"I'm overwhelmed right now, can we talk later?"*

● **Respond wisely to consequences**

- Didn't do well on a quiz? Instead of spiraling, use it as motivation to attend office hours or change your study plan.

Emotion Cycle Scenarios

See how the cycle plays out in these illustrations.

Here are real-life examples of how the emotion cycle plays out. Use them in discussion, journaling, or practice identifying where you could make a skillful change.

Scenario 1: Getting Ghosted

- **Event:** You text someone you like and they don't reply.
- **Interpretation:** *"I'm annoying. I always ruin things."*
- **Emotion:** Shame, rejection.
- **Urge:** Delete their number, cry, isolate.
- **Behavior:** Spiral on social media, stay in bed.
- **Consequences:** You feel worse, lose confidence.

What could help? Try reframing (*"Maybe they're busy"*), self-soothe, or Check the Facts.

Scenario 2: Academic Stress

- **Event:** You're behind in three classes.
- **Interpretation:** *"I'm lazy and stupid."*
- **Emotion:** Anxiety, shame, panic.
- **Urge:** Avoid everything.
- **Behavior:** Binge YouTube, skip class.
- **Consequences:** Work piles up more.

Use opposite action (start with ONE task), radical acceptance, or emotion naming.

Scenario 3: Compliment from a Professor

- **Event:** Your professor praises your work.
- **Interpretation:** *"I'm capable. My effort paid off."*
- **Emotion:** Pride, joy.
- **Urge:** Do more of what worked.
- **Behavior:** Start another assignment early.
- **Consequences:** More momentum and confidence.

This is the emotion cycle *working for you!*

Scenario 4: FOMO on a Friday Night

- **Event:** Your friends go out, but you stay in.
- **Interpretation:** *"They're going to forget about me."*
- **Emotion:** Sadness, anxiety.
- **Urge:** Text obsessively, stalk social media.
- **Behavior:** Overthink, compare, don't sleep.
- **Consequences:** Wake up tired and more disconnected.

Skills: Teflon Mind, opposite action (do something fun solo), grounding.

Check the Facts: Reality-Testing Your Emotions

Let's be real: sometimes we spiral over something that *might not even be true*. You've been there. You misread a text, assume the worst, and suddenly you're full of anger, panic, or sadness. But before you react... what if you could slow it down and fact-check your emotional response?

That's what the **Check the Facts** skill is all about: noticing when your emotions might be driven more by *interpretation* than by *actual facts*. That's because while our emotions are real, they're not always *true reflections of reality*. Sometimes we're reacting to:

- A thought that's based on fear, not facts.
- An assumption that hasn't been verified.
- A belief that comes from past experiences rather than the current moment.

In instances like these, Checking the facts helps you:

- Avoid jumping to conclusions
- Respond in ways that actually work
- Keep your emotions in proportion to the situation

How to Check the Facts

Step 1: Identify the Emotion

"What emotion am I feeling right now?" Rate the intensity (0 = super chill, 10 = maxed out).

Step 2: Identify the Trigger

"What happened that set off this emotion?" Try to stick to just the facts like a reporter. What did you *see, hear, or experience*?

Step 3: What's Your Story About It?

"What am I thinking or assuming about the situation?" Are you catastrophizing? Mind reading? Assuming intent?

Step 4: Reality-Check the Story

"Do the facts back up this story?"

- What evidence supports my thought?

- What evidence goes *against* it?
- Could there be other explanations?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?

Step 5: Decide: Does the Emotion Fit the Facts?

If yes → it's valid, and you can act skillfully.

If not → time to reframe or use distress tolerance/regulation skills.

Examples

Ghosted by a Friend?

- Emotion: Anger (7/10)
- Interpretation: *"They don't care about me."*
- Reality check: Could they be overwhelmed, busy, or anxious themselves? Have they done this before? Do they typically come back around?
- **Updated Thought:** *"They might be struggling. I'll give it a little time, then reach out again."*

Thought Spiral Before a Test

- Emotion: Panic (8/10)
- Interpretation: *"If I bomb this exam, my life is over."*
- Reality check: Have you studied? What's your current grade? Have you recovered from tough exams before?
- **Updated Thought:** *"This test matters, but it's not everything. I've prepared. I can do my best and bounce back if needed."*

Misunderstood Text Message

- Emotion: Sadness (6/10)
- Interpretation: *"They're mad at me."*
- Reality check: Did the tone of the message actually say that? Could it be about something else entirely?
- **Updated Thought:** *"I don't know what's going on yet. I'll check in instead of assuming."*

Professor Gave You a Weird Look

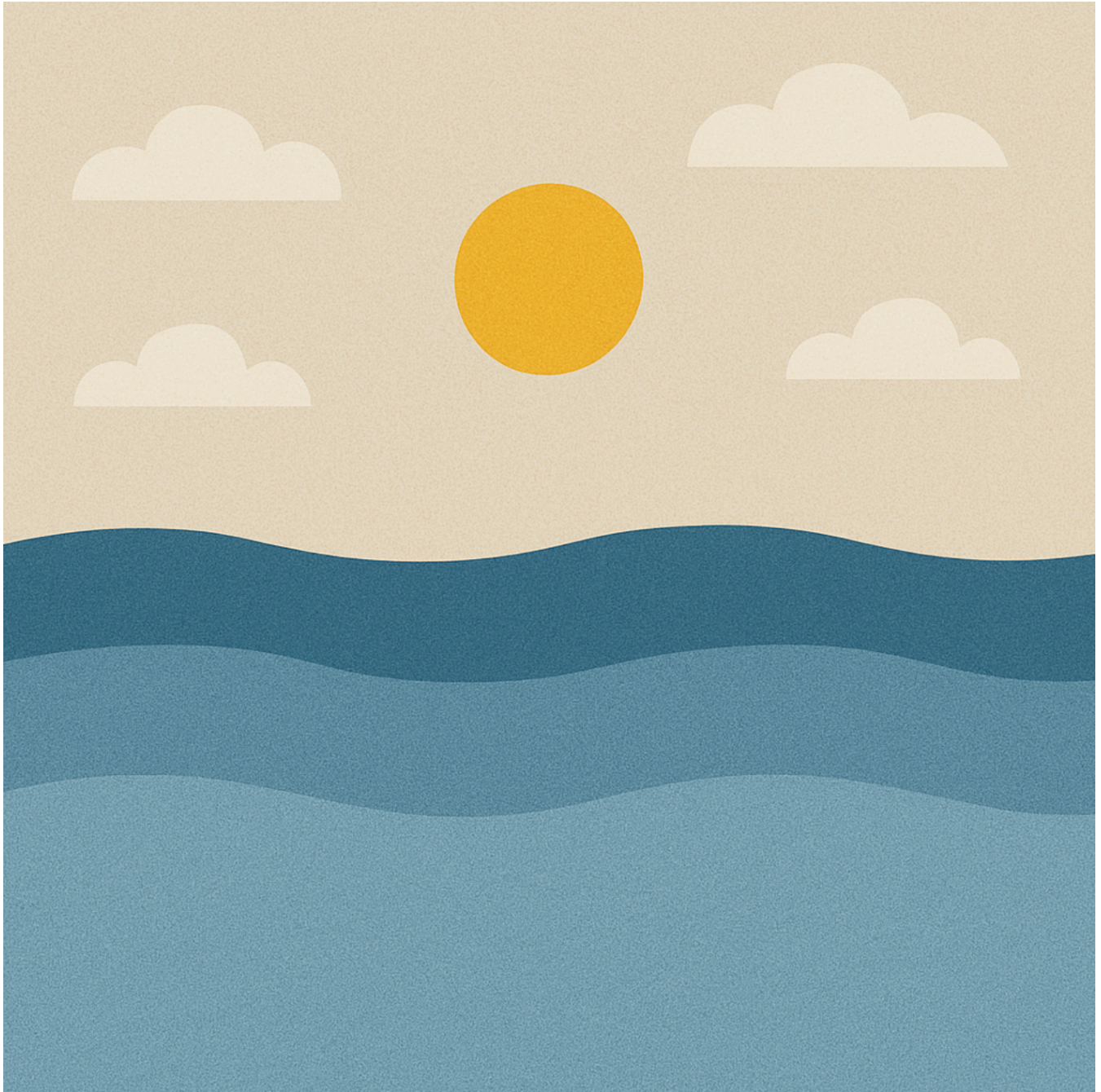
- Emotion: Embarrassment (5/10)
- Interpretation: *"They think I'm dumb."*

- Reality check: Maybe they were thinking about something else. Has your professor said anything supportive before?
- **Updated Thought:** *"One look doesn't define me. Might have nothing to do with me! I'll stay focused and ask for feedback if I need to."*

Try It Yourself

- Situation: What happened?
- Emotion (0–10):
- My story/assumption:
- Facts that support it:
- Facts that challenge it:
- Other possible explanations:
- Does my emotion fit the facts?
- How do I want to respond?

Session Eight: Emotion Regulation



PLEASED Self-Care Skills

Engage in Daily Self-care to Lower Vulnerability to Intense emotions

Taking care of your body is a sure way to also take care of your emotions. The PLEASED skill helps you build a lifestyle that supports your *emotional regulation* by tending to basic self-care needs that we all have. Remember the acronym PLEASED to build up your self-care.

P = Physical Health

Your emotional balance depends on how your body feels. Get regular checkups. Take prescribed meds. Follow through on physical therapy or chronic condition care.

Go to your campus health clinic if you're sick or need refills. Don't wait!

L = List Your Resources and Barriers

What helps you with self-care? What gets in the way?

Examples:

- **Resources:** Meal plan, campus gym, supportive friends
- **Barriers:** No time, low motivation, roommate drama

Work the dialectic: "I'm busy *and* I can still prioritize a brief workout."

E = Eat Balanced Meals

Food fuels your brain. Skipping meals or living on sugar and caffeine can tank your mood.

Even on a budget or in the dining hall, aim for protein + fiber + water. Keep easy staples in your dorm: oatmeal, peanut butter, protein bars, etc.

A = Avoid Drugs and Alcohol

Substances might seem like they help at first—but they almost always make emotions worse long-term. If you're struggling, talk to a counselor or support program on campus.

"I can be stressed and still stay sober," or "I can be sober and still have a blast!" You deserve to feel better in healthy ways.

S = Sleep Enough (but not too much)

Sleep resets your nervous system. Less than 6 hours or more than 10 can affect mood, focus, and motivation. Find the amount that's right for you!

Tips:

- Try to go to bed and wake up at roughly the same time.
- Use earplugs, white noise, or a sleep mask if needed.
- Don't scroll on your phone for an hour before bed.

E = Exercise Regularly

Physical activity boosts mood, lowers stress hormones, and builds resilience.

Examples:

- Walk to class mindfully
- Use your recreation center (or YouTube workouts in your room)
- Join an intramural or club sport

D = Do It Daily

Self-care isn't a "sometimes" thing. It's an *everyday* foundation for emotional regulation.

Try tracking your PLEASED habits on a tracking sheet or in a journal. You'll start to notice patterns and improvements.

Closing Thought:

You're less vulnerable to intense and emotions and they are easier to manage when you practice self-care. Prioritize taking care of yourself and you'll notice an amazing difference!

A Day in the Life Using PLEASED

See How Self-Care Fits Into a Student's Day

Meet Jada, a 20-year-old college sophomore balancing a full course load, a part-time job, and anxiety that tends to spike when she's overwhelmed.

8:00 AM – Sleep (S)

Jada wakes up feeling... okay. Not amazing, but not totally wrecked either. She made herself go to bed by 11:30 p.m. last night (even though she wanted to keep scrolling TikTok) and actually got 8 solid hours of sleep.

"Not hitting snooze five times feels like a win."

Better focus and energy = better emotional baseline for the day.

8:30 AM – Eat Balanced Meals (E)

She makes a quick breakfast: peanut butter toast, a banana, and coffee. She usually skips breakfast, but she's noticed her anxiety gets way worse on an empty stomach.

"Fuel first, freakout later."

Less dizziness, fewer jitters in her 9 a.m. stats class.

9:00 AM – Exercise (E)

Instead of zoning out on the bus, Jada walks the 15 minutes to class with her earbuds in. It's chilly, but the movement wakes her up. She listens to a funny podcast and laughs out loud once, which kind of makes her day already.

"Even a walk counts."

Movement + sunlight = mood boost.

11:00 AM – Avoid Substances (A)

After class, she passes some friends outside the student center vaping. It's tempting—she used to do it too—but she reminds herself how jittery and gross it made her feel.

"Not today, lungs."

Choosing not to self-sabotage keeps her emotionally steadier through the afternoon.

1:00 PM – Physical Health (P)

Jada goes to the student health clinic for a quick appointment about her iron levels. She almost canceled because of how busy she feels...but she's proud she followed through.

"Future me will thank me for this."

Investing in her health means fewer crashes and mood swings.

3:00 PM – List Resources and Barriers (L)

Between classes, Jada takes 5 minutes to journal in the library. She lists what's helping her lately (exercise, her roommate's support, therapy) and what's been tough (her tendency to procrastinate, stress about money).

"Writing it down helps me actually see it instead of just spin on it."

Awareness = power to problem-solve and seek support.

6:00 PM – Daily (D)

At the end of her day, Jada checks off her self-care tracker in her journal:

- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Eat
- ☐ Move
- ☐ Check-in
- ☐ Support
- ☐ No substances
- ☐ Small wins

"Today wasn't perfect, but I showed up for myself. That's enough."

She feels emotionally regulated, capable, and grounded—even though the day had some stress.

Reflecting on Jada's Day

Jada used her PLEASED skills like a low-key emotional toolkit. She didn't avoid hard feelings or eliminate stress, but because she had her foundation in place, she didn't spiral.

"When I take care of my body, my emotions don't run the show. I can feel stuff without it wrecking me."

Sleep Hygiene Ideas

Because You Can't Pour From an Empty Cup

College is a full-time juggling act: classes, jobs, group chats, TikToks, clubs, dorm drama, and the pressure to *be okay*. But there's one thing that affects all of it: Sleep.

This handout is your college-friendly guide to better sleep, better focus, and better emotional regulation.

Why Sleep Is a Big Deal

Sleep isn't a luxury. It's a non-negotiable for your brain and body.

When You Sleep Well:

- You remember more and learn faster
- Your emotions feel more manageable
- You're less anxious, irritable, or reactive
- Your immune system works better
- You make better decisions
- You feel more *you*

When You Don't:

- You're more likely to have mood swings
- You feel foggy and overwhelmed
- You may crave junk food and feel sluggish
- You struggle to focus in class or retain info
- You might lash out, shut down, or withdraw
- You lose motivation and burnout faster

Sleep debt is real. You *can't* truly "catch up" on weekends. It messes with your memory, your mood, and your motivation.

College-Proof Sleep Tips

Put these tips into action to sup up your rest!

Set a Sleep + Wake Time That Works for You

Aim for 7–9 hours most nights. It doesn't have to be 10 PM to 6 AM. Just pick a time that fits your schedule and try to stick to it. Your circadian rhythm (internal clock) loves consistency.

If your schedule varies a lot, keep your *wake-up* time consistent and your body will adjust better.

Create a Wind-Down Routine You Actually Like

Signal your brain that it's time to shut down. Consider it a mini self-care session because you deserve it. Ideas:

- Turn off overhead lights and use a lamp or fairy lights
- Listen to chill music (lo-fi, ambient, ASMR, white noise)
- Do a 5-minute stretch, face mask, or skincare ritual
- Journal a few thoughts to “dump your brain”
- Read a book (not a textbook) to ease mental fatigue

Protect Your Bed-Zone

Train your brain to associate your bed with calm and rest..not Canvas, YouTube, or doomscrolling. Your bed should feel like a retreat, not a battlefield.

- Use your desk, floor, or especially a common space for studying or snacking
- Try not to bring high-stress convos into bed
- Keep your sleep space clean and comfy. Treat it like your sanctuary

Tame the Tech

That blue light isn't just annoying. It literally suppresses melatonin. Try this to improve your sleep:

- Be a radical and set a “screens off” time at least 30 mins before bed
- Use a blue light filter (“Night Shift” or “Night Mode”) in the evening
- Avoid heavy emotional content (aka no break-up TikToks or drama threads) before bed

Balance Caffeine and Energy Drinks

That late-day latte or Celsius might help you cram, but it can steal your sleep.

- Stop caffeine by 2–3 PM if possible
- Try herbal teas or decaf if you need something cozy

- Remember that “tired but wired” is a sign your nervous system needs rest, not more stimulation

Don’t Sleep on Sleep Barriers

Ask yourself:

- Do I feel safe and comfortable in my space?
- Am I stressed, anxious, or overthinking at night?
- Do I struggle with nightmares or racing thoughts?

Try grounding skills (like 5-4-3-2-1), deep breathing, or mindfulness. If it’s persistent, talk to a counselor or campus therapist.

Quick Checklist: Is Your Sleep Hygiene Working?

- ☐ I go to bed and wake up around the same time most days
- ☐ I avoid screens and caffeine at night
- ☐ I have a wind-down routine to calm my body and brain
- ☐ I keep my bed for rest, not work or scrolling
- ☐ I don’t use substances to fall asleep
- ☐ I feel emotionally steadier after good sleep
- ☐ I feel rested most mornings, even if I’m not a morning person

If you didn’t check many boxes, don’t worry! Sleep is a skill, and it can *absolutely* be improved. Aim to check more boxes this week.

Closing Thought:

Sleep isn’t selfish. It’s essential. Even with the best habits, sleep can still be tough, especially if you’re dealing with depression, anxiety, or other symptoms and stressors. You deserve support. Continue to work on sleep hygiene *and* reach out to a medical provider or prescriber/psychiatrist.

Build Mastery

Grow Confidence by Doing Hard Things (One Step at a Time)

When you're feeling anxious, burned out, or down, even getting through the day can feel like a major challenge. The Build Mastery skill helps by encouraging you to do things, especially small, achievable tasks, that create a sense of accomplishment.

It's not about being perfect; it's about proving to yourself that you can show up and follow through, even when it's hard. Each time you take action, you build confidence, capability, and emotional strength. Over time, these consistent efforts help reduce anxiety, depression, and self-doubt, while increasing motivation and trust in yourself.

What Counts as Building Mastery?

The answer to that question depends on where you're at...

When you're struggling just to function...

- Getting out of bed on time
- Showering and brushing your teeth
- Eating a real meal
- Going to class even if you're feeling off
- Sending that email you've been avoiding
- Attending a study group even when you're anxious

These "basic" tasks are not basic when you're emotionally overwhelmed. They're brave.

When you're stable but want to grow...

- Turning in an assignment early (or on time)
- Speaking up in class even if your voice shakes
- Learning a new skill (e.g., Excel, coding, cooking)
- Applying for jobs, internships, or leadership roles
- Practicing DBT skills regularly, even when things are okay
- Asking for help from a professor, advisor, or TA

Mastery means stepping into growth even if it's uncomfortable.

When you're ready to level up...

- Launching a creative project (blog, art, video, event)
- Volunteering to lead a group or discussion
- Organizing your time and sticking to it
- Studying a subject outside your major, just for you
- Mentoring someone else or offering to tutor a classmate
- Working on long-term goals like financial literacy, public speaking, or self-discipline

Mastery is also continuing to take steps toward more challenging, longer-term goals.

Examples

- **Lena** was feeling anxious and disorganized. She started setting a goal of attending *all* her classes for one week and made a checklist. Every day she showed up was a win. After two weeks, her anxiety decreased, and she started tackling her assignments earlier.
- **Noah** struggled with imposter syndrome in his STEM classes. He started building mastery by going to office hours and asking one question per week, even if he felt awkward. It helped him engage, learn more, and feel like he belonged.
- **Sam** was feeling lonely and disconnected. He decided to start small by joining a group fitness class. He didn't love it at first, but it got him out of the dorm and introduced him to new people. Eventually, he made friends and gained confidence in social situations.

Closing Thought:

Building mastery isn't about being perfect. It's about being persistent. It's showing up for yourself, building trust with yourself, and proving that even on your hardest days...you are capable of doing hard things.

Build Mastery Worksheet

Pick Your Build Mastery Challenge

Step 1: Choose an Area of Life

Check off the areas where you want to feel more competent, confident, and in control:

- ☐ Academic success
- ☐ Time management
- ☐ Mental health
- ☐ Social confidence
- ☐ Self-care & routines
- ☐ Creativity & hobbies
- ☐ Career development

Step 2: Set a Realistic Goal...and Do It!

Start *just beyond* your comfort zone...something you can complete with effort.

Examples:

- "I will read one full chapter from my textbook before Friday."
- "I will go to the dining hall and eat a full meal today."
- "I will ask one question in class this week."
- "I will apply to one job or internship by Sunday night."
- "I will practice opposite action when I want to cancel plans."

My goal is:

Step 3: Track Progress & Celebrate Wins

Each time you follow through, *that's mastery*. Acknowledge it. Track it in a journal, planner, or notes app.

Examples of Weekly Mastery Wins:

- Went to class even though I had anxiety
- Sent resume to internship
- Cleaned my room (just a little!)

- Ate breakfast instead of skipping it
- Started a painting project I've been putting off

Build Positive Experience

Positives Add Up to Having a Satisfying Life

Life can be heavy sometimes with deadlines, relationship stress, imposter syndrome, burnout, anxiety. When you're overwhelmed, it might feel like joy and pleasure are out of reach or even not important right now.

But here's the thing: positive emotions aren't just nice to have. They're essential. They allow us to bounce back from stress, strengthen relationships, and fuel our sense of purpose and motivation. That's where this DBT skill comes in.

Build Positive Experience means intentionally creating moments of enjoyment, meaning, connection, and fun. Even when you don't feel like it. *Especially* when you don't feel like it.

What Counts as a Positive Experience?

Anything that sparks even a small amount of:

- Enjoyment
- Interest or curiosity
- Laughter or relaxation
- Meaning or connection
- A sense of peace, beauty, or awe

And here's the catch: You don't have to be "in the mood" to do it. Sometimes, you'll need to practice opposite action and *do the thing anyway*. That's where the magic happens. Positive feelings follow the behavior!

Ways to Build Positive Experience

Positive experiences can be broken down into three categories: Immediate, short-term, and long-term.

Immediate, Right Now, Positives

These are small, doable, readily accessible moments that can boost your mood on the spot.

Examples:

- Watch a funny TikTok or meme account
- Text a friend just to say hey

- Go for a short walk and feel the sun on your skin
- Play your favorite song (and maybe dance to it?)
- Sip something warm and comforting
- Pet an animal or watch animal videos
- Practice 5 minutes of gratitude or mindfulness
- Grab a snack and actually *enjoy* it without multitasking
- Doodle or do a puzzle while listening to music

These little wins don't seem like much but they *compound*.

Short-Term Positives (Plan It Out)

These are activities you plan for the next few days or week...things that give you something to look forward to. Note that if you schedule it and/or put it on your calendar, you're more likely to follow through.

Examples:

- Plan a movie night or coffee date with a friend
- Join a student org that aligns with your interests
- Cook a new recipe or bake something fun
- Schedule time to play guitar, draw, or write
- Sign up for a workout class or intramural sport
- Make a playlist for a specific mood
- Plan an "aesthetic" study session at a café or library
- Schedule a tech-free hour to read, rest, or chill

Long-Term Positives (Life Goals + Purpose)

These are your values-based goals...activities that take time but give you deep satisfaction and personal meaning. Think of these as the "big picture" positives that help you create a life worth living.

Examples:

- Start building a portfolio for your dream career
- Volunteer or get involved in a cause you care about
- Work toward applying to grad school or an internship
- Deepen your spiritual or mindfulness practice

- Learn a new language, craft, or musical instrument
- Take steps toward financial independence
- Develop relationship skills or work on assertive communication
- Build a morning or evening routine that sets you up for success

Common Barriers to Building Positive Experience and Strategies to Overcome Them

Even though positive experiences sound great, *they're not always easy to pursue*. Here are some common roadblocks and ways around them:

- **Barrier:** I don't deserve to feel good.
 - **Strategy:** Try Nonjudgmental Stance and Encouragement. Everyone, including you, deserves joy.
- **Barrier:** I'm too tired/anxious/depressed.
 - **Strategy:** Start small. Pick the *lowest-effort* enjoyable activity.
- **Barrier:** What if it doesn't help?
 - **Strategy:** Try anyway. Focus on the *experience*, not the outcome.
- **Barrier:** Good moments don't last.
 - **Strategy:** That's okay. They're still worth having. Good things are real, even if they're short.
- **Barrier:** I don't know what I like anymore.
 - **Strategy:** Explore! Try new things and notice what sparks interest or peace.

How to Start: A Daily Positive Experience Plan

Name **one** thing from each category below that you will do today:

- Do one small pleasure
- Connect with someone supportive
- Do something interesting or meaningful
- Plan something to look forward to
- Reflect with gratitude or mindfulness

For a bonus, try tracking how your mood changes before and after. You might surprise yourself.

Closing Thought:

Positive experiences *don't cancel out* hard ones, but they *balance* them. They remind you that joy, connection, and meaning still exist... even during hard seasons. Building positive experiences is not selfish or trivial. It's healing. It's empowering. It's how you build a life that feels worth showing up for, even on the rough days.

Day in the Life: Balancing Mastery & Positive Experience

See How Lila Juggles School, Mental Health, and Everything in Between

There is a natural, dialectical balance between Build Mastery and Build Positive Experience, and we need both:

- Too much *mastery* without *positive experience* leads to burnout, pressure, and perfectionism.
- Too much *positive experience* without *mastery* might feel aimless, hollow, or disconnected from growth.
- Together, they form the foundation for a life that feels both capable and satisfying.

See how **Lia** strikes this balance:

9:00 AM — Morning Start (Build Mastery)

Lila's alarm goes off and she *really* wants to stay in bed. But she remembers she set a goal to get to her 9:30 class all week. She pushes through, showers, grabs an energy bar, and heads out.

Mastery moment: Doing something hard and following through with a goal. Lila thinks: "I didn't want to go, but I did it. Proud."

11:30 AM — Study Group (Both Skills!)

She meets her psych study group in the library. They quiz each other and talk about their upcoming exam. They also end up laughing over memes and talking about their favorite podcasts.

Mastery: Working toward a good grade, learning the content

Positive Experience: Connection, laughter, shared interests

3:00 PM — Solo Chill Time (Build Positive Experience)

After class, Lila feels tired and overstimulated. Instead of pushing herself to keep going, she heads to the campus café, puts on lo-fi beats, and journals for a bit. She writes about three things that went well today, even if they were small.

Positive Experience: Recharging without guilt, gratitude practice
"I don't always have to be productive to take care of myself."

6:00 PM — Cooking Dinner (Build Mastery)

Lila's been trying to cook more instead of ordering takeout. She makes a simple veggie stir-fry while watching a video tutorial. It turns out pretty decent.

Mastery: Building life skills, following through with intentions. "Every time I do this, it gets a little easier."

9:00 PM — Movie Night with Roommates (Build Positive Experience)

They pick a cheesy comedy and laugh so hard they cry. Lila forgets about her worries for a while. They eat popcorn and stay up too late talking about life.

Positive Experience: Connection, laughter, relaxation. "*I needed that.*"

11:30 PM — Reflect & Reset

Before bed, Lila reflects on her skills use and thinks about:

- **Mastery** moments (going to class, cooking dinner)
- **Positive Experiences** (movie night, journaling)

She realizes she didn't get everything done, but she took care of her mind *and* moved toward her goals. That's the balance. And that's the win.

Daily Mastery & Positive Experience Tracker

Balance Productivity With Joy For a Satisfying Life

Date:

Build Mastery: What did you do today that gave you a sense of accomplishment, control, or growth?

Mastery Activity	Difficulty (1–10)	How It Made Me Feel

Mood Before Activities (0 = worst, 10 = best):

Mood After Activities (0 = worst, 10 = best):

Thoughts on the Activities:

Build Positive Experience: What did you do that brought you joy, connection, or relaxation?

Positive Activity	Was It Planned or Spontaneous?	How It Made Me Feel
	<input type="checkbox"/> Planned <input type="checkbox"/> Spontaneous	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Planned <input type="checkbox"/> Spontaneous	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Planned <input type="checkbox"/> Spontaneous	

Mood Before Activities (0 = worst, 10 = best):

Mood After Activities (0 = worst, 10 = best):

Thoughts on the Activities:

Opposite-to-Emotion (Opposite Action)

Acting Against the Pull of Emotion

Sometimes emotions take the wheel, and suddenly, we're doing things that make us feel worse instead of better. DBT has a phrase for this: *Emotions love themselves!* That means emotions tend to feed behaviors that *match* them: what we call **mood-congruent behaviors**. The outcome is that moods and mood-congruent behaviors feed on each other, and negative moods persist.

Examples:

- Feeling sad? You might isolate in your dorm and skip class.
- Feeling anxious? You might avoid sending that email or going to a club meeting.
- Feeling angry? You might fire off a text you later regret.
- Feeling shame? You might want to hide out from others.

These actions feel like the path of least resistance in the moment, but they often intensify the emotion, trap you in it longer, and create more problems.

That's where Opposite-to-Emotion (also called Opposite Action) comes in. It means doing the opposite of what your emotion is pulling you to do...not to invalidate your emotions, but to *free you from their grip* when they're unhelpful or overblown.

Let's walk through some common emotions and explore how Opposite Action can work in real life:

Anxiety or Fear

Mood-congruent behavior: Avoiding, procrastinating, withdrawing

Opposite action: *Approach the thing you're afraid of (as long as it's not actually dangerous).*

Examples:

- You're scared to speak up in class → Raise your hand and contribute anyway.
- You're nervous about joining a club → Show up for one meeting just to observe.
- You're anxious about an exam → Go to office hours or study group instead of avoiding it.

Reflection:

Think of a time when you approached something you were anxious about. How did it go?

What fear are you avoiding right now that could benefit from an Opposite Action?

Sadness or Depression

Mood-congruent behavior: Isolating, staying in bed, avoiding responsibilities

Opposite action: *Get active and connect with others even if you don't feel like it.*

Examples:

- You're feeling down → Text a friend and suggest grabbing coffee.
- You want to skip class → Go anyway, even if all you do is show up and listen.
- You've lost interest in everything → Try a low-effort activity you used to enjoy, like journaling or taking a walk.

Reflection:

What are a few low-effort actions you could take when sadness starts to take over?

Who can you reach out to, even if it's just for a quick check-in?

Anger

Mood-congruent behavior: Snapping, blaming, venting impulsively

Opposite action: *Gently walk away, breathe, or respond with calm instead of attack.*

Examples:

- Your roommate leaves dishes everywhere → Instead of yelling, set a respectful boundary.
- You feel judged in class → Pause before reacting; journal or talk it out with someone safe.
- You're heated after reading something online → Log off and go move your body instead.

Reflection:

What helps you cool down when you're angry?

What are some “calm exits” you can practice when you're getting triggered?

Guilt

There are **two types of guilt**, and they call for **different opposite actions**.

1. **Justified guilt** (You actually did something that violated your values.)
Opposite action: *Acknowledge, apologize, make amends, and learn from it.*
2. **Unjustified guilt** (You feel guilty for taking care of yourself or setting boundaries.)
Opposite action: *Keep doing the thing that causes the guilt—over and over—until the guilt fades.*

Examples:

- You snapped at someone when you were stressed → Apologize, take accountability, and reflect.
- You skipped a friend's party because you needed sleep → Remind yourself that taking care of your body is valid.

Reflection:

What's one thing you felt guilty for recently? Was the guilt justified or not?

What would be a wise and opposite action in response?

Shame

Mood-congruent behavior: Hiding, silence, isolation

Opposite action: *Talk about what happened with someone safe. Step back into connection.*

Examples:

- You bombed a test and feel “dumb” → Share it with a friend or mentor who can support you.
- You regret a social mistake → Acknowledge it, laugh it off, and allow yourself to be human.

- You're ashamed of your mental health struggle → Talk to a therapist or trusted person about it.

Reflection:

Who in your life feels emotionally safe to talk to about shame?

What small step can you take to come out of hiding?

Low Motivation

Mood-congruent behavior: Doing nothing, procrastinating

Opposite action: *Just start. Do something small. Action creates momentum.*

Examples:

- Don't want to write your paper → Open the doc and type one sentence.
- Can't get out of bed → Sit up, put your feet on the floor, and drink water.
- No energy to socialize → Send a quick text to someone you like.

Reflection:

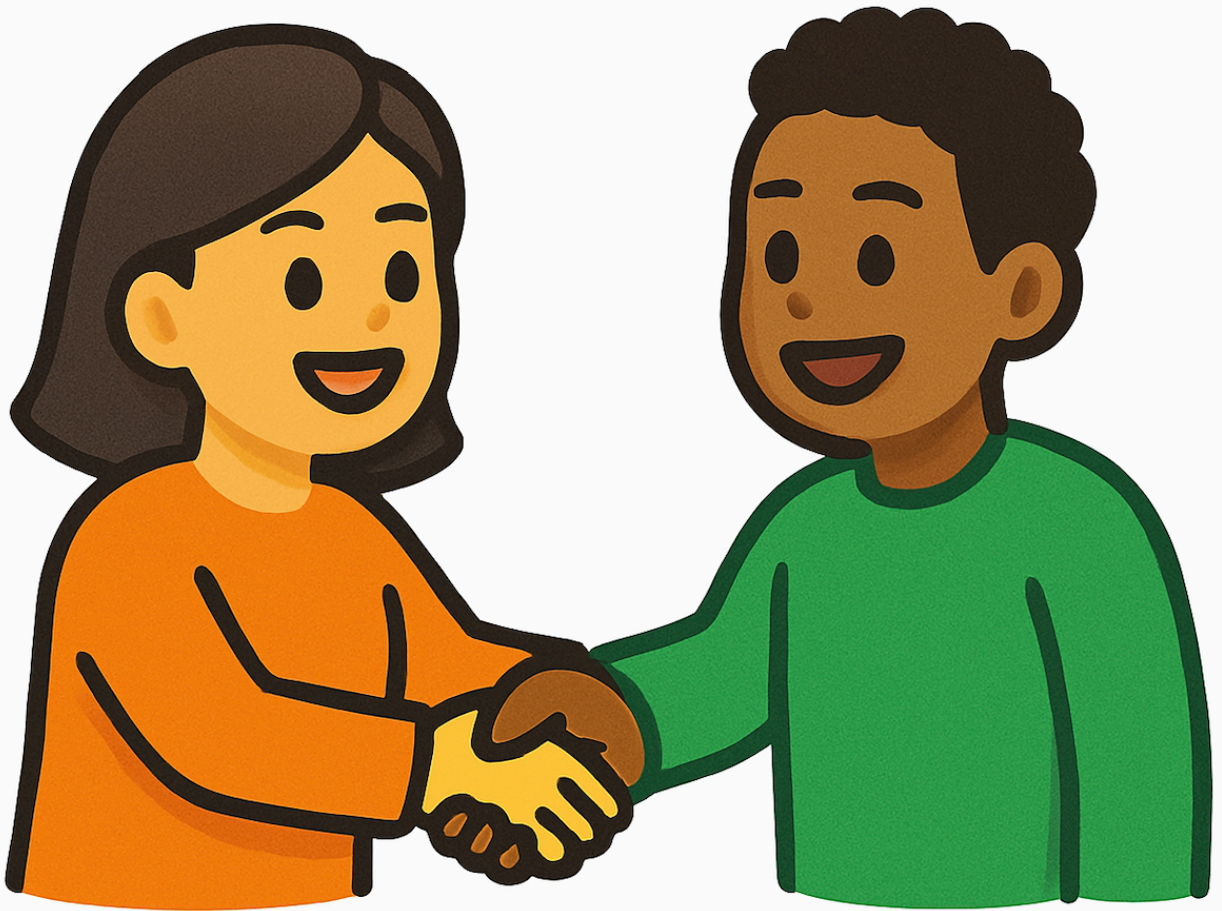
List 3 things you could "just do" this week even if you don't feel motivated.

How do you usually feel after doing something hard?

Closing Thought:

Opposite-to-Emotion doesn't mean *faking it* or ignoring your feelings. It means choosing behavior that helps you break free from being stuck. Sometimes your emotions are helpful, *but when they're not, your behavior can lead the way to feeling better.*

Session Nine: Interpersonal Effectiveness



Intro Interpersonal Effectiveness

Building Self-Respect and Stronger Relationships While Meeting Want and Needs

Navigating relationships in college, whether it's with roommates, professors, friends, partners, or coworkers, can be stressful. You might feel unsure about how to speak up, say no, or ask for what you need without hurting the relationship or feeling like you're giving too much of yourself.

Why Interpersonal Effectiveness Matters

College is full of moments where effective communication makes a difference. Examples include group projects, tough conversations, setting boundaries, and asking for support. Interpersonal Effectiveness skills give you tools to handle these situations with more confidence. You'll learn how to balance your goals, keep your relationships strong, and stay true to yourself, even when things get uncomfortable.

Interpersonal Effective does this by teaching you how to balance three goals in any interaction:

Self-Respect Effectiveness: How do I want to feel about myself after this?

This is about staying true to your values and integrity, and making sure that when the conversation ends, you're still proud of how you handled it even if the outcome isn't perfect. We use the skill **FAST** to support self-respect.

Relationship Effectiveness: How do I want the other person to feel about me after this?

This focuses on connection, kindness, and trust. You don't have to "people please,"; it's about being open, warm, and validating. We use **GIVE** skills for to build and maintain healthy and caring relationships.

Goal Effectiveness: What do I want or need from this interaction?

This is where you're assertive and make sure your needs are expressed clearly. Maybe you need more time on a project, want to end a friendship that no longer feels healthy, or need to say "no" to a commitment. We use **DEAR MAN** skills here.

The key to strong, healthy relationships is balance. You want to assert your needs confidently with DEAR MAN, show care and connection with GIVE, and protect your self-respect and values with FAST.

Think of these three skills as a triangle in which each one supports the others. GIVE strengthens your connection with others, DEAR MAN helps you ask for what you need, and FAST (which we'll dive into next) helps you walk away from interactions feeling proud of how you handled yourself.

When you use all three together, your relationships become more honest, respectful, and rewarding for both you and the people around you.

FAST Skill

Stay True to Yourself and Build Self-Respect

When you use the FAST skills, you're not trying to win or control the other person. Instead, you're showing up in a way that aligns with your values and identity, even when it's hard.

When you use FAST, you stay rooted in your identity. You stop being driven by fear, guilt, or the need to please others and instead act in ways that feel right to you.

You won't always get what you want in every interaction but you'll walk away knowing you showed up with integrity. And that's a long-term win.

What does FAST stand for?

F – Be Fair

Be fair to *yourself* and *others*. Don't put yourself last all the time, but don't bulldoze over people either. Try to understand different perspectives and avoid extremes.

Examples:

- You and your roommate disagree about the thermostat. Instead of blowing up or giving in every time, you talk it through and try to find middle ground.
- You didn't get chosen for a group project team. Instead of assuming it was personal, you remind yourself of other factors that may have been involved and avoid trash-talking the group.

Reflection:

When are you hardest on yourself?

How could being more fair to yourself *and* others change the way you handle difficult situations?

A – No Unnecessary Apologies

Stop apologizing for things that don't require one like existing, expressing your feelings or having boundaries. Over-apologizing erodes self-respect.

Examples:

- You say “sorry” for asking a question in class...don’t. You’re allowed to ask questions.
- You feel guilty for saying no to a request that you’re not able to (or don’t want to) do. It’s okay to say “no” without feeling like you owe someone an explanation or an apology.

Reflection:

Do you say “sorry” when you’re not actually sorry?

What’s something you can stop apologizing for this week?

S – Stick to Your Values

Don’t bend your values just to make someone else comfortable or to avoid conflict. Know what’s important to you, and stand in it respectfully.

Examples:

- You’re asked to join in making fun of a classmate but you leave the conversation instead.
- You’re dating someone who keeps pushing your boundaries. You remind yourself that your comfort and safety matter, and you decide to speak up or walk away.

Reflection:

What values matter most to you right now? (Kindness? Honesty? Justice? Ambition? Balance?)

What’s one value you’ve been ignoring that you want to prioritize again?

T – Be Truthful

Be honest, clear, and accountable. That doesn’t mean “brutal honesty” that hurts others, but rather not lying, exaggerating, or being manipulative to get what you want.

Examples:

- You forgot to submit your part of the group project. Instead of making an excuse, you own up and commit to getting it done.
- A friend asks if you’re okay and you’re *not*. You tell them, “*Honestly, I’m having a rough week.*” That builds connection.

Reflection:

Why is it sometimes easier to lie or avoid the truth?

How would telling the truth (kindly) improve your self-respect and your relationships?

FAST Self-Check Worksheet

Reflect on Interactions to Build Self-Respect

Use this worksheet after a conversation, conflict, or social situation, especially one that left you with strong emotions or questions about how it went. This tool helps you evaluate if you stayed aligned with your values and treated yourself with respect.

1. Describe the Interaction

What happened? Who was involved? What was the context (text, email, in-person, social media)?

2. Fair — Was I fair to myself *and* the other person?

- Did I acknowledge my own needs and feelings?
- Did I treat the other person with respect, even if I disagreed?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ Somewhat
 - ☐ Not really

What would fairness have looked like here?

3. Apologies — Did I apologize unnecessarily?

- Did I say “sorry” for something that didn’t require it?
- Was I overly self-blaming, even if I didn’t do anything wrong?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ Somewhat
 - ☐ Not really

What would a confident (and appropriate) response have looked like instead?

4. Stick to Values — Did I stay true to what matters to me?

- Did I compromise my values to avoid discomfort or please someone else?

- Did I stand up for something important, even if it was awkward?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ Somewhat
 - ☐ Not really

What value(s) was I honoring or ignoring?

5. Truth — Was I honest and real (without being harsh)?

- Did I avoid lying, exaggerating, or being passive-aggressive?
- Did I express myself in a clear and authentic way?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ Somewhat
 - ☐ Not really

What helped me stay truthful or what made it hard to be?

6. Self-Respect Score

On a scale of 0–10, how much self-respect do I feel looking back on how I handled this?

0 = I completely betrayed myself

10 = I stayed rooted in who I want to be

Score: _____/10

7. What I'd Do Differently (or Keep Doing)

What did you learn from this interaction? What would you repeat or change next time?

Values Clarification Tool

Know What Matters to You, So You Can Act From It

This tool helps you identify your core values so you can align your behavior with them. Knowing your values makes it easier to use FAST, set boundaries, and make meaningful decisions.

Step 1: Circle Your Top 10 Values (or List Ones Not Listed)

Accountability	Independence
Authenticity	Joy
Adventure	Justice
Ambition	Kindness
Balance	Leadership
Belonging	Learning
Compassion	Loyalty
Connection	Mindfulness
Creativity	Open-mindedness
Curiosity	Patience
Discipline	Peace
Diversity	Perseverance
Excellence	Respect
Fairness	Responsibility
Faith/Spirituality	Security
Family	Self-Care
Freedom	Service
Growth	Stability
Health	Success
Honesty	Trust
Humility	Wisdom

Step 2: Narrow It Down to 3–5 Core Values

These are the values you want to guide your decisions, relationships, and goals.

Core Value #1:

Core Value #2:

Core Value #3:

(Optional) Core Value #4:

(Optional) Core Value #5:

Step 3: Reflection Questions

1. Which value(s) do I feel most connected to right now? Why?
2. When I'm struggling in a situation, which value(s) could help guide me?
3. What's one way I can honor one of my core values this week?
4. What gets in the way of living out my values? What helps me return to them?
5. What specific behaviors can demonstrate my values to others?

Session Ten

Interpersonal Effectiveness



GIVE

How to Keep and Strengthen Relationships

The **GIVE** skill helps you build and maintain healthy relationships, whether with friends, classmates, professors, roommates, partners, or family. These skills help others feel *seen*, *heard*, and *respected*, which increases trust and closeness. The acronym GIVE stands for:

G – Genuine

Be your authentic self. Pretending, people-pleasing, or trying to impress usually backfires or creates anxiety. When you're honest about who you are, people connect with the real you.

Example:

You're at a campus event where you don't know anyone. Instead of pretending to be super confident, you say, *"I get nervous in crowds, but I'm really trying to meet new people."* That honesty can spark real connection.

Reflection:

What holds you back from being genuine? What would it look like to show up as your full self?

I – Interested

Show interest in others. Even if the topic isn't thrilling at first, being open and engaged shows people they matter. Make eye contact, have open non-verbal communication, and be an active listener.

Example:

Your lab partner is excited about their new internship, and you're exhausted. Still, you lean in and ask, *"What will you be doing there?"* That small gesture can mean a lot.

Reflection:

How do you know when someone is interested in you? How can you show that to others more often?

V – Validate

Let people know their feelings and experiences make sense even if you don't agree. To validate means you reflect what they are feeling, thinking, and

experiencing non-judgementally, *and how it makes sense from their perspective.*

Example:

A friend is upset about a bad test score. Even if they didn't study much, you say, *"That sucks. I know you wanted to do well."* Validation doesn't mean approval...it means acknowledgment.

Reflection:

Who in your life could use more validation from you? How might that improve your connection?

E – Easy Manner

Be calm, kind, and approachable. Use lightness or humor when appropriate. Don't bring more intensity than needed.

Example:

You're late for a group study session. You could say, *"Ugh, sorry I'm late. Today was chaos,"* with a smile. That tone can defuse tension and reset the vibe.

Reflection:

What makes it hard for you to keep an easy manner? What could help you relax in social situations?

DEAR MAN

The DBT System for Assertiveness

There are times in college when you need to speak up whether it's asking for help, setting a boundary, or saying "no." But let's be real that doing that can feel awkward or even scary. You might worry about coming off as rude, being rejected, or causing conflict.

That's where the DBT skill **DEAR MAN** comes in. It's a powerful tool to help you communicate clearly and confidently in situations like asking for an extension, turning down peer pressure, setting limits with a partner or friend, or navigating roommate drama. The DEAR MAN acronym stands for:

D – Describe

State the facts, not your judgments. At this step you share the details that sets up the interaction.

Example:

"I've noticed we've had three group meetings, and I've been the one putting together most of the slides and writing."

E – Express

Share how you feel, or your point of view, using "I" statements.

Example:

"I'm feeling really overwhelmed and kind of frustrated. I've got two midterms this week, and it's been a lot to juggle."

A – Assert

Say clearly what you want or need.

Example:

"I'd like us to divide the project more evenly. Could one of you take the lead on the conclusion and the other on the visual design?"

R – Reinforce

Explain the benefits for them (and the group).

Example:

"If we each take a fair part, it'll be easier for everyone and we'll all be less stressed at the end."

M – Mindful

Stay on track. Don't let the conversation derail.

Example:

If someone says, *"Well, you didn't complain before,"* respond with:
"That's fair, and right now I'd like to focus on how we can move forward with the project."

A – Appear Confident

Use a steady tone, eye contact, and assertive body language—even if you feel nervous.

Example:

Sit up straight, breathe deeply, and speak clearly. Confidence can be practiced like any other skill.

N – Negotiate

When you're stuck, be open to compromise. Not everything is all-or-nothing, so be willing to give to get. Another strategy to try when things aren't moving is **Turn the Tables**. This strategy invites the other person into coming up with a solution. It sounds like, *"I want to be fair and also need this resolved...what do you think would work?"*

Example:

"I'm open to other ideas as to how to evenly split up the remaining work. What are your ideas?"

And remember...DEAR MAN doesn't guarantee you'll get what you want, but it gives you the best shot while maintaining respect for yourself and others.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet

Using FAST, GIVE, and DEAR MAN in One Situation

Step 1: Define the Situation

What's the interaction or challenge you're facing? (*Briefly describe the situation, who's involved, and what's going on.*)

FAST – Self-Respect Effectiveness

How can you stay true to yourself in this situation?

F – Be FAIR

How can you be fair to *yourself* and the *other person*?

A – Don't Apologize Unnecessarily

Did you say sorry when you didn't need to?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how could you respond more assertively next time?

S – Stick to Your Values

What 2–3 values do you want to act from in this situation?

T – Be TRUTHFUL

How will you be honest without being hurtful or overly blunt?

GIVE – Relationship Effectiveness

How can you protect or improve the relationship while addressing the issue?

Who is the other person, and what's the situation? (*e.g., roommate about chores, professor about a deadline*)

G – Be GENUINE

How will you show up authentically?

I – Show INTEREST

How can you stay present and engaged with the other person?

V – Use VALIDATION

What can you say to validate their feelings or perspective?

E – Use an EASY MANNER

How will you keep the tone approachable (e.g., smile, humor, relaxed body language)?

DEAR MAN – Objective Effectiveness

How can you clearly and effectively ask for what you need?

D – Describe

What are the facts?

E – Express

What do you feel?

A – Assert

What do you want or need?

R – Reinforce

Why should they say yes? (*What's in it for them?*)

M – Stay Mindful

What's your main goal?

A – Appear Confident

What will you do to project confidence? (*e.g., tone of voice, posture, eye contact*)

N – Negotiate

Where are you flexible?

Interpersonal Effectiveness Role-Play Scenarios

Use a combination of FAST, GIVE, and DEAR MAN in each situation.

- **Roommate conflict:** They're leaving dishes everywhere, and you want a cleaning schedule.
- **Professor boundary:** You need an extension on a paper without apologizing excessively.
- **Group project:** You're doing all the work and want the team to step up.
- **Friend pressure:** A friend keeps asking you to go out when you want to stay in and study.
- **Family boundary:** A parent keeps texting during your classes.
- **Romantic relationship:** You need more alone time without making your partner feel rejected.
- **Club disagreement:** You're part of a student group and disagree with the leader's decisions.
- **Classmate conflict:** Someone in your class keeps interrupting you in discussions.
- **Request for help:** You need a classmate to explain a concept you're struggling with.
- **Advisor conversation:** You're feeling unsupported and want more feedback or check-ins.

A Day in the Life Vignette: Balancing FAST, GIVE, and DEAR MAN

See Alex Use Interpersonal Skills in a Typical Day

8:00 AM – Making a Decision to Attend Class

Alex wakes up feeling overwhelmed. They remember their values, balance and responsibility, and remind themselves not to skip class (FAST).

10:30 AM – Class Discussion

A peer makes a dismissive comment about Alex's opinion. Instead of snapping back, Alex calmly says, *"I'd like to finish my thought"* (FAST + DEAR MAN).

12:00 PM – Group Project Meeting

Alex notices they've taken on the most work. They say, *"I noticed I've been doing a lot of the writing. I'm feeling stretched thin, and I'd like us to split the work more evenly. If we all pitch in, the quality will be better for everyone"* (DEAR MAN).

2:00 PM – Coffee with a Friend

The friend shares they failed a midterm. Alex listens, nods, and says, *"That really sucks. I know you worked hard, and it's okay to be disappointed"* (GIVE).

5:00 PM – Professor Office Hours

Alex asks for clarification on feedback without apologizing. *"I'm trying to improve, and I'd love to better understand your comments"* (FAST + DEAR MAN).

9:00 PM – Text from Partner

Their partner says, *"Let's hang out tonight."* Alex feels exhausted. They reply, *"I really want to see you, but I need to rest and reset tonight. Can we plan something for tomorrow?"* (FAST + DEAR MAN).

Alex ends the day feeling emotionally balanced and proud of the respectful, assertive, and kind ways they navigated their interactions.

Session 11

Behavior and Solution Analysis



Behavior & Solution Analysis (aka Chain Analysis)

Solve Problems by Establishing the Links and Breaking the Chain

In this session you will learn how to use **Behavior and Solution Analysis** (also known as *Chain Analysis*) to understand why problems happen and how to prevent them in the future. This method helps you “zoom out” and see the full picture of what led to a behavior, what you were hoping to get out of it, and how you can respond more skillfully next time with your skills.

The goal is not to blame yourself. Instead, it’s about curiosity and breaking things down so you can learn, grow, and take control of your future actions. By the end of this session, you will be able to identify the sequence of events (the “chain”) that led to a problem, recognize where you could have inserted DBT skills to change the outcome, and build an action plan for next time.

Why Behavior and Solution Analysis Matters

College life is full of stressors: deadlines, exams, roommate issues, dating ups and downs, financial pressures, and the push for independence. When things go wrong, like skipping class, procrastinating on an assignment, or blowing up at someone, it can feel like the behavior “just happened.”

Behavior and Solution Analysis shows you that behaviors don’t come out of nowhere. They are the end of a chain of events, thoughts, emotions, urges, and situations. By mapping out the links, you can see where skills could have been used to break the chain. This tool is essential for building self-awareness and creating real solutions.

How to Do Behavior and Solution Analysis

Step 1: Describe the Problem Behavior

Start by naming the behavior you want to understand. Be specific and concrete.

- Instead of “*I’m lazy,*” say: “*I procrastinated on my history paper until the night before it was due.*” (Behavior = Procrastination)
- Instead of “*I’m a bad roommate,*” say: “*I yelled at my roommate when she borrowed my headphones without asking.*” (Behavior = Yelling)

Being specific moves you away from judgment and toward problem-solving.

Step 2: Identify the Prompting Event

What was the spark that set things in motion? The prompting event is not the whole fire, just the trigger.

- *"I saw my ex post on Instagram."*
- *"My professor gave me critical feedback in front of the class."*
- *"I felt stressed by finals."*

Step 3: List Vulnerabilities

Before the prompting event even happened, you may have been in a state that made the problem more likely. Common vulnerabilities include:

- Lack of sleep
- Skipping meals
- Stress overload
- Mental health symptoms
- Feeling overwhelmed or isolated

These vulnerabilities don't cause the behavior, but they set the stage for it.

Step 4: Build the Chain (Link-by-Link)

Now go moment by moment leading up to the behavior:

- **Thoughts:** What went through your mind?
- **Emotions:** What feelings showed up?
- **Physical sensations:** What did you notice in your body?
- **Urges:** What impulses or cravings did you feel?
- **Situational factors:** What was happening around you?
- **Actions:** What did you do, step by step?

The point is to see the sequence clearly, as though you are replaying a movie of what happened.

Step 5: Identify the Consequences

After the problem behavior, what happened? Notice both the short-term and long-term results.

- Short-term: *"I felt relief by avoiding the assignment."*
- Long-term: *"I submitted sloppy work and felt ashamed."*

Ask yourself: Did I feel better at first, then worse later? Did it affect my relationships, grades, or self-respect?

Step 6: Insert Missing Skills

This is where growth happens. At each link in the chain, ask: *"What DBT skill(s) could I have used here?"* Every link is an opportunity to insert a skill!

Step 7: Make a Plan

Finally, identify which skills you will use proactively next time. Build an action plan you can actually carry out.

Example: Ghosting a Group Project

Let's examine another example with skills mapped in:

- **Problem Behavior:** I ignored my group project and ghosted my group chat for three days.
- **Prompting Event:** Frustrating group meeting where I felt dismissed.
- **Vulnerabilities:** Only 4 hours of sleep, skipped lunch, behind in another class, high social anxiety
- **Chain:** Meeting → idea dismissed → thought *"They don't respect me"* → embarrassment → urge to avoid → left meeting early → turned off chat → ignored group → guilt and fear → missed next meeting.
- **Consequences:** Short-term relief, long-term guilt, strained relationships, possible grade impact, self-respect damage.
- **Skills to Use and Plan:** List the skills you think would have worked at each step:

Worksheet: Behavior and Solution Analysis

Use This Worksheet to Problem-Solve Behaviors

Describe the problem behavior:

- What did you do?
- How did you do it?
- Where did you do it?
- When did you do it?
- Who else was involved?
- Skills to use at this step:

Identify what was happening before the problem behavior:

- What event set off the problem behavior?
- What were the events leading up to the event that set off the problem behavior?
- Which of the events leading up to the problem behavior were the most important?
- What were you feeling prior to and during the problem behavior?
- What were you thinking prior to and during the problem behavior?
- What want(s) and/or need(s) were you trying to meet with the problem behavior?
- At what point did you decide to engage in the problem behavior?
- Skills to use at this step:

Identify the consequences of the problem behavior:

- How have you benefited from the problem behavior (in the short-term and long-term)?
- How have you and others been hurt by the problem behavior (in the short-term and long-term)?
- Following the problem behavior, what changes happened with your:
 - Emotions:
 - Thoughts:
 - Physical sensations:
 - Behaviors:
 - Events around you:
 - The way others treat you:
- Skills to use at this step:

Review and summary:

- What DBT skills could you use next time when similar events take place?
- What is the earliest point at which you could use skills?
- What consequences (or potential consequences) to the problem behavior will help you to control or avoid that behavior in the future?
- How can you remove access (i.e., burn the bridge) to the problem behavior?
- What can you do to get your wants and/or needs met effectively that will not hurt you, others, and/or your treatment?

Closing Thoughts

By practicing Behavior and Solution Analysis, you are learning to step out of autopilot and into awareness. Instead of beating yourself up when things go wrong, you can now trace the steps that led there, see the vulnerabilities that made the problem more likely, and identify where your skills could have changed the outcome.

Each time you build a chain and insert solutions, you strengthen your ability to respond with intention rather than impulse. This process transforms mistakes into learning opportunities and helps you approach future challenges with greater clarity, resilience, and confidence. In college, and in life, you can't always control the stressors that come your way, but with this tool, you can take control of how you respond.

Session 12: Recap, Building A DBT Toolbox, and Celebrating Success



Recap, Building A DBT Toolbox, and Celebrating Success

Pack Up Your Toolbox and Celebrate Your Success

This final session brings everything together. Over the past eleven sessions, you have learned the full set of DBT skills, applied them to real-life college challenges, and practiced weaving them into your day-to-day routines.

The purpose of today's session is to look back, notice your growth, and create a plan for carrying these skills forward. You will leave with a personalized "Skills Toolbox" that highlights your most useful strategies, as well as a clear sense of how to keep practicing beyond this program.

Looking Back: The Journey of 12 Sessions

Think back to Session 1, when the group began. You were introduced to DBT and to the possibility that you could both accept yourself as you are *and* make meaningful changes in your life.

Since then, you've worked through each DBT skills module, and most recently, Behavior and Solution Analysis. Each week added a new layer, giving you a fuller picture of how DBT skills can support you in managing stress, building healthier relationships, and staying on track academically.

Along the way, you've practiced using skills in situations that matter: sitting through exam anxiety without panicking, handling conflicts with roommates more calmly, managing procrastination before deadlines, and standing up for yourself with professors, parents, or friends. These are not just classroom exercises: they are real-life practices that build resilience.

What's most important is not that you used the skills perfectly, but that you tried them at all. Skills practice is like building muscle: the more repetitions, the stronger you get. Even when you missed opportunities or fell back into old patterns, those moments became valuable lessons in self-awareness.

Integrating the Skills: How They Work Together

As you reflect on the whole set of DBT skills, notice how each module connects to the others:

- **Dialectics** taught you to hold multiple truths at once. For example, "*I am stressed and overwhelmed, and I am capable of handling this moment.*" This mindset helps soften black-and-white thinking and makes space for creativity, balance, and flexibility in behavior.

- **Mindfulness** gave you the ability to slow down, observe your thoughts and emotions, and find Wise Mind. In college, where distractions are constant, mindfulness offers a way to stay grounded and intentional.
- **Distress Tolerance** skills gave you a survival kit for crises, whether that meant using STOP to pause before reacting, TIPP to cool down intense feelings, or Radical Acceptance to face situations you can't change. These skills prevent problems from getting worse in the heat of the moment.
- **Emotion Regulation** helped you understand your emotional patterns and reduce vulnerabilities. By practicing PLEASE skills, Opposite Action, and building positive experiences, you learned that emotions are not random storms but signals you can respond to skillfully.
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness** provided concrete strategies like DEAR MAN, GIVE, and FAST for communicating clearly, setting boundaries, and maintaining self-respect. These skills are especially powerful in the college setting, where relationships with roommates, friends, professors, and family all shape your daily life.
- **Behavior and Solution Analysis** tied everything together by teaching you to step back and analyze why problems occur, where skills could have been used, and how to make a proactive plan for next time. This tool transforms setbacks into opportunities for growth.

Together, these modules create a comprehensive toolkit: a set of strategies you can mix and match depending on the challenge you face.

Reflection Activity

Take a few minutes to reflect:

- Which skills do you find yourself using the most?
- Which skills still feel difficult, and how might you practice them more intentionally?
- What skills would you like to review in this session?
- Where have you noticed growth since Session One...in your academic performance, relationships, stress management, or self-confidence?
- What goals do you want to set for continuing skills practice after this program ends?

Building A Skills Toolbox

Fill Your Tool Box With Skills to Continue Your Progress

A Skills Toolbox is your personal DBT survival kit. It's a short list of your most effective, go-to strategies for particular problems...the ones you know you can rely on when stress hits. Think of it like having a backpack with essentials you never leave home without.

Different problems require different tools at times, so think about this process for tailoring skills to challenging situations.

How to Build Your Toolbox:

1. Identify one upcoming challenge (e.g., final exams, moving home for the summer, starting a new job) and make a plan with your top skills.
2. Choose your top five to 10 skills that feel realistic and helpful for you with this challenge.
3. Write them in your own words so they feel natural to use.
4. Keep this toolbox visible...on your phone, a notecard, or taped to your desk...so it's easy to reference when you need it.
5. Repeat this process as needed for other challenges!

My Challenge:

Top Five to 10 DBT Skills I Will Use With It:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

The Specific Ways I Will Apply These Skills:

Remember that this is a repeatable process!

Group Celebration Exercise

Honoring the Journey

To close our final session, we'll take time to celebrate the effort, growth, and resilience each person has shown throughout this program. Practicing skills is hard work, and it deserves recognition. This exercise creates space to honor yourself and the group as a whole.

Sharing Highlights

Go around the group to share:

- One skill that has been most useful in your college life.
- One way you've noticed growth since the program began.

Appreciations

Next, share one appreciation for the group. This could be gratitude for the space to learn, encouragement received from others, or simply valuing the chance to know they aren't alone in their struggles.

Celebrations

Let's take some moments to give ourselves and others credit for completing the program. Let the compliments flow...there are few things as impactful as committing to a process to improve yourself while encouraging others to do the same!

Capstone: Moving Forward

As this program closes, remember that learning DBT skills is not about perfection...it's about progress. You now have the tools to manage your emotions, handle stress without making things worse, and build relationships that respect both you and others. The more you practice, the more natural these skills will become.

College, and life, will continue to bring challenges, and now you can approach these situations with greater awareness, flexibility, and confidence. You can't control every event, but you can control how you respond. That is the power of these skills.

Let's end with a mutual commitment to continue working toward more skillful and satisfying lives!

