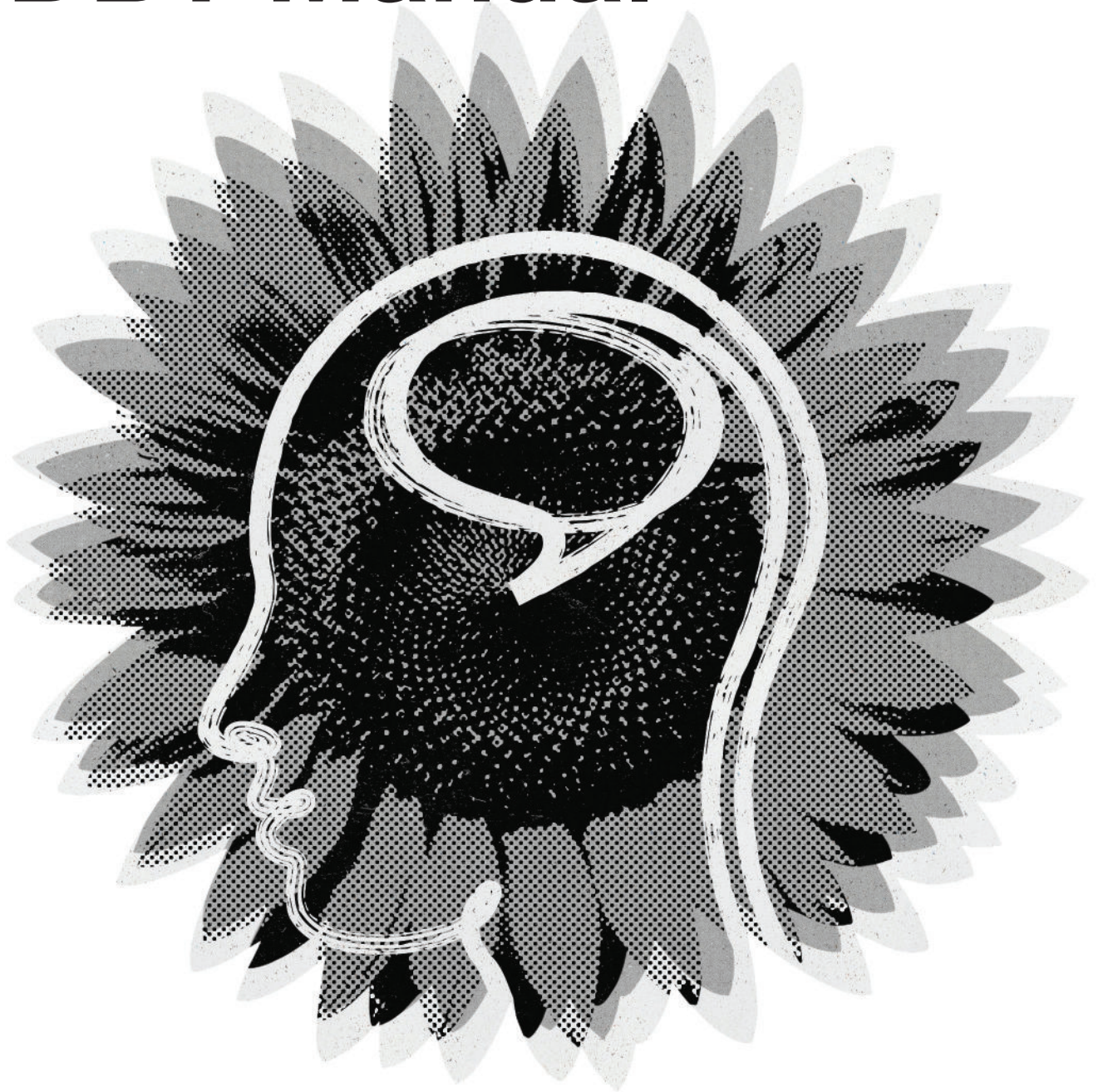


MHS Waypoint DBT Manual



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MHS DBT Program Rules & Expectations

- **Program Members are expected to attend every scheduled session.** Absences must be planned with the therapist and/or group in advance. Documentation of absences may be requested. All absences, regardless of reason, count towards overall attendance. Attendance below 90% will result in an attendance contract to support consistent attendance. Three consecutive absences without phone calls will be grounds for discharge (see attached attendance policy).
- Members must maintain confidentiality. Group issues cannot be discussed outside of programming or during break. Breaking confidentiality may be grounds for discharge. Recording, photographing, screenshotting, or otherwise capturing any part of programming is strictly prohibited. This includes the use of phones, smart watches, smart glasses, computers, tablets, AI-enabled devices, or any other recording technology. Maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of all group members is a shared responsibility.
- Members are expected to participate in programming through active listening, providing support and feedback to peers, being engaged in teaching, presenting diary cards, and completing behavior chains and homework as assigned.
- Members are expected to take problem-solving time and practice skills whenever they report significant distress.
- Members' feedback and behavior are expected to be respectful at all times. Anyone engaged in disrespectful feedback will be given a verbal warning and then may be asked to take a break or leave. Examples of disrespectful behavior include:
 - Interrupting others
 - Using inappropriate verbal and/or non-verbal language
 - Sharing specific details of behaviors that are self-injurious
 - Not respecting the boundaries of others
 - Using cell phones or participating in other distracting activities
- A pattern of disrespectful behavior may result in a Success Plan, suspension, or discharge from programming.
- Discrimination and harassment of any kind will not be tolerated. Discrimination or harassment may be grounds for discharge from programming.
- Relationships and interactions between members outside of programming are generally discouraged (this includes social media spaces), but at times members may be allowed to use each other for skill-based support outside of programming. Members are expected to be clear and respectful of each other's boundaries. Members are not allowed to have romantic or other private relationships with each other, and they are not allowed to engage in behaviors that could be problematic or unskillful with one another (for example, substance use, gambling, sexual behavior, etc.).
- Members are not allowed to use alcohol, drugs, or engage in unhealthy behaviors together. Participating in these behaviors may be grounds for discharge.
- Members are not allowed to engage in SI/SIB behaviors on premises or come to group under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Members are not allowed to vape or use any other substances in the therapy space. Such behaviors may be grounds for discharge.
- Members may not call other members for 24 hours after they have acted on SI/SIB/TIB behaviors.
- Members are required to participate in ongoing individual therapy and comply with prescribed medications.
- To help maintain a safe, respectful, and therapeutic environment, Members are expected to wear clothing that fully covers the genitals, buttocks, and chest/torso, as well as shoes, while in the clinic. Our clinic is committed to creating a welcoming environment where people of all identities and backgrounds can feel safe, respected, and able to focus



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on treatment. Clothing and footwear expectations are intended to support physical safety, promote a professional healthcare environment, and be mindful of the diverse experiences, cultural backgrounds, personal boundaries, and trauma histories of those in our community. These expectations apply equally to everyone and are not intended to make assumptions about gender identity or expression. We ask everyone to follow these expectations to help foster a therapeutic space where all individuals can feel comfortable and supported.

- Members are expected to comply with their payment agreements.

Acknowledged by: _____

MHS DBT Virtual Clinic Rules and Expectations

- Members must be physically located in the state of Minnesota at the time of participation in group.
- Members participating in virtual programming are expected to attend sessions from a safe, private, and stable location where confidentiality can be maintained.
 - Never record, stream, or screenshot your session.
 - Never include anyone in your physical environment in the session, i.e. no friends or family members in the room, no one walking in and out of the space you are using for sessions etc.
 - Members may not participate while driving or being driven or engaging in other activities that interfere with treatment.
 - Keep your camera unless it is a break time. If you must briefly turn off your camera due to tech difficulties or a brief break, please inform your group in the chat; failure to inform your facilitator about camera being off and lack of verbal communication may result in being removed to the waiting room.
 - An intentional violation of confidentiality will result in discharge; an unintentional violation (as determined by the group facilitator) will be reviewed by the clinical team to determine if virtual programming is an appropriate ongoing care option.
- Safety expectations:
 - At the beginning of each virtual session, members must be able to provide their current physical location (an address and make/model/license number of vehicle if parked somewhere confidential) so staff can respond appropriately in the event of a safety concern or wellness check. If you connect for a session from a different or new location, you must inform your therapist immediately upon login to session.
 - Members will have an active safety plan, cooperate with safety assessments, and will be clear about their safety related to suicidal ideation (SI) and urges.
 - Members who do not have a clear commitment to safety with suicidal ideation and urges by the end of the session will have the police and/or ambulance sent to their physical location and transported to the hospital for further evaluation.
 - Members who deliberately disconnect during a safety assessment, intervention, or effort to obtain a safety commitment will have police and/or ambulance sent to their physical location and transported to the hospital. This behavior will result in discharge.
 - *Members who have technical difficulties or who get unintentionally disconnected will immediately call/email their facilitator to ensure safety (this applies to all clients, regardless of safety concerns). Deliberately disconnecting will be treated at a Therapy Interfering Behavior (TIB).*
- Members must treat the virtual space as if it were a shared physical space, including:
 - Refraining from all nicotine/vaping use until break times (*all use must be off-screen during break times*)
 - Facing the camera as if you are in an in-person conversation
 - Refraining from distracting activities (use of cell phone or other devices, moving around your home to do chores, vigorous exercise, cooking, TV on in the background etc.)



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- Your group facilitator may also suggest use of hand-raising, muting, headphones etc. to support an environment where everyone can participate without talking over each other or being interrupted by environmental noise
- Members are also encouraged to come to the session as if coming to an in-person appointment, this may include: changing out of pajamas into something you would wear out; sitting up; arriving a few minutes early; preparing a snack or meal in advance; having fidgets or comfort items to use skillfully during group
- If your group facilitator becomes disconnected unexpectedly from the session, please wait at least 15 minutes for them to reconnect to the session. Please pause therapy-related discussion until they return.

What to expect your first day in program?

Welcome to MHS!

Your first day in program can be a bit overwhelming so here is some information to help know what to expect when you start your journey through your program.

If you have never done DBT before, the beginning might be confusing. DBT has a lot of acronyms and language that takes some getting used to. But you will get used to it! We encourage you to be patient and ask questions. This will help you get into the swing of things.

On your first day, the Facilitator will orient you to the group and the process. You will review the group rules and expectations (also found in this Handbook).

You can expect the group and Facilitators will be:

- Welcoming
- Accepting
- Interested in you
- Patient as you get used to the program
- Helpful with things that might be confusing
- Ready to answer questions
- Safe

Welcome
MHSStaff

WAYPOINT Program Guidelines:

Participation, Respect, and Safety

CORE CONCEPT: Structure and safety help everyone in the Waypoint group.

This program is designed to support you in managing both mental health and chemical health issues more effectively. For that to happen, we need clear rules and expectations that make group a safe, respectful, and productive place for everyone.

Attendance Expectations

Being present matters. Skills and support only work if you show up regularly.

- You're expected to attend all scheduled sessions.
- If you can't make it to your next program session, please talk before hand with your therapist or share this with your therapist and the group. Documentation may be needed in the case of repeated absences.
- Missing more than 1 of 10 group sessions will lead to an attendance contract. A repeat of missing more than 1 of 10 group sessions will lead to a discharge contract. Missing more than 1 of 10 group sessions again could lead to discharge. There are no excused absences, but mitigating circumstances will be considered prior to discharge
- Missing three groups in a row without calling could mean discharge from the program.
- Why this matters: Dual Disorder programming is about consistent skills training and application. Each session is important as they build from each other.

Confidentiality and Emotional Safety

Group is a private space.

- What's shared in group stays in group. No discussing group content outside or even during breaks.
- Breaking confidentiality may result in being discharged from the program.
- Why this matters: Respect and privacy help people share openly and feel safe.

Participation and Skill Practice

You get out what you put in.

- Be present: listen, ask questions, support others.
- Share your homework, behavior chains, and diary cards when asked.
- If you are feeling high distress, use skills or ask for problem-solving help.
- Why this matters: Practicing skills helps you apply them when urges/distress increases or life gets overwhelming.

Respectful Communication

We speak and act with kindness.

- Everyone deserves to feel heard and respected.
- Interrupting, inappropriate language, or boundary violations are not allowed.
- First, you'll get a verbal reminder. If it continues, you may be asked to leave or take a break.
- Ongoing disrespect may lead to a behavior contract or discharge.
- Why this matters: Emotional pain often makes relationships harder. Practicing respectful communication supports healing.

Boundaries Outside of Group

Support is great—so are boundaries.

- Skill-based contact between group members is allowed with clear, respectful boundaries.
- No private or romantic relationships between group members.
- No using drugs/alcohol or engaging in harmful behaviors with each other.
- You may not contact another member within 24 hours of self-harm or high-risk behavior.
- Why this matters: When managing urges and emotional distress, structure keeps things safe.

Outside Therapy & Medication

This group is part of your bigger recovery plan.

- You must be in regular individual therapy.
- Follow your prescribed medication plan and stay in contact with your providers.
- Why this matters: Managing recovery takes a full team approach. Group is only one piece.

Payment

Healing is an investment.

- You're expected to stick to your agreed payment plan.
- Talk to your therapist or billing staff if issues arise.
- Why this matters: Following through on commitments is part of rebuilding structure and self-trust.

Use these pages as a guidepost. These rules are designed to help you build a better life, even while living with symptoms and urges. Respecting the structure helps you and your fellow group members move forward.

Understanding Payment Responsibilities

CORE CONCEPT: Regular financial contribution helps keep the WAYPOINT program running and available to those who need it.

Managing mental health concerns often involves ongoing support, and being part of a structured program like WAYPOINT means committing not only to your treatment goals but also to the shared responsibilities that keep the program available. That includes understanding how billing works and making consistent payments—even small ones—when possible.

What You Need to Know

Mental Health Systems, PC (MHS) is a fee-for-service clinic. This means we are reimbursed for the care you receive through your insurance and your payments. To stay in the program, every participant is expected to take part in this system of shared responsibility.

What You May Be Billed For

Your insurance may require one or more of the following:

- Co-pays (a fixed fee per session)
- Deductibles (what you pay before insurance starts covering services)
- Co-insurance (a percentage of the cost)
- Spend-downs (what you owe if you're on certain state plans)

These are not optional. MHS is legally and contractually required to collect them.

If You Can't Pay in Full

We understand that dual disorders can make work and income unpredictable. If you can't pay your full bill:

- You can set up a monthly payment plan with the business office.
- No interest will be charged, and your account won't be sent to collections.
- We ask that you stick to your agreement and make at least your agreed-upon monthly payment.

Important: No one with an outstanding balance will be seen without making at least a minimum contribution, even during financial hardship.

When and How to Pay

- Due Date: Payments are due by the 20th of each month.
- How to Pay: You can give your payment to your therapist, mail it to the Edina business office, or pay online via the pay online link on the MHS webpage.

If Your Situation Changes

- New insurance? Let MHS know right away.
- Lost coverage? We won't discharge you but...
 - You must actively look for insurance, and
 - A new payment agreement will be created during the gap.
- If you are paying reduced fees without insurance, you have up to six months to complete the WAYPOINT program.

Non-Payment Policy

- If you go three months without paying and don't communicate or make new arrangements, this may lead to discharge from the program.

Why This Matters in recovery

Dual Disorder care is long-term. Regular payments help keep programs like WAYPOINT sustainable and available to others in similar need. Just like we encourage you to show up for your therapy and practice your skills, this is another area of follow-through that builds stability and supports recovery.

Group Structure

Before Program:

- Please turn off your cell phone or set it to silent.
- Please be in the group by the time it is scheduled to begin.
- Be mindful of the Attendance Policy (also found in this Handbook) The program has 3 parts:

Teaching:

- The teaching hour is where the Facilitator will teach on the topic of the day
- Most of the time, the topic is a DBT skill
- Other, relevant topics are also covered
- Participate in this hour by openly listening, asking questions, understanding, and interacting with each other

Diary Card:

- Members will complete a diary card daily on each day of the week
- Diary cards need to be completed before group starts
- Members must present their diary card every day
- Participate in this hour by asking questions, validating other's experiences, and showing interest

Process Time:

- Common uses for Time are
 - Asking for problem-solving feedback
 - Better understanding a DBT skill
 - Asking for support from other members
 - Presenting Behavior Chain Analyses or other homework
- Participate in this hour by taking Time effectively and providing support and feedback to other members

Vision of Recovery (VOR) and Goal Setting

CORE CONCEPT: Knowing what you want your life to look like helps you stay focused and motivated.

What Is a Vision of Recovery (VOR)?

Your Vision of Recovery is your big picture. It's your personal idea of what life could look like if addiction and mental health symptoms no longer had control over your day-to-day experiences.

Even though they may still be a part of your life, your VOR helps you imagine a life where they don't stop you from doing what matters most.

This is your chance to dream. You get to define:

- What you want out of life
- What's meaningful to you
- What life could look like with more freedom, stability, or connection

Questions to Guide Your VOR:

- What do I want my life to look like in a few years?
- What do I want to be doing if I'm no longer in weekly treatment?
- What would life look like if urges and symptoms were under control?
- What strengths do I already have that I can build on?

Your VOR becomes your North Star—it helps guide your treatment and your efforts.

Turning Your VOR into Goals

Once you have your big-picture vision, the next step is breaking it into clear, realistic goals.

Living with dual-disorders means that your goals need to focus on *function* more than *fixing*. We may not be able to erase your urges and symptoms—but you can build a life around it.

Example:

VOR: "I want to feel more connected and active again."

Goal: "I want to have a weekly lunch with a friend and take a short daily walk."

Goal Setting: The Steps

1. Start with your VOR

What do you want your life to look like?

2. Set your goals

What do you need to work on to move toward that vision?

3. Break goals into small steps (objectives)

- What can you do today, this week, or this month?
- Why Use Your Own Words?

Using *your* words helps you take ownership of your goals. It's not about what your therapist wants—it's about what *you* want to build.

Power, Control, and Motivation

Urges and MH symptoms often take away the feeling of control. But goal setting gives that power back.

When *you* are the one setting the direction, you're more likely to stay motivated—even on tough days.

Reflective Questions:

- “What I need to work on to reach my VOR is...”
- “My top treatment priorities are...”
- “What I need to learn or do differently is...”

Remember:

Your disorders do not define you or your future

Small steps build big changes

You have the power to shape a life that feels meaningful

DBT Beliefs About Skills Training

(For Mental Health & Substance Use Recovery)

CORE CONCEPT

How you think about yourself, your symptoms, and your substance use affects how well skills work.

Skills are tools for learning new ways to cope, respond, and move toward the life you want.

The beliefs below form the foundation of DBT and dual disorder treatment. Use them to guide how you learn, practice, and return to skills—especially during hard moments.

1. You Are Doing the Best You Can

Everyone—including you—is doing the best they can in each moment with the skills, energy, and support they have at that time.

- People do not intentionally want to:
- Feel overwhelmed or out of control
- Hurt others or themselves
- Use substances in ways that cause problems
- Repeat patterns that do not work

When emotions are intense, mental health symptoms flare up, or urges to use show up, this belief helps reduce shame and self-blame. Hold this belief while also remembering the next one.

2. You Can Learn Skills to Do Better

Even though you are doing your best, your current best may not always be effective. This does not mean you are failing.

It means:

- You may need **new skills**
- You may need **more practice**
- You may need **different support**

Skills help you respond differently to emotions, urges, stress, cravings, and relationships. Recovery and change are possible—even when progress is slow or uneven.

3. Skills Apply to All Areas of Life

Most people use skills successfully some of the time, in some situations, or with some people.

The goal of skills training is to:

- Use skills during high-risk moments

- Apply skills when emotions or urges feel intense
- Practice skills in the situations where problems usually show up

This includes:

- Mental health symptoms
- Substance use urges or lapses
- Relationships
- Work, health, and daily responsibilities

The more areas you practice skills in, the stronger they become

4. You Are Responsible for a Skillful Response

No matter how a problem started—or who caused it—you are responsible for how you respond now.

Sometimes:

- We contribute to our own problems
- Other people or systems cause harm
- Life events happen outside our control

Focusing on blame often increases distress and urges.

Focusing on skills increases choice, control, and self-respect.

This does not mean:

- You caused everything
- Your pain is invalid
- Others are not accountable

It means that skills give you power—even when the situation is unfair.

5. Skills Work When You Practice Them

A skill is something that improves with training and repetition.

Skills:

- Do not work perfectly right away
- May feel awkward or ineffective at first
- Work best when practiced before crises and during difficult moments

If a skill does not work once, that does not mean it will never work.

Learning skills is like building muscle—it takes time, patience, and practice.

Do not give up on yourself.

Every time you return to a skill, you are strengthening your recovery.

Reflection (Optional Workbook Prompt)

- Which belief feels easiest to accept right now?
- Which belief feels hardest to believe?
- How might these beliefs help when emotions or urges show up?

Safety Plan

I, _____
will follow this safety plan until the next time I receive services. This means I will not engage in suicidal behavior. I will use the steps listed below to assist with my safety, call my team members/people in my support system/crisis numbers listed below as needed, or admit myself into the hospital if needed.

Events that might lead to safety concerns:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Specific steps I will take to maintain my safety:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Team members/other people in my support system/crisis numbers I will call for help are:

Name	Phone number
1) _____	_____
2) _____	_____
3) _____	_____
4) County Crisis Line	_____
5 Crisis Text Line	988
6) Crisis line for MH and Substance Use	988
7) Emergency	911

Client signature:

Therapist signature:

Date:

Date:

MON	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														
TUE	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														
WED	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														
THU	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														
FRI	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														
SAT	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														
SUN	Rx	SI	SIB	URG	TIB	RIB	DEP	ANX	ANG	SOS	SLEEP	SELF-CARE	BPE/PLANNED BPE	Goals
														1.
														2.
														3.
Skills														

Diary Card

MON	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):
TUE	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):
WED	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):
THU	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):
FRI	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):
SAT	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):
SUN	Stressors:	Feelings:	Thankful:	Daily goal/met?
				Topic (Time):

Diary Card

Wise Mind (WM)

To dialectically balance emotion and reason so you can respond rather than react

Observe (OB)

To just notice experience

Describe (DE)

To put words on experience

Participate (PA)

To fully enter into your experience

Nonjudgemental Stance (NJS)

To not attach strong opinions or labels to experience

Pleased (PL)

Physical Health: To engage in behaviors that keep your body healthy

List Resources and Barriers: To identify your resources and barriers for each area of PLEASED

Eat Balanced Meals: To maintain a healthy diet everyday

Avoid Drugs and Alcohol: To minimize or eliminate drug and alcohol use

Sleep 7 to 10 Hours: To get the amount of sleep that helps you feel good

Exercise: To exercise 20 minutes three to five times each week

Daily: To make PLEASED skills daily habits, for maximum benefit

Build Mastery (BM)

To do things to help you feel competent and in control

Build Positive Experience (BPE)

To seek out events that create positive feelings

Attend to Relationships (A2R)

To connect with meaningful people in your life

Mood Momentum (MM)

To perform balanced behaviors to maintain positive moods

Opposite to Emotion (O2E)

To do the opposite of the action a negative emotion pulls you to perform

Distract with ACCEPTS

Activities (AC): To keep busy and involved
Contributing (CON): To do something for others

Comparisons (COM): To see that others struggle, too

Emotions (EM): To do something that creates other emotions

Push Away (PA): To shelve your problem for later

Thoughts (T): To think about something other than your distress

Sensations (S): To invigorate your senses or to do something physically engaging

Self-Soothe (SS)

To relax yourself through the senses

Urge Surfing (US)

To ride the ebbs and flows of emotions/urges without reacting

Bridge Burning (BB)

To remove the means to act on harmful urges

IMPROVE the Moment

Imagery (IM): To relax or practice skills visually in your mind

Meaning (ME): To find the “why” to tolerate a difficult time

Prayer (PR): To seek connection and guidance from a higher power

Relaxation (RE): To calm the mind and body

One Thing at a Time (OT): To focus on one thing when overwhelmed

Vacation (V): To take a brief break

Encouragement (EN): To coach yourself with positive self-talk

Pros and Cons (P&C)

To weigh the benefits and costs of a choice

Grounding Yourself (GY)

To use OB and DE to come back to the here and now

Radical Acceptance (RA)

To acknowledge “what is” to free yourself from suffering

Everyday Acceptance (EA)

To accept daily inconveniences that occur in life

Willingness (WI)

To remove barriers and do what works in a situation

Fast (F)

Fair: To be just and take a Nonjudgemental Stance (NJS) with yourself and others.

Apologies Not Needed: To not apologize for having an opinion, for your own viewpoints or for things over which you have no control

Stick to Values: To know what values are non-negotiable and when values conflict, work to resolve the conflict through Wise Mind (WS)

Truth and Accountability: To be honest and accountable with yourself and others

Give (G)

Genuine: To be honest, sincere, respectful and real with others

Interested: To make efforts to connect with a person — listen intently, ask questions and listen to the answers, make appropriate eye contact

Validate: To acknowledge others’ feelings, thoughts, beliefs and experiences without judgement

Easy Manner: To treat others with kindness and a relaxed attitude

Dear Man (DM)

Describe: To outline the situation in non-judgemental language

Express: To share your opinions and feelings if they relate and will help others understand the situation

Assert: To ask clearly for what you want or need, say no or set your boundary

Reward: To let others know what is in it for them, avoid ultimatums and threats

Mindful: To stay focused on your goal

Appear Confident: To use an assertive tone of voice, make eye contact and use confident body language

Negotiate: To strike compromises that make sense, meet in the middle

Urge & Symptom Skills Implementation Plan (USIP)

CORE CONCEPT

This worksheet helps you prepare for how to manage substance use urges and mental health symptoms at different intensity levels.

Urges, emotions, and symptoms often increase gradually, not all at once. When you learn to recognize early warning signs, you can use DBT skills sooner and prevent situations from becoming a crisis.

Knowing what to expect at each level helps you respond more effectively.

Urge & Symptom Intensity Levels

0–1, No Urges or Distress

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: maintaining routine, self-care, recovery activities, mindfulness

1–2, Early Warning Signs

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: mindfulness, reaching out to supports, distraction skills

3–4, Mild Urges or Emotional Distress

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: urge surfing, opposite action, grounding skills

5–6, Increasing Urges or Symptoms

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: distress tolerance skills, contacting supports, changing environment

7–8, Strong Urges or High Emotional Distress

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: crisis survival skills, urge surfing, calling support

9–10, Crisis Level Urges or Symptoms

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: crisis plan, immediate support, removing yourself from triggers

Support Contacts

Name

Phone number

Therapist:

Psychiatrist:

Case Manager:

Friend/Support Person:

Other:

Other:

In Case of Emergency

If you have tried your skills and contacted your supports but still feel overwhelmed:

- During work hours, call **Mental Health Systems** at **(952) 835-2002** for skills coaching
- After hours, call **COPE** at **612-596-1223** or **911**
- You may also go to the **nearest emergency room** for immediate help

Part One

Explanation of DBT-S



Introduction to Integrated Dual Disorder Treatment (IDDT)

CORE IDEA

Integrated Dual Disorder Treatment (IDDT) brings mental health treatment and substance use treatment together so both can be addressed at the same time, by the same team. This integrated approach leads to better outcomes and reduces confusion, frustration, and gaps in care.

People with co-occurring mental health and substance use challenges often experience symptoms that interact with and reinforce each other. Treating only one concern at a time is usually not enough.



Why Integrated Treatment Matters

Historically, mental health and substance use disorders were often treated separately or one after the other. In these “serial” approaches, treatment focused on whichever condition was labeled as “primary,” while the other was postponed or ignored.

When treatment is split this way:

- Important symptoms go untreated
- Progress is often limited or short-lived
- People may be referred back and forth between programs
- Setbacks are often misunderstood as “noncompliance” or “lack of motivation”
- This cycle can be exhausting and discouraging for individuals and families, and it can lead to unnecessary costs—both financially and emotionally.

The IDDT Approach

IDDT was developed to address these problems by integrating care. Instead of separating mental health and substance use treatment, IDDT:

- Treats both concerns together
- Recognizes how symptoms influence each other
- Emphasizes coordination and consistency
- Reduces gaps, mixed messages, and repeated assessments
- Integrated treatment reflects the reality that recovery does not happen in pieces—it happens as a whole.

How DBT Fits with IDDT

Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Substance Use (DBT-S) is a skills-based, evidence-informed treatment that aligns well with IDDT principles. DBT-S focuses on building practical skills to manage emotions, urges, stress, relationships, and behaviors—areas that are central to both mental health recovery and substance use recovery.

This workbook and approach encourage:

- Using DBT skills across mental health and substance use challenges
- Integrating chemical dependency strategies that fit with DBT values
- Adapting skills to real-life recovery situations

Core Principles of IDDT and How DBT Supports Them

1. Integrated Services

Mental health and substance use treatment are provided together in a coordinated, holistic way.

DBT-S supports this by:

- Teaching skills that apply to emotions, urges, cravings, and behaviors
- Addressing patterns that affect both mental health and substance use
- Supporting multiple recovery paths, including abstinence and harm reduction

2. Cross-Trained Providers

Effective integrated treatment requires providers who understand both mental health and substance use disorders.

In an IDDT-informed DBT approach:

- Providers remain open to learning from both disciplines
- Assessment and intervention tools are shared across treatment areas
- DBT skills are adapted thoughtfully while staying true to theory
- Even when DBT-S is the primary framework, collaboration and flexibility strengthen treatment effectiveness.

3. Stage-Oriented Treatment

People enter treatment at different stages of readiness and recovery. IDDT recognizes that treatment must match where someone is—not where others think they “should” be.

DBT supports stage-oriented treatment by:

- Emphasizing engagement and commitment early on
- Matching goals and skills to readiness for change
- Viewing motivation as something that develops over time
- Research on the stages-of-change model shows that understanding readiness can deepen clinical insight and improve outcomes, especially when working with complex conditions.

4. Motivational Interventions

Motivational interventions help people clarify their recovery goals and take steps toward them.

Motivation is not something people either “have” or “do not have.”

It changes over time and is strongly influenced by emotions, stress, symptoms, and substance use.

DBT strongly supports motivational work by:

- Helping people identify what they want to change and what makes change hard
- Balancing acceptance (“This makes sense”) with change (“Something different is needed”)
- Treating ambivalence as normal, not as resistance
- Motivational Interviewing techniques fit naturally with DBT because both approaches are dialectical—they honor two truths at once. In DBT-S, motivation is strengthened through validation, skills use, and repeated recommitment to recovery goals.

5. Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a core approach for helping people change thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that interfere with recovery.

DBT is an adaptation and expansion of CBT. It builds on CBT by:

- Adding structured, skills-based training
- Emphasizing emotion regulation, distress tolerance, mindfulness, and interpersonal effectiveness
- Addressing high-risk behaviors and urges directly
- Within an IDDT framework, CBT and DBT skills are used to:
- Understand patterns linking mental health symptoms and substance use
- Develop safer, more effective coping strategies
- Practice new behaviors that support long-term recovery

6. Multiple Treatment Formats

Integrated treatment works best when support is offered in multiple formats, not just one setting or style.

IDDT encourages services across:

- Individual therapy
- Skills groups
- Family or support-involved services
- Peer or self-help supports
- DBT-S is designed as a multi-modal treatment. Standard DBT-S includes:
- Individual therapy
- Skills training groups
- Provider consultation

- Phone or between-session coaching
- Case management
- In IDDT settings, DBT-S can be adapted to different levels of care while maintaining its core structure. Whenever possible, treatment plans should include multiple formats to increase consistency, accessibility, and support.

Key Takeaway

Integrated treatment works because it reflects real life.

Mental health symptoms and substance use influence each other—and recovery is strongest when both are addressed together, with skills, support, and compassion.

Optional Reflection (Workbook Use)

- How have mental health symptoms and substance use affected each other in your life?
- What has been difficult about receiving separate or fragmented treatment?
- How might an integrated approach support your recovery differently?

Getting Started:

The DBT-S \Waypoint Philosophy

Core Dialectics and Shared Assumptions

DBT-S is grounded in dialectical thinking. Dialectics is the idea that more than one thing can be true at the same time. What may look like opposites—such as acceptance and change—are actually connected and work best together.

Dialectical thinking helps people move out of extremes. When emotions, thoughts, or behaviors feel “all-or-nothing,” dialectics helps find balance, flexibility, and forward movement.

In DBT-S, therapists and clients work together to:

- Notice different perspectives
- Validate what makes sense in each position
- Find a balanced response that is effective in the moment and over time
- The goal is not to decide who is “right,” but to discover what works.

Acceptance and Change: The Central DBT Dialectic

The most important dialectic in DBT is acceptance and change.

Acceptance means:

- Recognizing things as they are right now
- Acknowledging pain, urges, and struggles without judgment
- Validating that reactions make sense given past experiences and current stressors
- Change means:
 - Learning new skills
 - Practicing different behaviors
 - Moving toward recovery goals
- DBT holds that acceptance opens the door to change. When people feel understood and validated, they are more able to try something new.

In DBT-S, the balance between acceptance and change shifts depending on what is most effective in the moment. Sometimes the focus is on soothing and stabilizing; other times the focus is on pushing gently toward change.

Partial Truths and Ongoing Growth

Dialectical thinking also recognizes that no single viewpoint is complete. Each perspective holds part of the truth.

Because of this:

- Therapists and clients stay curious
- Treatment stays flexible

- Plans evolve as circumstances change
- There are times to pause and accept, and times to take action. Learning when to do each is a key part of recovery.

“Doing the Best You Can” and “Needing to Do Better”

Another core DBT dialectic is the belief that:

- You are doing the best you can right now, and
- You need to learn skills to do better moving forward
- Both statements are true.

Believing you are doing your best:

- Reduces shame and self-blame
- Builds compassion for yourself and others
- Acknowledges that behaviors often developed as attempts to cope
- Recognizing the need to do better:
- Creates motivation for change
- Encourages skill development
- Supports recovery and long-term health
- Change happens not through pressure or criticism, but through learning and practicing new skills in a validating environment.

Skills Are the Path to Change

In DBT-S, change does not happen simply by wanting it.

Change happens by building skills.

Skills:

- Replace old coping behaviors
- Increase emotional and behavioral control
- Support mental health stability and sobriety
- Pushing for change without teaching skills is ineffective and invalidating. The way skills are taught—patiently, respectfully, and collaboratively—is just as important as the skills themselves.

Dialectics and Abstinence in DBT-S

DBT-S is an abstinence-oriented treatment, meaning the long-term goal is to stop substance use that causes harm.

At the same time:

- Abstinence is not required before starting treatment
- Many people enter treatment without the skills needed to stay sober
- Recovery is often a process, not a single decision

Clients are asked to commit to sobriety in realistic timeframes, such as:

- One week
- One day
- One hour
- One moment at a time

This moment-to-moment approach reflects the understanding that learning to stay sober happens gradually, with practice and support.

Dialectical Abstinence: Holding Two Truths

DBT-S uses a concept called dialectical abstinence, which means:

- Continuing to aim for full abstinence
- Treating lapses as learning opportunities, not failures

When substance use happens:

- Therapists respond without judgment
- The focus shifts to understanding what happened
- Skills are strengthened to reduce future risk

This approach helps reduce the tendency to turn a slip into a full return to old patterns. Instead of giving up, clients are encouraged to re-orient quickly and continue forward.

Learning From Slips Without Giving Up

Lapses often come with strong emotions such as shame, guilt, or hopelessness.

DBT-S focuses on:

- Helping clients tolerate these emotions
- Identifying what led up to the lapse
- Adjusting plans and skills moving forward

Clients may also work on repairing consequences related to substance use, while continuing to build recovery skills.

Matching Goals to Skills and Capacity

DBT-S recognizes that:

- People with complex mental health and substance use challenges can only change so much at one time
- Asking for change beyond someone's current skill level is invalidating

Treatment targets are chosen carefully, often starting with:

- The most dangerous behaviors
- The substance causing the greatest harm
- Behaviors that trigger higher-risk use

As skills grow, additional goals can be addressed. Recovery is viewed as a step-by-step process, not an all-at-once expectation.

Key Takeaway

DBT-S helps people move forward by:

- Balancing acceptance and change
- Teaching practical, usable skills
- Supporting abstinence without shame
- Treating setbacks as opportunities to learn

Progress happens through patience, practice, and compassion—for yourself and for the process.

DBT-S, Twelve-Step Approaches, and Traditional Substance Use Counseling

Different Models, Shared Goals

Twelve-Step programs and traditional alcohol and drug counseling often use a disease model to understand substance use disorders. From this perspective:

- Addiction is viewed as progressive
- Continued use can lead to serious harm or death
- Complete abstinence is emphasized as essential for recovery

These approaches commonly ask clients to:

- Commit to abstinence at the start of treatment
- Acknowledge powerlessness over substances
- Attend meetings regularly
- Engage in fellowship, step work, and a relationship with a higher power

Within these models, reluctance or resistance is sometimes understood as part of the illness itself.

The DBT-S Perspective

DBT-S approaches substance use from a different—but compatible—angle.

Rather than focusing primarily on disease, DBT-S emphasizes:

- Emotion dysregulation
- Invalidating or high-stress environments
- Skills deficits that make coping without substances difficult

DBT-S views substance use as strongly influenced by:

- Behavioral patterns
- Environmental cues
- Reinforcement and consequences
- Through behavioral analysis and skills training, clients learn to:
- Identify triggers and high-risk situations
- Respond more effectively to urges
- Build healthier coping strategies over time

Biology, Behavior, and Skills Can Coexist

DBT-S does not reject biological or genetic contributions to substance use disorders.

The DBT biosocial model recognizes that:

- Biology can increase vulnerability
- Environment shapes behavior
- Skills are needed to manage both

People with medical illnesses still need coping skills to manage their conditions. In the same way, people with substance use disorders benefit from learning skills—regardless of whether addiction is viewed as a disease, a behavior pattern, or both.

Clients engaged in Twelve-Step work can also benefit from DBT skills, especially when:

- Emotions run high
- Cravings intensify
- Interpersonal stress arises

Abstinence: Shared Aim, Different Pathways

DBT-S is abstinence-oriented, meaning long-term recovery from harmful substance use is the goal.

At the same time:

- Immediate abstinence is not required to begin DBT-S
- Treatment recognizes that abstinence often requires new skills
- Change is approached as a process, not a single decision

In some cases, treatment goals may be individualized based on:

- Functional impact
 - Risk level
 - Relationship to other problem behaviors

DBT-S also fully supports the use of psychiatric medications when they are clinically appropriate and helpful for managing mental health symptoms.

A Dialectical Synthesis: Using What Works

Rather than choosing one approach over another, DBT-S encourages a dialectical synthesis—drawing from multiple models in ways that support recovery.

In practice:

- Most people use what helps them, regardless of theoretical labels
- Many effective programs integrate Twelve-Step principles with cognitive-behavioral and skills-based approaches
- DBT-S can complement Twelve-Step work rather than compete with it
- This workbook includes skills and concepts that align with DBT while also respecting and incorporating compatible Twelve-Step ideas.

Expanding Recovery Supports

Clients are encouraged to use as many recovery supports as possible.

When helpful, this may include:

- Twelve-Step meetings
- Peer support groups
- Skills groups
- Individual therapy

Many clients report that attending meetings and connecting with others in recovery:

- Reduces isolation
- Strengthens commitment
- Provides hope and accountability

There is no single “right” path. Recovery is strongest when people are supported by multiple tools, skills, and communities.

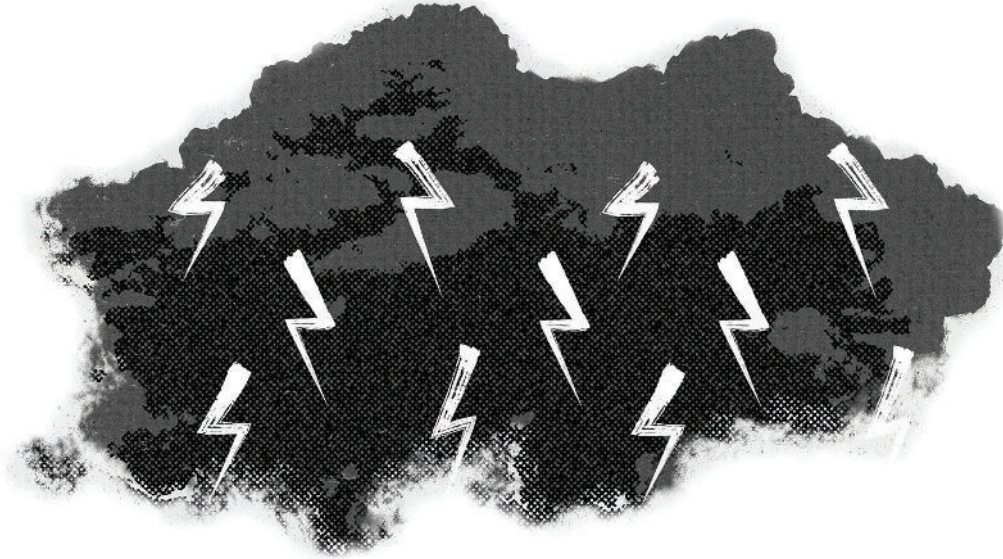
Key Takeaway

Different approaches may explain substance use in different ways, but they often share the same goal:

- helping people build healthier, more meaningful lives.
- DBT-S supports recovery by adding practical skills, flexibility, and compassion—while honoring the value of other recovery traditions.

Understanding Mental Health and Substance Use:

Emotion Dysregulation and Invalidating Environments



Core Idea

DBT-S is based on a clear explanation of how emotional difficulties develop and why substances and other behaviors are often used to cope. This understanding guides how skills are taught and how change happens.

Rather than focusing on blame or diagnosis alone, DBT-S looks at how emotions, environments, and learned coping strategies interact over time.

Emotion Dysregulation: When Feelings Feel Too Much

Emotion dysregulation refers to patterns of emotional experience that include:

- High emotional sensitivity (strong reactions to emotional cues)
- Intense emotional responses
- Slow return to emotional baseline

When emotions are frequent, intense, and long-lasting, the nervous system can become highly reactive. Over time, emotional reactions may start to feel automatic and hard to control.

Some researchers describe this as a “kindling effect.”

Like embers in a fire pit that look cool but are still hot, emotional reactions can reignite quickly—even with small triggers.

When emotions reach this level of intensity, it becomes very difficult to:

- Think clearly
- Make skillful choices
- Tolerate distress without reacting

Invalidating Environments and Emotional Pain

An invalidating environment is one where emotional experiences are:

- Dismissed
- Minimized
- Punished
- Ignored
- Over time, people may learn:
 - Their emotions are “wrong” or “too much”
 - They should suppress or escape feelings
 - There is no safe way to express emotional pain
 - When emotion dysregulation interacts with invalidation, distress often increases—and coping becomes more urgent.

Escape and Avoidance Behaviors

Intense emotions naturally lead people to look for relief. Many coping behaviors provide short-term relief, even when they cause long-term harm.

Common escape or avoidance behaviors include:

- Substance use
- Self-injury
- Disordered eating
- Gambling or overspending
- Emotional withdrawal or shutdown
- These behaviors work in the short term by reducing emotional pain—but over time, they increase suffering and reinforce the cycle.

One goal of DBT-S is to help people replace harmful coping behaviors with skillful ones, rather than switching from one escape behavior to another.

Substance Use as Emotional Relief

Many people report that substances temporarily:

- Numb emotional pain
 - Reduce anxiety or sadness
 - Create relief or pleasure
 - When substances successfully reduce distress, they become self-reinforcing.
- Over time:
- Tolerance builds
 - More of the substance is needed
 - Withdrawal and emotional pain return
 - Use becomes more frequent and automatic
 - What starts as emotional coping can evolve into addiction—without addressing the emotions underneath.

Mood-Congruent Behaviors

Emotions often pull people toward behaviors that match and sustain them.

For example:

- Depression can lead to withdrawal and inactivity
- Anxiety can lead to avoidance
- Anger can lead to hostility or control
- These behaviors may feel protective in the moment, but they often:
 - Reinforce the emotion
 - Shrink life over time
 - Reduce access to support and meaning
- Substance use can also become mood-congruent—when something makes you feel better, you are more likely to repeat it.

The Trap of Judging Emotions

When people stop using substances or other escape behaviors, emotions often return—sometimes intensely. A common reaction is to judge emotions as:

- Weak
- Stupid
- Dangerous
- Unacceptable
- Judging emotions does not make them go away.
- In fact, judgment often intensifies emotions, increasing distress and the urge to escape again.

Acceptance as the Path Forward

DBT-S teaches a counterintuitive but powerful approach:

- accepting emotions in order to move through them.
- Acceptance does not mean liking emotions or giving up.
- It means:
 - Allowing emotions to be present
 - Responding with curiosity instead of judgment
 - Letting emotions rise and fall naturally
- Many wisdom traditions note that suffering eases when we stop fighting it. DBT-S applies this insight in practical, skills-based ways.

How This Theory Guides Treatment

Because emotional pain drives many harmful behaviors, DBT-S focuses on helping clients:

- Understand their emotions
- Reduce emotional vulnerability
- Build effective coping skills
- Key treatment strategies include:

- Validation to calm emotional intensity
- Self-care skills to reduce vulnerability
- Emotion regulation skills to balance feelings
- Distress tolerance skills for crisis moments
- Mindfulness skills to notice emotions and urges without acting on them
- Skills are taught and practiced in a supportive, non-judgmental environment where learning—not perfection—is the goal.

Practical Skills for Change

In DBT-S, clients learn to:

- Notice emotions and urges without reacting automatically
- Soothe intense emotions
- Interrupt mood-driven behaviors
- Choose responses that align with recovery goals
- As emotion regulation improves, people gain more choice—and ineffective behaviors lose their power.

Key Takeaway

Emotions are not the problem.

The problem is not knowing how to work with emotions safely and effectively.

DBT-S helps people build a healthier relationship with emotions so that substances and other harmful behaviors are no longer needed for relief.

Invalidating Environments and Validation in Treatment

Why Validation Matters

Validation means having your thoughts, feelings, and experiences acknowledged without judgment—by others and by yourself.

Validation is not about being told you are “right” or that everything you do is okay. It means someone is truly listening, trying to understand your experience, and letting you know that what you feel makes sense.

When people feel understood, emotions usually calm down.

When people feel dismissed, ignored, or judged, emotions often intensify.

What Is an Invalidating Environment?

- An invalidating environment is one where emotions and experiences are regularly dismissed, minimized, or criticized.
- No environment is perfectly validating—and that’s okay.
- But environments that are consistently invalidating can make emotional struggles and substance use much harder to manage.
- Often, strong emotions lead others to respond with invalidation, and invalidation then makes emotions stronger. This can turn into a painful cycle.

Obvious Forms of Invalidation

Some invalidation is clear and harmful, such as:

- Abuse or neglect
- Being told your feelings are wrong, exaggerated, or made up
- Being punished or mocked for emotional expression

People who grow up or live in these environments often struggle more with:

- Mental health symptoms
- Substance use
- Self-doubt and shame

Over time, invalidation can lead people to stop trusting their own experience, making it harder to self-validate and cope effectively.

Subtle Forms of Invalidation

Other kinds of invalidation are quieter—but still powerful.

These include:

- Not acknowledging how someone feels
- Minimizing pain (“It’s not that bad”)

- Acting like something important “doesn’t matter”
- Expecting someone to do things they don’t yet have the skills to do

When this happens, people may hear the message:

“Your feelings don’t matter”

or

“You should be able to handle this already.”

This often increases shame, frustration, and emotional pain.

Why Validation Is Central to Treatment

It’s hard to move forward when your experiences aren’t truly recognized.

One of the main goals of DBT-S treatment is to create a clearly validating environment where you feel:

- Understood
- Taken seriously
- Respected

For many people, this kind of understanding has been missing for a long time. Receiving it can be healing.

Validation helps by:

- Making emotions safer to notice
- Reducing emotional intensity
- Helping you stay present instead of shutting down or escaping

It also helps build trust and connection in treatment.

Validation Comes Before Change

In DBT-S, validation always comes first.

This is especially important because:

- Mental health symptoms make skills harder to use
- Substance use often developed as a way to cope
- Learning new skills takes time and practice
- Setbacks and slips are part of the process

Validation helps you tolerate the ups and downs of recovery and learn from difficult moments—without giving up.

Without validation, it becomes very hard to keep practicing skills.

What Validation Looks Like in DBT-S

DBT describes different levels of validation, which may include:

- Someone being fully present and paying attention
- Hearing your words and reflecting them accurately
- Noticing emotions shown through body language or tone

- Recognizing how your reactions make sense given your past
- Understanding how your feelings make sense right now
- Connecting with you as a real person, not as a problem to fix

These forms of validation help you feel grounded, understood, and supported.

Validation Is Not a Trick

Validation is not something done just to move on to problem-solving.

It is a way of being in real, human connection.

Before working on change, it's important that you truly feel:

"They get me."

When that happens, change becomes possible.

Key Takeaway

- Validation helps calm emotions.
- Calmer emotions make skill use possible.
- Skills make change sustainable.
- Feeling understood is not a luxury—it is a foundation for recovery.

Phone Coaching and Seeking Sober Support

During your time in recovery, it's likely that you are going to want to use or drink again, or that you might find yourself in a mental health crisis and struggle with using skills. In these situations, it is really important to remember that ***you don't have to do this alone***. There are people, organizations, and institutions that are here for you and want to support you; in fact, there are probably people in your life and on your team that would greatly value the opportunity. Here are some situations that would warrant reaching out for help:

- You are suicidal or want to hurt yourself.
- Urges or cravings to use are present, and you may be likely relapse or your situation is similar to other times that you've relapsed.
- Your depression or anxiety are seriously getting in the way of life.
- The things that you're working on are becoming more frequent, and you need ideas of what to do.

If you are in doubt as to whether or not you should reach out for support, then it's probably time to do so. There are three basic things you should be prepared to describe to the person that you are talking to:

1. What's going on. Be brief, stay focused, and try not to get too caught up in details.
2. What you've tried. Say the things you have done in this situation to manage it.
3. What you need. Say what you need, be it ideas to try, sober support, help finding a meeting, or whatever. Again, be brief.

If you need help preparing for phone coaching or other support, you can find the Phone Coaching Worksheet on the following page to help guide you. While this worksheet is specifically for use with your DBT program group, it can easily work for any time you need to seek help!

Once you have explained the above, then you basically have one job; listen to what the other person has to say and try what they recommend. Resist the urge to argue, deny, or negotiate. Once you've put your concerns in their hands, try what they say. Remember, these calls aren't supposed to take the place of therapy; they are meant to help you find answers to what's going on and places to go for support.

Resources to call or text if mental health needs (suicide, depression, anxiety, or high distress) are the problem:

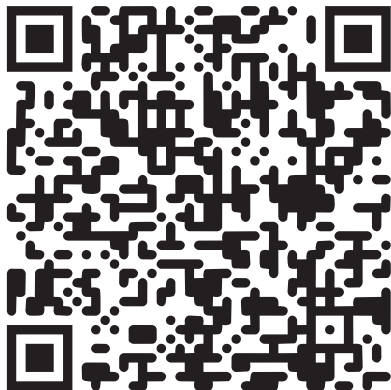
- Your group facilitator (during business hours) or individual therapist (depending on their rules)
- The clinic(s) that you receive services out (depending on rules)
- 988 or text “MN” to 741741 for crises
- Call the Minnesota Warmline at 651-288-0400 or text 85511 for non-crises
- In Hennepin County, call COPE at 612-596-1123

Resources for Sobriety Support

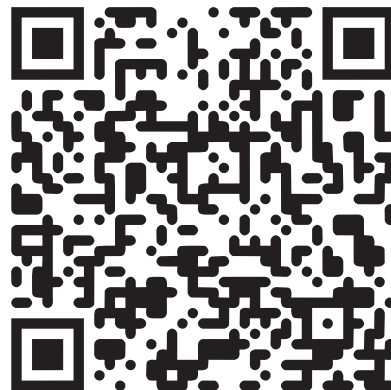
- Your group facilitator (during business hours) or individual therapist (depending on their rules)
- A sponsor or sobriety mentor
- Individuals from a phone list (often supplied at 12-step meetings and other sobriety-oriented support groups)
- National Helpline 1-844-289-0879
- Minnesota Intergroup (24/7, 365 days a year) 952-922-0880

If you are looking to find a meeting for support, you can call Intergroup at the number above (952-922-0880) or use the Meeting Guide App:

Scan for Android



Scan for Apple/iOS



Phone Coaching Worksheet

Please complete this worksheet prior to the coaching call.

Describe the problem or difficulty:

Describe the skills you have already used:

Describe what specific skills you need help with:

Describe what other skills or supports you can use if your therapist is not immediately available:

Specific Expectations:

- The call will focus on skills and last no more than 5 minutes.
- I will be willing to be coached and practice the skills I will be respectful of my therapist's availability
- I understand that I will be hospitalized if I am unclear about safety issues.

Role of Behavior Analysis to Create Change

How Behavior Analysis Helps You Create Change

Why Looking at Behavior Matters

When something goes wrong—like a blow-up, a shutdown, substance use, or a relapse—it's easy to think:

“I messed up again.”

“What’s wrong with me?”

DBT-S takes a different approach.

Instead of judging or blaming, we get curious about what happened.

Behavior analysis helps you understand how a situation unfolded, so you can respond differently next time.

This is not about fault.

It's about learning.

What Is Behavior Analysis?

Behavior analysis is a step-by-step way of looking at:

- What happened before a problem
- What you felt, thought, and did during it
- What happened afterward

It helps answer questions like:

- What set this off?
- What was I feeling or needing?
- What made the behavior make sense in that moment?
- What kept it going?
- Where could I try something different next time?

When behaviors are understood, they become changeable.

Why This Is Especially Helpful in DBT-S

Mental health symptoms and substance use often:

Happen automatically

- Feel out of control
- Show up during strong emotions
- Are triggered by stress, relationships, or exhaustion

Behavior analysis slows things down so you can see the pattern, not just the outcome. Once you see the pattern, you can:

- Interrupt it earlier
- Add skills at key moments
- Reduce the chance of it happening again

Behavior Makes Sense (Even When It Causes Problems)

In DBT-S, we assume:

Every behavior makes sense given the situation, emotions, and skills available at the time.

Substance use, self-destructive behaviors, or emotional reactions often:

- Reduce pain in the short term
- Help you escape, numb, or cope
- Meet a real need (even if they cause problems later)

Understanding why a behavior worked short-term helps you find safer ways to meet the same need.

Behavior Analysis Is Not About Shame

Behavior analysis is:

- Non-judgmental
- Curious
- Practical

It is not:

- A lecture
- A punishment
- A way to prove you “should have known better”

Setbacks, symptoms, and relapses are treated as information, not failures. Each time you look at what happened, you build awareness and skill.

How Behavior Analysis Supports Recovery

By doing behavior analysis, you can:

- Spot early warning signs
- Recognize emotional triggers
- Catch urges sooner
- Choose skills before things spiral
- Learn from slips without giving up

This makes change more realistic and sustainable.

Recovery becomes:

“Let’s figure out what happened and adjust,”
not

“I failed again.”

Change Happens in Small Steps

DBT-S doesn’t expect perfection.

Change usually looks like:

- Noticing things a little earlier
- Using a skill once when you didn’t before
- Recovering more quickly after a slip
- Making fewer problems worse

Each of these counts.

Behavior analysis helps you see progress that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Key Takeaway

You don’t have to hate a behavior to change it.

You just have to understand it.

Behavior analysis helps you turn painful moments into learning moments—so you can build a life that works better for you.

Visual Behavior Change Analysis Directions

DIRECTIONS: The more you understand about behaviors you want to change, the more you can be effective in the use of your skills to meet that goal! Start anywhere on the change (chain) analysis and work forward and/or backward to figure out each link, then identify other skills or choices you could make with your new awareness.

Remember to be **NONJUDGMENTAL** with yourself, the situation, and others. The following explains each identified link, but remember that you can add as many links as you need to understand your process and that **EVERY LINK PRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE!** Also, look for skills that you might have already been using but not noticed or for which you need more practice. Chances are you have been using skills!

Vulnerabilities:

What made you vulnerable to the prompting event (and what unfolded after it)? Examples might include not doing self-care, having a tough day, getting into a conflict, or other stressors. Be as specific as possible.

Prompting Event:

What happened? Describe in nonjudgmental, descriptive words.

Surface Emotion:

What feeling(s) occurred after the prompting event that was/were most easily noticed?

Underlying Emotion:

Was there a feeling or feelings further below the surface? Examples might include feeling hurt or embarrassed under anger or feeling guilty under depression.

Self-Talk:

What automatic thoughts or beliefs were happening that fed your emotions and the following action urge?

Action Urge:

What did the feelings pull you to do? This link is a critical moment of choice in changing a behavior.

Action:

This is the behavior you might want to change. However, remember that using skills at earlier links might effectively change your action/behavior.

Outcomes:

What happened after the behavior you want to change? What did you gain and/or lose, in both the short term and the long term? Did the outcomes cause a new vulnerability or stressor and/or cycle back to the beginning again?

SOLUTIONS:

At each step, brainstorm skills or choices that could create behavior change and more effective outcomes. Also plan for how you can deal skillfully with the outcomes you are experiencing, including how you may need to make amends with others.

Visual Behavior Change Analysis Directions

Describe your vulnerabilities:

Describe the prompting event (what set off the action?):

Describe your emotion on the surface (the one mostly easily noticed):

Describe any underlying emotions (the ones hidden underneath):

Describe your self-talk:

Describe the action urge:

Describe the action:

Describe the outcomes:

SOLUTIONS:

Fill in alternative skills and choices that would be more effective at each step. Consider how these alternatives would have altered the outcomes for you and for other people.

Describe how you will use skills effectively to deal with the outcomes that exist:

Describe who else was affected by your choice(s):

Describe how you will make amends with these people (if appropriate):

Part Two

Skills Training & Worksheets



Why Skills Are the Heart of DBT-S

One of the most important ideas in DBT-S is this:

Change happens by learning and using new skills.

DBT-S focuses on helping you replace behaviors that no longer work—or that are unhealthy or unsafe—with behaviors that help you move toward the life you want.

DBT-S does not assume that people can change just by trying harder or wanting it more. In fact, it can feel invalidating when others expect change without making sure the right skills are in place.

Mental health symptoms and substance use are not simply problems of motivation or willpower.

They are problems of coping, skills, and support.

Motivation Comes From Action, Not Pressure

In DBT-S, motivation is not something you have to magically find.

Motivation grows when you:

- Take small effective actions
- See that those actions actually help
- Get reinforced for effort and progress
- Experience less suffering and more control

In other words, motivation builds when skills work.

The power of change comes through learning, practicing, and repeating skills.

Skills You Will Learn in DBT-S

DBT-S teaches practical skills that help with both mental health challenges and substance use urges.

You will learn skills to help you:

- Get through painful emotions and crisis moments
- Manage urges, including urges to use substances
- Reduce behaviors that make emotions worse
- Regulate and balance emotions
- Increase positive and meaningful experiences
- Set boundaries, say no, and ask for what you need
- Build and take care of relationships
- Create a more satisfying and stable life

These are life skills—not just “treatment skills.”

Learning Skills Takes Practice

Learning skills is a lot like learning a new language or learning to play an instrument. It takes:

- Some learning
- A lot of practice
- Patience with mistakes

After learning some basic ideas—like dialectics and stages of change—you'll begin working on exercises that help you:

- Clarify your goals
- Identify what gets in the way
- Learn from setbacks
- Create plans for difficult moments

Skill Plans That Support You

As part of this process, you may work on plans such as:

- A Safety Plan for suicidal or self-harm urges
- A Substance Use Prevention Plan
- A Mental Health Symptom Response Plan
- A Health Maintenance Plan

These plans are meant to help you use skills in real life, not to judge or restrict you. You'll usually start with the plan that addresses the area causing the most difficulty right now, decided together with your therapist.

Start With the Skills You Already Have

You don't have to wait until you learn all the skills to begin.

You'll start by:

- Using the skills you already have
- Strengthening them
- Adding new ones over time

As you continue, your plans can be updated and adjusted. Mental health symptoms and substance use are often connected, so you may revise and cross-reference your plans as you go.

Eventually, many people combine their plans into a personal, integrated plan that works best for them.

Skills Create a Life That Feels Worth Living

A more satisfying life doesn't come from forcing change.

It comes from repeated effective actions that spread into all areas of life.

As skills become more familiar, they start to feel natural—part of how you respond, not something you have to think hard about.

That's when change lasts.

Even If You're Not Sure You Want to Change

If you're reading this book or attending a program, you've already taken a step toward considering change—even if that step was for someone else.

That's okay.

Your goals may look different depending on where you are:

- Ready to change now
- Thinking about change
- Not convinced change is needed

DBT-S skills can still help.

These are life skills that apply to anyone—at any stage of life, with or without serious problems.

Keeping an open mind is enough to start.

Key Takeaway

You don't change by being harder on yourself.

You change by learning skills that actually work.

And you don't have to do it all at once.

Understanding Dialectics:

Holding Two Things at Once



What Are Dialectics?

Dialectics is a way of understanding the tensions that show up:

- Inside you
- Between people
- In everyday life

Dialectics teaches that opposites can both be true at the same time. When two things feel like they are pulling against each other, DBT doesn't ask you to choose just one—it helps you find balance and movement.

These tensions are not mistakes.

They are part of being human.

We All Experience Inner Conflicts

You've probably noticed conflicts like:

- Wanting things to stay the same and wanting change
- Wanting comfort and wanting growth
- Wanting to avoid pain and wanting a better life

These conflicts happen all the time. For example, many people in treatment feel torn between:

- Doing what feels familiar and safe
- Trying something new that feels uncomfortable

Both sides make sense.

Both Sides Usually Have Some Truth

In dialectics, we assume:

- There is no single “right” or complete truth
- Each side of a conflict has valid reasons
- Opposing ideas are connected, not separate

Using the example of staying the same versus changing:

- There may be good reasons to stay the same (safety, habit, fear of failure)
- There may be good reasons to change (relief, growth, better relationships)

These reasons don’t cancel each other out—they coexist.

Change Comes From Working With Tension

When dialectical tensions shift, movement happens.

Sometimes change looks obvious:

- Trying a new skill
- Speaking up differently
- Choosing not to use a substance

Other times change is subtle:

- Continuing the same behavior but learning something new
- Seeing a pattern more clearly
- Becoming more aware of your choices

Even choosing to stay the same creates a new situation—which leads to the next tension and the next opportunity for change.

Life keeps moving, whether we notice it or not.

Why Dialectics Helps in Treatment

We make better choices when we:

- Notice our inner conflicts
- Understand both sides
- Stop judging ourselves for feeling torn

Dialectics helps you move out of “all-or-nothing” thinking and into more flexible, effective responses.

Common Dialectical Tensions You May Notice

Self-Acceptance and Making Personal Changes

Both matter.

- Self-acceptance helps reduce shame and self-hatred
- Change helps reduce suffering and build a better life

Often, accepting yourself is what makes change possible.

Doing Your Best and Needing to Do Better

At any given moment:

- You are doing the best you can with what you have
- You are also practicing skills because you want things to improve

Both are true.

- Accepting that you're doing your best builds compassion.
- Wanting to do better is why you're learning new skills.

Dialectics Are Ongoing

Dialectical tensions don't disappear once you "solve" them.

New situations create new tensions, and that's okay.

The goal isn't to eliminate conflict—it's to understand it and respond more skillfully.

Reflection (Optional Workbook Exercise)

On the next page is a list of common dialectical tensions.

As you review them, consider:

- Which ones show up in your life?
- Where do you feel stuck between two sides?
- How might both sides make sense?

You don't have to choose one side today.

Noticing the tension is the first step.

Key Takeaway

You don't have to be "either/or."

You can be both/and.

Dialectics helps you move forward without fighting yourself.

Common Dialectical Conflicts to Notice and Work With

Dialectical conflicts are the push-and-pull experiences that show up in everyday life. They can feel confusing, frustrating, or exhausting—but they are also opportunities for growth.

You don't have to resolve these perfectly.

The goal is to notice them, understand both sides, and practice skills that help you respond more effectively.

Read through the examples below and see which ones feel familiar to you.

Changes, Habits, and Urges

- Wanting to be different and resisting change
- Being pulled into unskillful behaviors and wanting to step out of them
- Wanting to use substances and knowing it will be harmful
- Feeling good in the moment with substances and knowing you'll feel worse later
- Deciding that a relapse means total failure

Identity, Values, and Self-Judgment

- Wanting to be like people who don't struggle with substances
- Seeing only one side of a situation
- Having a mismatch between your values and your behaviors
- Taking an "all-or-nothing" approach to problems
- Being indulgent at times and overly restrictive at others

Relationships and Boundaries

- Being independent and still needing help
- Wanting respect but not always practicing respect
- Telling too much versus telling too little
- Balancing your needs with the needs of others
- Taking things personally when they aren't about you

Thinking, Emotions, and Decision-Making

- Separating feelings from facts
- Balancing emotion with reason
- Staying non-judgmental in difficult situations
- Leaving the door open to unskillful choices
- Deciding between telling the truth or lying

Goals and Behavior

- Wanting long-term goals but acting in ways that don't match them
- Wanting stability and wanting excitement or escape

How to Work With These Conflicts

When you notice a dialectical conflict:

1. Pause and name both sides
2. Validate that both sides make sense
3. Ask yourself:
 - What skill might help here?
 - What would move me even one small step toward effectiveness?
 - What would I want for myself in the long run?

You don't have to choose one side forever.

Often the goal is to find balance, make room for both, or choose the skillful option in this moment.

Reflection (Optional Workbook Exercise)

- Which conflicts show up most often in your life?
- Which ones feel connected to substance use or emotional distress?
- What DBT skills have helped you with these in the past?
- Are there other tensions you notice that aren't listed here?

Write them down. Bring them to group. Talk them through.

Key Takeaway

Feeling torn doesn't mean you're failing.

It means you're human—and at a crossroads.

Dialectics help you move forward without fighting yourself.

What “Dialectical Abstinence” Means

In DBT-S, dialectical abstinence means making a clear, full commitment to sobriety because alcohol or drugs have been harmful to your life.

This is a 100% commitment:

- Your focus is on not using
- Your energy goes toward learning and using skills
- Your goal is to build and maintain sobriety

In this part of DBT-S, there is no middle ground about whether substance use is helpful—it isn’t. The commitment is to the side of the dialectic that supports your health and future.

What Happens If You Slip?

Slips and mistakes happen for many people working toward sobriety.

A slip does not mean you failed or that everything is ruined.

Dialectical abstinence means:

- You do not give up after a mistake
- You repair quickly
- You recommit fully to your goal

What we want to avoid is turning one mistake into many by thinking:

“I already messed up, so why try?”

The Mountain-Climbing Idea

Imagine you are climbing a mountain and lose your footing.

What do you do?

- You steady yourself
- Check your supports
- Make adjustments
- Keep climbing

You would not throw yourself off the mountain.

A slip with substances is like losing your footing—not a reason to quit the climb.

Learning From Mistakes Is How People Succeed

In every area of life, successful people make mistakes. What sets them apart is how they respond.

- A parent who yells learns new parenting skills instead of yelling more
- A businessperson who loses an account adjusts instead of repeating the mistake
- An athlete who messes up refocuses instead of giving up

Sobriety works the same way.

Mistakes become teachers, not proof that you can’t succeed.

Self-Acceptance Helps You Do Better

Staying committed works best when it is grounded in:

- Self-acceptance
- Non-judgment
- Compassion for yourself

Beating yourself up does not help you stay sober.

Shame and judgment make urges stronger—not weaker.

Remember:

- You are doing the best you can
- And you are learning how to do better

Both can be true at the same time.

Using Skills After a Slip

After a slip, DBT-S encourages you to:

- Look at what happened without judgment
- Learn what led up to it
- Strengthen your skill plan
- Make repairs where needed
- Get back on track as soon as possible

Working through these steps with your therapist or group helps prevent future slips and supports long-term recovery.

Dialectical Abstinence Applies Beyond Substances

This idea isn't only for substance use.

Dialectical abstinence can also mean making a 100% commitment to:

- Not acting on suicidal thoughts
- Not engaging in self-injury
- Not feeding behaviors that worsen mental health symptoms

The same principle applies:

Commit fully, learn from mistakes, and keep moving forward.

Key Takeaway

Dialectical abstinence means:

- Full commitment to doing better
- Zero commitment to giving up
- Learning from mistakes instead of punishing yourself

Progress comes from recommitment, not perfection.

Stages of Change:

Understanding Where You Are

Change Is a Process

Change is always happening—even when it doesn't feel like it.

Research shows that change happens in stages, and people move through them over time. You don't skip stages, and you don't fail if you move back and forth between them.

You might also notice that:

- You're in different stages for different behaviors
- You're ready to change one thing, but not another

Wherever you are right now, you are already in the process.

How to Use This Worksheet

Read through each stage and notice which one fits you right now for:

- Mental health symptoms
- Substance use
- Or both

Then:

- Talk about it with your therapist or group
- Think about what would help you move forward
- Write down specific supports or skills that would be useful

You can come back to this worksheet many times during treatment.



Pre-contemplation

“I don’t really think I have a problem.”

At this stage:

- You may feel like others are overreacting
- You may feel pressured to change by people around you
- You may feel resigned, stuck, or hopeless
- You may believe, *“This is just how my life is”*

You are not resistant—you are at an early point in the process.

What helps most at this stage:

- Feeling understood, not pushed
- Learning information at your own pace
- Reducing shame and judgment
- Feeling safe enough to stay curious

*What would help me most right now?
(write specific things that feel realistic)*

Contemplation

“I know something isn’t working, but I’m not ready to act yet.”

At this stage:

- You can see that problems exist
- You feel torn or unsure
- You may go back and forth a lot
- The idea of change feels overwhelming

Many people stay here for a while—and that’s okay.

What helps most at this stage:

- Validation for feeling unsure
- Talking through pros and cons
- Gentle encouragement, not pressure
- Hope that change doesn’t have to happen all at once

What would help me most right now?

Preparation

“I’m starting to think about how I might change.”

At this stage:

- You’re leaning toward change
- You may start setting small goals
- Doubts still show up
- You’re beginning to imagine a future that looks different

Preparation is about getting ready, not rushing.

What helps most at this stage:

- Planning instead of forcing action
- Talking openly about goals
- Identifying barriers and supports
- Letting others know your intentions

What would help me most right now?

Action

“I’m actively working on change.”

At this stage:

- You’re learning and using skills
- You’re trying new behaviors
- You’re practicing instead of just thinking
- You’re working toward sobriety and/or symptom reduction

This stage takes effort—and it’s normal to feel tired or discouraged at times.

What helps most at this stage:

- Skill coaching and feedback
- Encouragement for effort, not perfection
- Problem-solving when things don’t work
- Support after slips or setbacks

What would help me most right now?

Maintenance

“I’m working to keep my progress going.”

At this stage:

- You’re reinforcing what’s working
- You’re planning for high-risk situations
- You’re strengthening routines and supports
- You’re staying alert for old patterns

Maintenance is active, not passive.

- What helps most at this stage:
- Ongoing skill practice
- Relapse prevention planning
- Supportive check-ins
- Recognizing how far you’ve come

What would help me most right now?

Termination (or Long-Term Maintenance)

Some people reach a point where:

- Urges and symptoms no longer control behavior
- Old patterns no longer feel tempting

Others stay in maintenance long-term.

Both represent success.

There is no “better” stage—only what fits your life.

A Few Important Reminders

- You cannot fail a stage
- Moving backward doesn’t erase progress
- Insight alone is change
- Skills help you move forward when you’re ready

Most people already know, deep down, what they need next. Trust your intuition—it’s part of your recovery.

Key Takeaway

Change isn’t about speed.

It’s about matching support to where you are.

Wherever you are right now—that’s where we start.

Making Sense of Setbacks, Slips, and Relapses

Setbacks Are Part of Change — Not Proof You’ve Failed

Many people feel discouraged or defeated after a setback, slip, or relapse. It’s easy to think:

“I’ll never get this.”

“What’s the point?”

But research shows something important and hopeful:

Setbacks are a normal part of change—not a barrier to it.

People who successfully change problem behaviors don’t move in a straight line.

They have:

- Starts and stops
- Ups and downs
- Times when they revisit earlier stages of change

This is how real change works.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa Metaphor

Changing behavior has been compared to climbing the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

As you climb:

- Sometimes it’s obvious you’re going up
- Other times, because of the lean, it feels like you’re going backward

But when you keep going, you realize:

- You’re still moving higher overall
- The “down” parts are part of the climb

What matters most is learning from the moments that feel like going backward.

Why “Recycle” Is a Better Word Than “Relapse”

Some change experts prefer the word recycle instead of relapse.

Why?

Because every attempt at change teaches you something.

Just like recycling:

- Nothing is wasted
- Old material becomes something new
- Each cycle makes the next one stronger

Mistakes aren’t garbage.

They’re raw material for learning.

Treatment Is Your Recycling Center

When progress is interrupted by a slip, treatment becomes the place where you:

- Sort through what happened
- Learn what didn't work
- Strengthen your skills
- Try again with more information

You wouldn't throw recyclable materials in the trash just because they were used once. Don't throw yourself away either.

Make Your Mistakes Useful

Trying something new always comes with mistakes.

As the saying goes:

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.

The goal isn't to avoid mistakes forever.

The goal is to learn from them faster and more skillfully.

Remember SLIP

In DBT-S, we use the word SLIP as a reminder of what really matters:

Skills Learning Improves Progress

A slip doesn't mean you've failed.

It means there's something new to learn.

Each time you:

- Look at what happened
- Practice skills
- Adjust your plan
- Recommit to your goals

You're moving forward—even if it doesn't feel like it yet.

Key Takeaway

Progress isn't about never falling back.

It's about getting back up with more skills than before.

Setbacks don't stop change.

Giving up does.

And you don't have to do that.

Skills Learning Improves Progress (SLIP) Worksheet

Purpose:

This worksheet helps you turn a slip, setback, or relapse into useful information. A SLIP does not mean failure. It means there is something new to learn.

Take your time. Answer what you can. You can complete this alone or with your therapist or group.

1. What Made Me More Vulnerable?

Think about what was going on before the slip that made things harder. Examples: Strong emotions, stress or exhaustion, conflict or loneliness

What made me more vulnerable?

2. What Triggered the SLIP?

A trigger is the moment or situation that set things in motion. Examples: A thought, memory, or feeling; a person, place, or event; a sudden urge or craving

What triggered the SLIP?

3. What Were the Consequences?

Look at the effects without judging yourself.

For me:
(emotions, physical effects, thoughts, urges)

For others (if any):
(relationships, trust, impact)

4. What Did I Learn From This SLIP?

Every attempt at change teaches something.

What did this experience show me about my patterns, needs, or risks?

5. What Skills Can Help Me Avoid a Similar SLIP?

Think about skills that could help earlier next time.

Examples: Mindfulness, Emotion regulation, Distress tolerance, Urge-surfing

What skills might help prevent a similar SLIP?

6. What Skills Can Help Me Handle the Consequences?

These are skills that help keep consequences from becoming new vulnerabilities.

Examples: Self-soothing , Problem-solving, Radical acceptance

What skills can help me deal with the aftermath?

7. What Skills Help Me Make Amends With Myself?

Self-repair matters.

Examples: Self-validation, Non-judgmental stance, Self-compassion, Re-committing to goals

How can I make amends with myself?

8. What Skills Help Me Make Amends With Others?

If others were affected, repair can support healing and trust.

Examples: Honest communication, Taking responsibility without shame, Listening

How can I make amends with others (if needed)?

9. What Am I Committed to Doing Next?

Keep this specific and realistic.

My next step forward:

10. Who Will I Share This Commitment With?

Sharing increases follow-through and support.

I will share this with:

Final Reminder

S L I P = **S**kills **L**earning **I**mproves **P**rogress

You didn't fail—you learned.

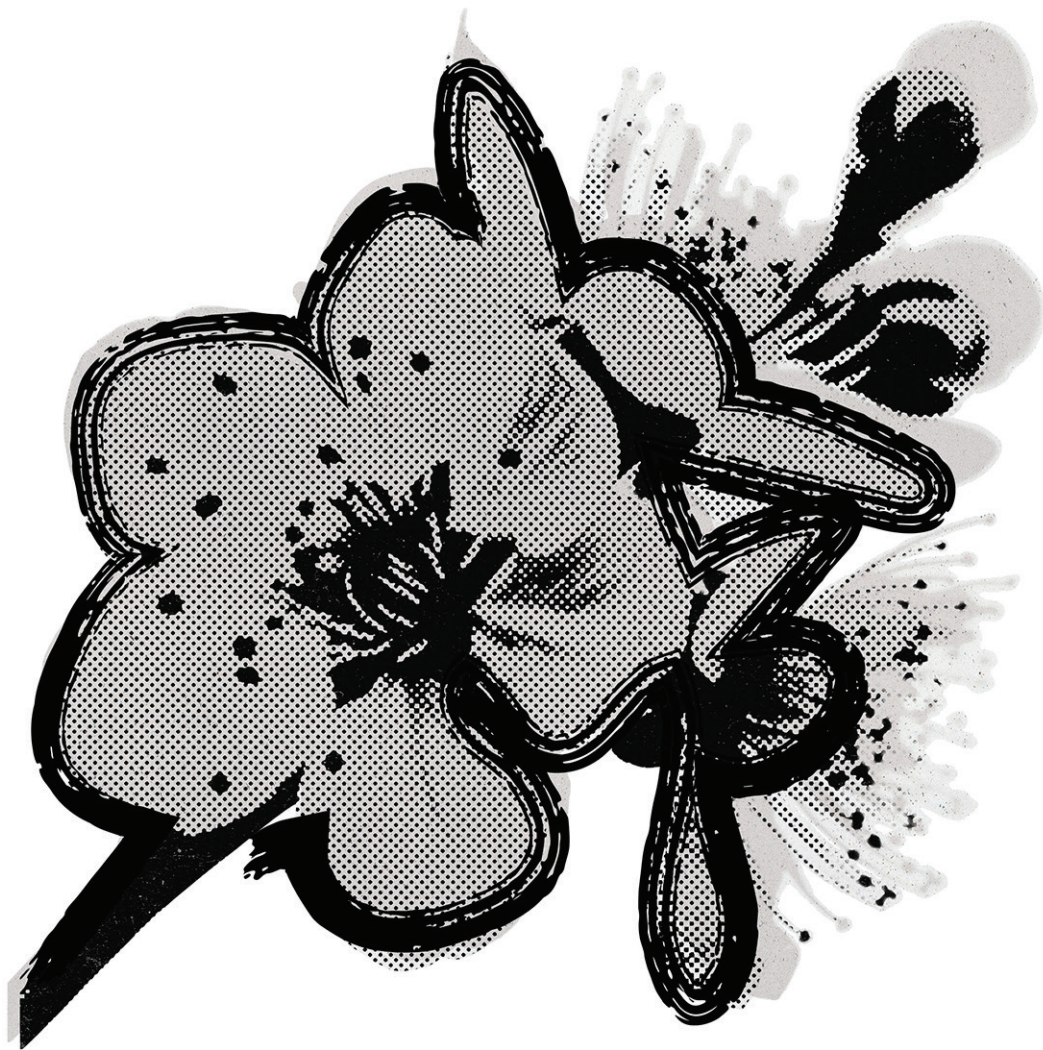
And learning is how change lasts.

Bring this worksheet to your next session or group to keep moving forward.

Part Three

Mindfulness

Skills Training



Mindfulness Module

Learning to Be Present and Respond Effectively

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the ability to pay attention on purpose—to notice what is happening right now, without judging it.

When you are mindful, you are:

- Aware of the present moment
- Focused rather than scattered
- Able to choose how you respond instead of reacting automatically

Mindfulness helps you stay connected to what is happening inside you and around you, so your actions are more intentional and effective.

Mindfulness Is a Practice, Not a Destination

Mindfulness is not something you “achieve” and then you’re done.

It’s more like physical fitness:

- There is no finish line
- Daily practice matters more than perfection
- Benefits build over time

Research shows that regular mindfulness practice:

- Changes how the brain responds to stress
- Improves emotional balance
- Supports overall physical and mental health

Practicing mindfulness is valuable because of the practice itself, not because you reach a final goal.

The Untrained Mind

Many people live with what could be called an untrained mind.

An untrained mind:

- Gets pulled around by strong emotions and urges
- Reacts quickly without awareness
- Feels overwhelmed by constant stimulation
- Jumps from thought to thought without rest

This can lead to:

- Increased stress
- More impulsive choices
- Reactive behaviors, including substance use

When attention isn’t trained, it’s harder to pause, reflect, and choose what actually helps.

Training the Mind

Just as physical exercise strengthens the body, mindfulness strengthens the mind.

With practice, mindfulness helps you:

- Notice emotions and urges earlier
- Stay present during difficult moments
- Reduce reactivity
- Respond more calmly and skillfully

Over time, this leads to:

- A quieter mind
- Greater clarity
- More peace and steadiness
- A stronger sense of control over your choices

Mindfulness in DBT-S

In DBT-S, mindfulness is the foundation for all other skills.

Mindfulness helps you:

- Recognize emotional cycles
- Notice substance use urges before they take over
- Identify triggers
- Choose skills instead of automatic reactions

DBT-S teaches specific states of mind and core mindfulness skills that you practice every day to support recovery and effective living.

Everyday Mindfulness

Mindfulness doesn't require special equipment or long meditation sessions.

It happens in daily life:

- While eating
- While walking
- While breathing
- While doing ordinary tasks

A traditional saying about mindfulness captures this idea:

*Before awakening:
chop wood and carry water.
After awakening:
chop wood and carry water.*

*Life doesn't change because you're
mindful.
How you experience life changes.*

Key Takeaway

Mindfulness helps you slow down, wake up, and choose your next step with intention.

You don't practice mindfulness to escape life.

You practice mindfulness to live it more fully.

States of Mind



How Emotions and Logic Work Together

In DBT-S, we talk about three different states of mind that everyone moves through:

- Emotion Mind
- Reason Mind
- Wise Mind

You are not “bad” or “wrong” for being in any of these states.

The goal is not to judge your state of mind, but to notice whether it is helpful in the moment.

Emotion Mind

Emotion Mind is when feelings are in charge.

In Emotion Mind:

- Emotions feel strong, urgent, and convincing
- Urges can feel overwhelming
- Decisions are often driven by feelings in the moment

Emotion Mind is not useless. Emotions exist to motivate action.

For example, fear can help a parent react instantly to protect a child.

However, staying stuck in Emotion Mind can be hard.

When Emotion Mind takes over for too long:

- Emotions can feel never-ending
- Urges to escape or avoid discomfort increase
- Unhealthy coping behaviors may show up, such as substance use or self-harm

Emotion Mind can also lead to mood-congruent behaviors, meaning behaviors that feed the emotion instead of relieving it, such as:

- Isolating when depressed
- Avoiding situations when anxious
- Acting hostile or passive-aggressive when angry

These behaviors often keep the same painful emotions going.

Reason Mind

Reason Mind is when logic and facts are in charge.

In Reason Mind:

- Thinking is analytical and problem-focused
- Decisions are based on logic and planning
- Emotions are pushed aside

Reason Mind can be very helpful.

Some situations truly need logic—like making a budget, following safety steps, or handling an emergency.

But being stuck in Reason Mind also has limits.

When Reason Mind is used to avoid emotions:

- Feelings may build up underneath
- Emotions can intensify later
- You may disconnect from important emotional information

This can look like intellectualizing—thinking about emotions instead of feeling them.

Like other forms of avoidance, ignoring emotions usually backfires over time.

Wise Mind

Wise Mind is the balance point between Emotion Mind and Reason Mind.

In Wise Mind:

- You are aware of emotions and facts
- You stay connected to what you feel without being controlled by it
- You make choices that reflect your values and long-term goals

Wise Mind doesn't mean emotions disappear.

It means you can act effectively even when emotions and urges are present.

Wise Mind is:

- Calm but alert
- Thoughtful and intuitive
- Grounded in what truly matters to you

Choices made from Wise Mind tend to feel more “right,” even if they aren't easy.

Why Wise Mind Matters in Recovery

In DBT-S, Wise Mind helps you:

- Pause before reacting
- Choose skills instead of old habits
- Handle urges without acting on them
- Make decisions that support recovery

Recovery doesn't mean living without emotion or relying only on logic.

It means learning how to bring both together.

A Helpful Reminder

You will move between states of mind—sometimes many times a day.

That's normal.

The skill is learning to notice:

- “Where am I right now?”
- “Is this state helping me in this situation?”
- “Would shifting toward Wise Mind help?”

Key Takeaway

Emotion Mind gives you energy.

Reason Mind gives you clarity.

Wise Mind gives you direction.

DBT-S helps you learn how to return to Wise Mind—again and again.

Clear Mind

States of Mind That Support Recovery

For people working on substance use recovery, DBT-S describes three additional states of mind that can help guide the process:

- Addiction Mind
- Clean Mind
- Clear Mind

These are not labels and not judgments.

They are ways of understanding where your thinking is focused right now—so you can respond more effectively.

Addiction Mind

Addiction Mind is when substance use is running the show.

In Addiction Mind:

- Urges and cravings feel loud and urgent
- Thinking centers on using, planning to use, or getting access to substances
- Consequences are minimized or pushed aside
- It's easy to justify, rationalize, or deceive—yourself or others

Addiction Mind keeps the door to using wide open.

From other recovery approaches, this state can look like denial or ambivalence. In DBT-S terms, it simply means the mind is focused on short-term relief instead of long-term well-being.

Clean Mind

Clean Mind can show up after you stop using.

At first, Clean Mind may feel great—like a burst of hope or momentum. But it can also be risky.

In Clean Mind:

- Things feel “better,” so warning signs get overlooked
- Triggers and stressors don't feel important
- Planning and skill use may decrease
- There may be a belief of “I've got this now”

Clean Mind can also include thoughts like:

- “I don't need to be as careful anymore.”
- “I could probably use moderately.”
- “That won't happen to me again.”

This state is not a failure—it's a common phase. The danger is becoming less alert just when skills and awareness are still needed.

Clear Mind

Clear Mind is the goal in DBT-S recovery.

Clear Mind is similar to Wise Mind in that it blends awareness, honesty, and effectiveness—but it's specifically focused on recovery.

In Clear Mind:

- Urges and emotions are noticed without judgment
- You take cravings seriously instead of ignoring them
- You plan ahead instead of reacting later
- You stay realistic about risk
- You actively protect your recovery

Clear Mind has no illusions about relapse. It understands that slips can happen quietly and gradually if mindfulness, self-care, and skill use fade.

What Keeps You in Clear Mind

Clear Mind is built and maintained by:

Reducing and stopping substance use

Managing physical and emotional discomfort

- Using skills when urges show up
- Keeping doors to using closed
- Staying connected to support and resources
- Practicing mindfulness and self-care

Clear Mind is not something you “arrive at” and keep forever without effort.

It's practiced:

- Moment by moment
- One day at a time
- Even after years of sobriety

A Gentle Reminder

You may move between these states at different times.

That doesn't mean you're failing.

It means you're human.

The skill is noticing:

- “Which state am I in right now?”
- “What would help me move toward Clear Mind?”

Key Takeaway

Addiction Mind ignores risk.

Clean Mind underestimates risk.

Clear Mind respects risk—and plans for it.

Clear Mind is how recovery becomes steady, realistic, and sustainable.

Two Steps to Wise Mind and Clear Mind

How to Move From Reacting to Responding

Wise Mind and Clear Mind aren't places you magically arrive at.

They are states you practice returning to, again and again.

These two steps help you get there—especially when emotions, urges, or stress are strong.

Observe → One-Mindfully
Describe → Non-judgmentally
Participate → Effectively

Step One: Observe and Describe

(Non-Judgmentally and One-Mindfully)

This step is about waking up to what's happening.

Observing and describing means:

- Noticing your experience
- Allowing it to be there
- Watching it without fighting it or clinging to it

Think of your mind as having different windows, such as:

- Emotions
- Urges
- Physical sensations
- Thoughts
- Behaviors
- Other people and your surroundings
- Your senses

There are also windows to the past (memories) and the future (planning).

You don't have to keep every window open.

Mindfulness means choosing which windows to open and which to gently close, based on what helps you be effective.

Watching Without Judgment

When you observe, the goal is to watch without judging.

Judgments often sound like:

- "This is bad."
- "I shouldn't feel this way."
- "This means something is wrong with me."

Judgments tend to:

- Narrow your perspective
- Intensify emotions
- Get you stuck

They're like trying to see the world through a drinking straw—you miss important information.

Instead, try neutral descriptions, such as:

- "My chest feels tight."
- "I notice an urge to use."
- "My thoughts are racing."
- "I feel sadness and tension."

This kind of describing:

- Doesn't add to the experience
- Doesn't take anything away
- Keeps you connected and flexible

One-Mindful Attention

Observing and describing also means being one-mindful—focusing on one thing at a time.

A helpful image is being like a guard at a gate:

- You notice what comes in
- You notice what goes out
- You gently redirect attention when it wanders

Distractions happen. That's normal.

Each time you notice and refocus, you're training your mind.

Step Two: Participate Effectively

Observing and describing gives you awareness.

Awareness gives you choice.

Without awareness, life is mostly reactive:

- Emotions take over
- Urges run the show
- Old patterns repeat

With awareness, you can choose how to participate.

Choosing What Works

Participating effectively means asking:

- "What works here?"
- "What helps me move toward the life I want?"
- "What reflects my values and intentions?"

Effective participation may mean:

- Using a skill
- Asking for help
- Setting a boundary
- Removing barriers
- Changing your environment
- Staying with discomfort instead of escaping it

It's about playing the situation as skillfully as possible, given the cards you're holding right now.

Being In Your Life, Not Watching It

Effective participation isn't just about problem-solving.

It also means:

- Being present
- Being engaged
- Being in the moment instead of on the sidelines

It's the difference between:

- Thinking about life
- And actually living it

This is how Wise Mind and Clear Mind begin to guide your actions naturally.

Practice Makes It Feel Natural

The more you practice these steps:

- The more automatic skillful choices become
- The more often Wise Mind shows up
- The more stable Clear Mind feels in recovery

Over time, these skills stop feeling like “techniques” and start feeling like part of who you are.

A Simple Reminder

Before insight: do the work of daily life.

After insight: do the work of daily life.

Or said another way:

Chop wood. Carry water.

And keep practicing.

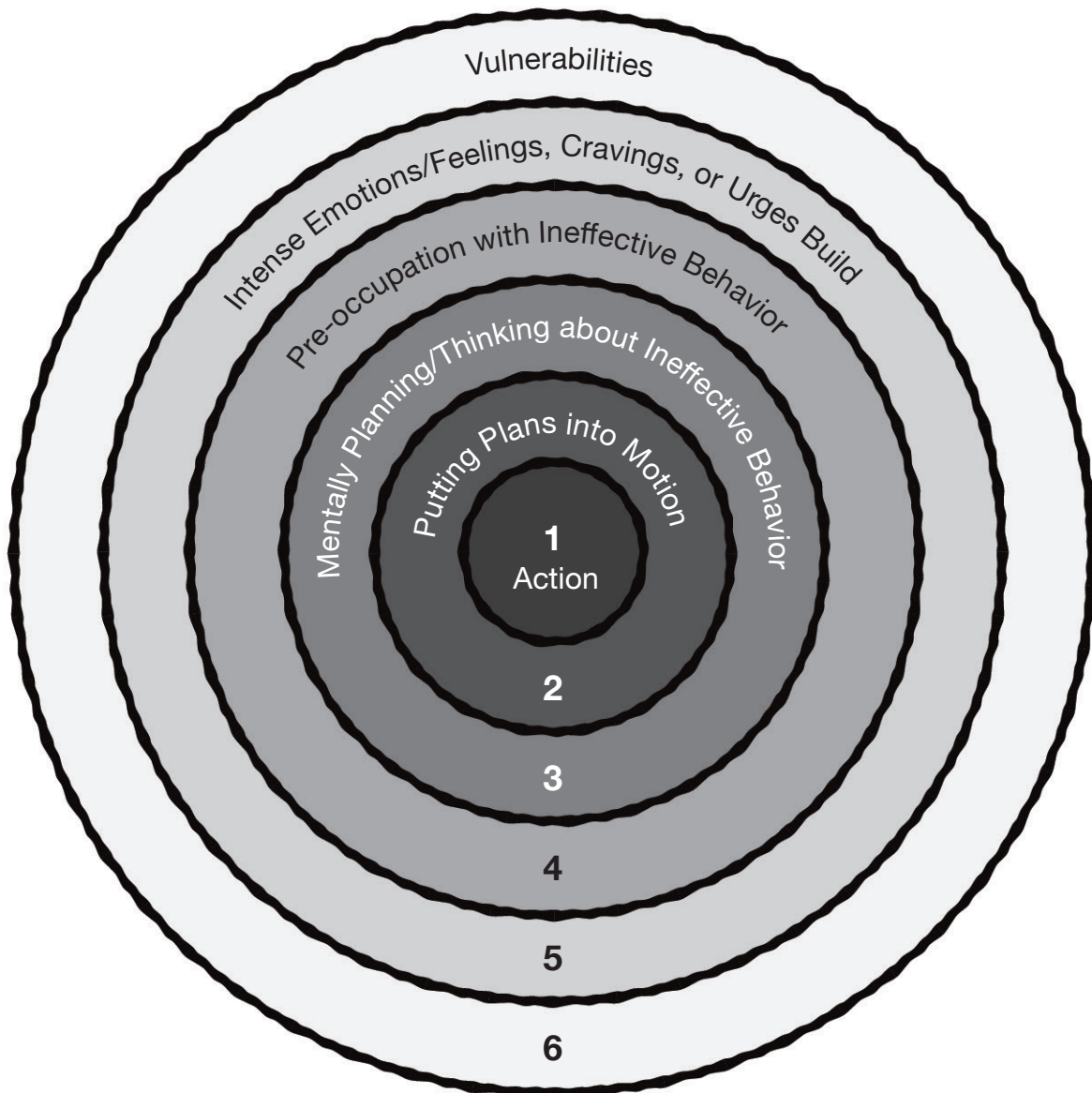
Key Takeaway

First, notice without judging.

Then, choose what works.

Wise Mind and Clear Mind grow from these two steps—moment by moment, one choice at a time.

Observe and Describe a Process of Ineffective Behavior



1: Action → **2:** Putting Plans into Motion → **3:** Mentally Planning/Thinking about Ineffective Behavior → **4:** Pre-occupation with Ineffective Behavior → **5:** Intense Emotions/Feelings, Cravings, or Urges Build → **6:** Vulnerabilities

1: Action

Using ineffective behavior as a short term solution. Observe and describe ineffective behavior. Describe skills you need to practice/implement to minimize and/or avoid slips.

2: Putting Plans into Motion

At this point you are taking active steps toward ineffective behavior. Observe and describe how putting your plans into motion at those times appears to you in retrospect. Describe skills you can implement and practice to address behavioral steps toward ineffective behavior.

3: Mentally Planning/Thinking about Ineffective Behavior

At this point thinking may shift into planning. For example planning mapping out substance use, when you will use it, where you will use it, how you will get it or planning a time to me alone. This can apply to any other ineffective behavior. Observe and describe how your planning at those times appears to you in retrospect.

4: Pre-occupation with Ineffective Behavior

At this part many people can become preoccupied with ineffective behavior. Examples of this could be minimizing or rationalizing ineffective behavior. You may be stuck in a negative thought process. You may tell yourself that substance use or self-injurious behavior is the only solution and it's not a big deal to engage in this behavior. Observe and describe what you may have told yourself at this time and what self-talk occurred before you engaged in ineffective behaviors. Observe and describe skills you need to practice to address self-talk.



5: Intense Emotions/Feelings, Cravings, or Urges Build

When we do not attend to our vulnerabilities it can impact and fuel intense emotions, cravings and urges. This emotional intensity can be triggering and feel like they can last for a long time. This can be challenging to manage if substance use or other ineffective behaviors was a short term solution in the past. Observe and describe feelings, cravings, and urges that can be difficult to manage. Observe and describe skills you can implement and practice to address intense emotions, cravings, and urges.



6: Vulnerabilities

When we are not attending to our own self-care and basic needs vulnerabilities can increase and create difficulties to emotionally regulate ourselves. When paired with stress these vulnerabilities can thrive and intensify. In addition if we are not attending to our values and building a satisfying life it can leave space for falling back into old maladaptive behaviors. Describe the vulnerabilities that apply to you. Describe the skills you can implement and practice to address these vulnerabilities.



Nonjudgmental Stance, Self-Acceptance, and Change

How Letting Go of Judgment Helps You Move Forward

Judgment Doesn't Create Change.

No one has ever overcome mental health symptoms or substance use by being harsh with themselves—or by being judged by others. In fact, judgment tends to:

- Increase stress and emotional pain
- Make urges stronger
- Keep old patterns going
- Make change feel harder, not easier

Judgment often traps people in cycles of shame, avoidance, and self-criticism. These cycles don't lead to growth—they keep people stuck.

What Happens When We Judge Ourselves

Judgment can sound like:

- “I'm weak.”
- “I should be better by now.”
- “I always mess things up.”
- “This proves I'll never change.”

Most of the time, judgment:

- Distorts reality
- Narrows perspective
- Shuts down learning
- Pushes us into reactive behaviors

When judgment takes over, we lose touch with our deeper goals and values and fall back into automatic habits.

Being Nonjudgmental Does Not Mean Avoiding Responsibility

Staying nonjudgmental does not mean:

- Making excuses
- Ignoring consequences
- Pretending nothing happened

You are still responsible for your choices.

A nonjudgmental stance means that after a mistake or slip, you:

- Acknowledge what happened
- Learn from it
- Make adjustments
- Move forward

You don't punish yourself into change—you learn your way into it.

In DBT-S, a slip is called a SLIP:

Skills Learning Improves Progress

When a slip happens:

- You move quickly into learning mode
- You look at what led up to it
- You strengthen your skills and plans
- You avoid self-criticism that becomes a new vulnerability

This is how a nonjudgmental stance turns a setback into forward movement—creating something useful out of something painful.

Self-Acceptance Comes First

A nonjudgmental stance opens the door to self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance means:

- Acknowledging who you are right now
- Seeing your strengths and struggles clearly
- Letting go of fighting reality

Self-acceptance is not giving up.

It is not saying, “This is fine forever.”

It is saying:

“This is where I am—and this is where I start.”

When you stop fighting yourself, you free up energy for change.

Acceptance Fuels Change

Acceptance and change are not opposites.

Acceptance:

- Calms emotional intensity
- Reduces shame
- Makes learning possible

Change:

- Builds new skills
- Creates new choices
- Moves you toward the life you want

In DBT-S, acceptance is both the starting point for change—and a form of change itself.

A Gentle Reminder

You don’t change by being harder on yourself.

You change by being honest, curious, and kind enough to keep learning.

Key Takeaway

Judgment keeps you stuck.

Acceptance gives you room to move.

When you practice a nonjudgmental stance, self-acceptance follows—and change becomes possible.

One Moment at a Time



Making Big Changes Manageable

There's an old saying in recovery:

You may not know how to stay sober for a year—but you do know how to stay sober for today.

The same idea applies to anything that feels overwhelming.

Whether you're working on sobriety, managing urges, or getting through something painful, change is easier when it's broken into small pieces.

Smaller Timeframes Make Change Possible

Big commitments can feel intimidating or impossible when emotions are intense.

DBT-S encourages you to:

- Shrink the time frame
- Focus on what you can do right now
- Recommit again when the time ends

You don't have to decide about the rest of your life.

You just have to decide about this moment.

Examples of One-Moment Commitments

On a hard day, you might:

- Commit to not drinking or using for one hour (or even less)
- Set aside suicidal or self-harm urges until your next appointment
- Practice a skill for ten minutes at a time
- Delay a difficult conversation until tomorrow if you can't handle it skillfully today
- Commit to treatment one week at a time

When the time is up, you decide again.

Each recommitment is a success.

How Small Steps Add Up

When you link many small commitments together, they become:

- Longer periods of sobriety
- More emotional stability
- Greater confidence
- Lasting change

You build success one piece at a time.

Don't Just Watch the Clock

"One moment at a time" works best when you:

- Stay engaged in life
- Practice skills
- Do things that support the life you want

Getting absorbed in helpful activities makes time pass more easily and reduces focus on urges.

A Gentle Reminder

- You don't have to do everything today.
- You don't have to decide everything now.
- You just have to choose what helps in this moment.

Key Takeaway

Big change doesn't happen all at once.

It happens one moment at a time—and those moments add up.

Observing and Describing Triggers for Substance Use

Noticing What Pulls You Toward Using—and What Helps Instead

Substance use urges don't come out of nowhere. They usually follow emotions, situations, thoughts, or physical sensations.

Learning to notice and describe these triggers—without judging yourself—helps you respond more skillfully instead of reacting automatically.

Read through the common triggers below. Use them to better understand yourself, and add what you learn to your skill plans.

Common Triggers and Skillful Responses

Painful Emotions

Strong feelings like anxiety, depression, anger, hopelessness, guilt, or shame can create powerful urges to use.

Helpful responses:

- Accept the emotion without judging it
- Talk with someone supportive
- Use healthy distractions or activities

Remember: unhealthy coping often feeds painful emotions

High-Risk Situations

Being around people, places, or things strongly linked to use—or being pressured by others.

Helpful responses:

- Ask yourself: Would I stay in a burning building?
- Leave calmly and deliberately
- Use your plan and skills to exit safely

Having a Bad Day

Using substances as a way to escape stress, frustration, or exhaustion.

Helpful responses:

- Replace substance use with stress-management skills
- Use self-care, relaxation, or problem-solving
- Bad days require more skills, not fewer

Having a Great Day

Wanting to keep positive feelings going.

Helpful responses:

- Find ways to celebrate or enjoy yourself without substances
- Build positive experiences that don't cost you later

Nostalgia for the “Good Old Days”

Remembering only the positive parts of using and forgetting the harm.

Helpful responses:

- Balance the picture by recalling the “bad old days”
- Remember how substance use affected your life, health, and relationships

Minimizing the Effects of Use

Thinking “it’s not that bad” or “others are worse,” or believing substances make you more fun.

Helpful responses:

- Think long-term: health, finances, trust, goals
- Remember: no one has special immunity to substance effects

Strong Physical Sensations or Cravings

Body sensations can strongly drive behavior.

Helpful responses:

- Practice urge-surfing
- Use relaxation, distraction, or opposite-to-emotion skills
- Build healthy pleasures and positive experiences

Withdrawal Symptoms

Feeling physically or emotionally unwell can tempt you to use again.

Helpful responses:

- Practice radical acceptance of discomfort
- Consult a physician if needed
- Use self-care skills and healthy distractions
- Remind yourself: this discomfort will pass

“Just One Won’t Hurt”

Knowing, deep down, that it usually isn’t just one.

Helpful responses:

- Look at your own history honestly
- Compare how often “one” stayed one versus became more
- Use facts, not wishful thinking

“This Is the Last Time” or “I’ll Start Tomorrow”

Making promises that haven’t worked before.

Helpful responses:

- Review the stages of change
- Be honest about where you are right now
- Ask for support that matches your stage

“It’s Not Fair—Other People Can Do It”

Comparing yourself to others who seem unaffected.

Helpful responses:

- Practice radical acceptance that life isn’t always fair
- Refocus on what helps you build a good life
- Work on mastery and positive experiences without substances

“I’m a Lost Cause”

Using substances to confirm negative beliefs about yourself.

Helpful responses:

- Practice a nonjudgmental stance
- Ask for support—even if it feels uncomfortable
- Use distraction or grounding until the thought passes

“I Deserve a Celebration”

Linking success to substance use.

Helpful responses:

- You do deserve celebration
- Choose healthy, positive ways to reward yourself

“I Deserve an Escape”

Using substances to cope with how hard life feels.

Helpful responses:

- You do deserve relief
- Look for healthy escapes and pleasures
- Use skills that give relief without long-term cost

“I Can’t Stand This”

Feeling trapped in unbearable emotions or situations.

Helpful responses:

- Practice acceptance and distress-tolerance skills
- Reach out for validation and support
- Remember: urges often peak and pass within minutes

Confusing Wants With Needs

Thinking wanting substances means needing them.

Helpful responses:

- Question that belief
- Use mindfulness, relaxation, or fun activities
- Build positive experience in healthier ways

Tunnel Vision (Myopic Thinking)

Seeing only today or only part of the picture.

Helpful responses:

- Practice dialectical thinking
- Zoom out—see both the short-term and long-term view

Turning a Slip Into a Relapse

Thinking “I already messed up, so why stop now.”

Helpful responses:

- Remember your commitments
- Use dialectical abstinence
- Take a nonjudgmental stance
- “Play the tape through” to see likely consequences
- Don’t burn down what you’ve worked hard to build

“No One Cares About Me Anyway”

Believing you’re not worth care or concern.

Helpful responses:

- Test that belief by reaching out
- Talk with a therapist, group member, friend, or crisis resource
- Allow others to show care—even if it feels hard

Final Reminder

Triggers are information, not failure.

The more clearly you can observe and describe what pulls you toward using, the more choices you have to respond differently.

Awareness opens the door to skills—and skills keep the door to recovery open.

Stages Of Change & DBT Skill Matching

CORE CONCEPT:

Behavior change usually happens in stages, not all at once. DBT skills are most effective when matched to a person's current readiness for change. This handout helps identify where someone is in the change process and what skills may help most right now.

Purpose of this handout:

- This guide can help clients and clinicians:
 - Meet the person where they are
 - Reduce resistance and power struggles
 - Increase motivation for change
 - Choose effective DBT skills
 - Support long-term recovery and growth



1. Precontemplation

CORE CONCEPT:

At this stage, the person may not believe there is a problem or may not feel ready to look at it.

Common Signs:

- Limited insight
- Minimizes consequences
- Blames outside factors
- Often pressured by others to seek help

Helpful Goals:

Increase awareness without creating defensiveness.

Most Helpful DBT Skills:

- Observe and Describe
- Nonjudgmental Stance
- Pros and Cons
- Validation

Examples:

- “Let’s look at what has been happening.”
- “What are the costs and benefits of staying the same?”
- “I understand why this feels hard to discuss.”

Holistic View:

Change often starts with awareness. Pressure may create resistance, but curiosity can open the door.

2. Contemplation

CORE CONCEPT:

The person sees a problem but feels unsure about changing.

Common Signs:

- Ambivalence
- Recognizes concerns
- Torn between comfort and growth
- Fear of failure or loss

Helpful Goals:

- Resolve ambivalence and build internal motivation.
- Most Helpful DBT Skills:
- Wise Mind
- Expanded Pros and Cons
- Dialectical Thinking
- Values Clarification

Examples:

- “Part of me wants change, part of me is afraid.”
- “Both can be true.”
- “What kind of life do I want to build?”

Holistic View:

Many people stay here for a while. Uncertainty is normal and often part of progress.

3. Preparation

CORE CONCEPT:

The person is getting ready to act and wants tools or a plan.

Common Signs:

- Ready to begin soon
- Making small attempts
- Looking for strategies
- More hopeful

Helpful Goals:

- Build commitment and create a realistic plan.
- Most Helpful DBT Skills:
- Commitment Strategies
- Coping Ahead
- Chain Analysis
- PLEASE Skills

Examples:

- “What gets in the way?”
- “What small first step can I take?”
- “How do I prepare for difficult moments?”

Holistic View:

Strong planning increases success. Small steps often create lasting momentum.

4. Action

CORE CONCEPT:

The person is actively making changes in behavior, emotions, or routines.

Common Signs:

- Using new skills
- Reducing harmful behaviors
- Emotional ups and downs
- Increased relapse risk

Helpful Goals:

Strengthen new habits and manage difficult emotions.

Most Helpful DBT Skills:

- Distress Tolerance
- TIPP
- Self-Soothe
- IMPROVE
- Opposite Action
- DEAR MAN, GIVE, FAST

Examples:

- “What skill can I use right now?”
- “How do I ride this urge without acting on it?”
- “How do I repeat what is working?”

Holistic View:

Action requires repetition. Progress is often uneven, but practice matters more than perfection.

5. Maintenance

CORE CONCEPT:

The new behavior is becoming part of everyday life.

Common Signs:

- Consistent progress
- Greater confidence
- Better stability
- Risk of complacency

Helpful Goals:

- Prevent relapse and strengthen a healthy identity.
- Most Helpful DBT Skills:
- Relapse Prevention Planning
- Build Mastery
- Accumulate Positive Emotions
- Radical Acceptance

Examples:

- “What keeps me well?”
- “How do I stay consistent?”
- “Who am I becoming?”

Holistic View:

Maintenance is not just avoiding setbacks. It is building a life worth living.

6. Relapse (if it occurs)

CORE CONCEPT:

Setbacks may happen. Relapse does not erase progress.

Common Signs:

- Shame
- Hopeless thoughts
- Self-criticism
- Desire to give up

Helpful Goals:

Stabilize quickly and re-enter the change process.

Most Helpful DBT Skills:

- Nonjudgmental Stance
- Chain Analysis
- Self-Validation
- Radical Acceptance

Examples:

- “What happened, and what can I learn?”
- “This was a setback, not failure.”
- “I can restart today.”

Holistic View:

Relapse can become valuable information when used to improve the plan.

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Stage

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance
- Relapse

Primary Focus

- Awareness
- Resolve Ambivalence
- Planning
- Behavior Change
- Sustain Gains
- Re-engagement

Helpful DBT Skills

- Mindfulness, Validation
- Wise Mind, Dialectics
- Commitment, Chain Analysis
- Distress Tolerance, Opposite Action
- Emotion Regulation
- Radical Acceptance, Analysis

KEY CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

- People move through stages in a non-linear way.
- Skills work best when matched to readiness level.
- Validation matters at every stage.
- Acceptance and change can happen together.
- People are doing the best they can and can keep growing.

Breathing: The Anchor to Mindfulness

Coming Back to the Present Moment

Breathing is the most basic sign of life—and one of the most powerful tools for grounding yourself in the present moment.

When things feel overwhelming, your breath is always with you.

You don't have to find it, earn it, or prepare for it.

You just return to it.

Why Breathing Helps

Breathing is an incompatible skill. That means when you are breathing slowly and intentionally, it directly interferes with:

- Panic
- High anxiety
- Anger
- Impulsivity
- Urges to escape or react

This makes breathing especially helpful for people working on mental health symptoms and substance use.

Once practiced regularly, breathing helps:

- Calm the nervous system
- Reduce stress
- Slow racing thoughts
- Create space between urges and action

How Breathing Affects Your Body

When you breathe quickly and shallowly:

- Your body stays in “alarm mode”
- Stress hormones remain high
- Emotions feel more intense
- Urges feel harder to resist

When you breathe slowly and deeply:

- Your body receives more oxygen
- Your systems work more efficiently
- Tension begins to release
- A sense of calm and steadiness increases

There's an old idea that life is measured in breaths.

Whether or not that's literally true, it points to something important:

How you breathe matters.

Breathing Is Always Available

Breathing is:

- Free
- Portable
- Private
- Always accessible

You can use it:

- At home
- At work
- In group
- In public

During cravings or emotional spikes

No one even has to know you're doing it.

Practice Makes Breathing Powerful

Like any skill, breathing works best with practice.

Practicing a few times a day—even briefly—helps your body learn:

- How to calm itself
- How to shift out of stress more quickly
- How to respond instead of react

The more familiar breathing becomes, the easier it is to use when you really need it.

A Nonjudgmental Practice

When you practice breathing:

- There is no “right” or “wrong” breath
- Your mind will wander—and that's okay
- Each return to the breath is part of the practice

The goal is not to control your experience.

The goal is to meet the moment with acceptance.

A Simple Reminder

When life feels unsteady, return to what is steady.

- Breathe in.
- Breathe out.
- Begin again.

Key Takeaway

Your breath is an anchor.

No matter how intense the moment feels, you can always come back to it—and in doing so, come back to yourself.

Breathing Exercises



Simple Ways to Calm Your Body and Steady Your Mind

Breathing exercises are practical tools you can use:

- When emotions feel intense
- When judgments take over
- When urges or impulsivity show up
- Or anytime you want to feel more grounded

Aim to practice at least one breathing exercise a few times each day, and also during difficult moments. Over time, your body learns to calm itself more quickly.

You don't need to do these perfectly.

Showing up and practicing is enough.

3–5–7 Breathing

This exercise slows your nervous system and releases tension.

How to do it:

- Exhale fully
- Inhale through your nose for 3
- Hold for 5
- Exhale through your mouth for 7

Let the exhale be long and complete—even a little noisy if it helps.

This is especially helpful for anxiety, anger, and strong urges.

Counting Breaths

This exercise builds focus and steadiness.

How to do it:

- Breathe naturally
- Say “one” silently on your first exhale
- Continue counting each exhale up to 10
- If you lose track, gently return to one

Practice for 3–5 minutes.

Losing count is part of the practice—not a mistake.

Cue Yourself to Breathe

This exercise builds mindfulness into everyday life.

Choose 5–10 cues that remind you to take one to three deep breaths, such as:

- Walking through a doorway
- Sitting down at your desk
- Stopping at a red light
- Seeing a specific color
- Interacting with someone who triggers emotion

Each cue becomes a moment to pause, breathe, and reset.

From Frustration to Peace

This is a variation of cue-based breathing.

Choose common frustrating moments (traffic, interruptions, waiting, mistakes) and use them as reminders to:

- Breathe slowly and deeply
- Stay nonjudgmental
- Accept the moment as it is

You may find it helpful to repeat a phrase while breathing, such as:

“Life is like this.”

Bellows Breathing

This is an energizing breathing exercise.

How to do it:

- Breathe rapidly in and out through your nose
- Aim for about 3 breaths per second
- Continue for 10 seconds

Use this when you feel sluggish, foggy, or low in energy.

(This is not meant for calming.)

Alternate Nostril Breathing

This exercise promotes balance and steadiness.

How to do it:

- Close your left nostril and breathe in through your right
- Close your right nostril and breathe out through your left
- Breathe in through the left, then switch again
- Continue alternating sides slowly

This can help when emotions feel uneven or scattered.

Square Breathing

This exercise brings rhythm and control.

How to do it:

- Inhale for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- Exhale for 4 seconds
- Repeat 4 times

This is a good all-purpose breathing skill for stress, urges, or grounding.

A Gentle Reminder

Breathing is not about forcing calm.

It's about:

- Meeting the moment
- Slowing things down
- Giving yourself space to choose your next step

Stay nonjudgmental as you practice.

Each breath is a chance to begin again.

Key Takeaway

You don't have to change everything at once.

Sometimes, the most skillful move is simply to pause and breathe.

Your breath is always available—use it.

Part Four

Distress Tolerance



Distress Tolerance Module

Getting Through Hard Moments Without Making Things Worse

Distress tolerance skills help you get through painful moments safely—without doing things that create more problems later.

These skills are especially useful during:

- Emotional overload
- Crises
- Strong urges
- Situations you can't immediately change

Distress tolerance is about surviving the moment—not fixing everything at once.

Why Distress Tolerance Matters

Everyone has times when life feels overwhelming and relief feels urgent.

Many people learn to cope through behaviors like:

- Using substances
- Overeating
- Self-injury
- Gambling
- Overspending
- Other impulsive behaviors

These behaviors often bring short-term relief, but they usually:

- Increase distress later
- Create new problems
- Keep painful cycles going

They work briefly—but at a high cost.

You Can't Just "Stop" a Coping Behavior

Giving up any coping behavior is hard—especially if it once helped you survive.

Change doesn't work by simply saying:

"Don't do that anymore."

It works by replacing old coping behaviors with new ones that:

- Still provide relief
- Don't harm you
- Support your long-term goals

That's exactly what distress tolerance skills are for.

What Distress Tolerance Skills Do

Distress tolerance skills help you:

- Ride out intense emotions
- Get through urges without acting on them
- Stay safe during crises
- Buy time until emotions settle
- Prevent short-term relief from becoming long-term pain

These skills don't erase pain—but they help you move through it without making things worse.

Building Your Distress Tolerance Toolbox

The goal of this module is to help you build a wide range of options so you're not relying on just one way to cope.

Over time, you'll learn skills that help with:

- Emotional pain
- Physical discomfort
- Stressful situations
- Unexpected crises

The more tools you have, the more prepared you are.

Using These Skills in Your Plans

As you learn distress tolerance skills, add them to:

- Your Substance Use Prevention Plan
- Your Mental Health Symptom Response Plan
- Your Skills Implementation Plans

This helps make sure the skills are ready when you need them—especially in high-risk moments.

A Realistic Goal

Distress tolerance is not about liking pain or pretending things don't hurt.

It's about saying:

"This is hard—and I can get through it safely."

Each time you use a skill instead of an old behavior, you strengthen your ability to handle life as it is.

Key Takeaway

Painful moments are part of life.

Making them worse doesn't have to be.

Distress tolerance skills help you get through the storm without damaging what you've worked hard to build.

Distress Tolerance:

Guidelines for Using Skills Effectively

Knowing When and How to Use Distress Tolerance

Distress tolerance skills work best when you know when to use them, how to prepare, and what to do when they don't work right away.

These guidelines help you use distress tolerance in a way that actually supports recovery and emotional stability.

Ask yourself these 3 questions

Can I solve it?

Is this the right time?

Am I in Wise Mind?

Use Distress Tolerance When the Problem Can't Be Solved Right Now

Distress tolerance is for moments when:

- You can't fix the situation immediately
- Emotions or urges feel overwhelming
- You feel at risk of using substances, harming yourself, or acting in ways that sabotage your goals

If a problem can be solved and you're calm enough to think clearly, then problem-solving makes sense.

If not, distress tolerance comes first.

Trying to solve problems while overwhelmed often makes things worse.

Plan and Practice Before a Crisis Hits

Distress tolerance works best when it's already familiar.

Just like fire drills or emergency plans:

- You don't wait for a crisis to learn what to do
- You practice ahead of time
- You know your steps without having to think too hard

Create your distress tolerance plans before you need them—and practice them regularly.

Practice helps you:

- Stay in Wise Mind
- Stay in Clear Mind
- Respond instead of react

Build a Wide Toolbox

You can't have too many distress tolerance skills.

Some skills:

- Work only short-term
- Lose effectiveness if overused
- Fit some situations better than others

That's normal.

The more options you have, the more flexible and prepared you'll be—especially in high-stress moments.

Don't get complacent. Keep adding tools.

If a Skill Doesn't Work, Try Something Different

If distress tolerance isn't helping:

- Pause instead of pushing harder
- Ask yourself what might be missing

You may need:

- Mindfulness first
- A different skill
- A break or distraction
- Support from another person

Sometimes progress isn't about trying harder—it's about trying differently.

If you can't get over the mountain, walk around it.

Don't Give Up

Distress tolerance is not about instant relief.

It's about:

- Staying safe
- Reducing harm
- Buying time
- Keeping your long-term goals intact

Coach yourself with compassion.

Ask for help when needed.

Stay responsive—not reactive—to what's happening.

Every attempt counts.

Key Takeaway

Use distress tolerance when you can't fix the problem yet.

Practice before you need it.

Build many options.

Change strategies when needed.

And keep going.

Distress tolerance helps you get through the moment without losing the life you're building.

ACCEPTS

Short-Term Skills for Getting Through Distress

When distress is intense and you can't fix the problem right now, Wise Mind helps you accept the moment and turn toward skills that keep you safe and effective.

ACCEPTS is a group of short-term distress tolerance skills. These skills don't solve the problem—but they help you survive the moment without making things worse.

What ACCEPTS Is (and Isn't)

- ACCEPTS is for high distress
- ACCEPTS helps you ride out urges and emotions
- ACCEPTS buys you time and space
- ACCEPTS is not avoidance forever—it's a pause

Once distress comes down, you can return to problem-solving.

ACCEPTS

The Building Blocks

A

Activities

C

Contributing

C

Comparisons

E

Emotions

P

Push Away

T

Thoughts

S

Sensations

A – Activities

Activities give your mind and body something else to do.

Activities:

- Reduce depression and anxiety
- Create positive emotions
- Pull attention away from urges

The more engaging the activity, the better.

Throw yourself mindfully into what you're doing—without demanding a certain outcome. When you show up fully, the benefits tend to follow.

Remember how much time substances or symptoms once took—seeking, using, recovering, or ruminating.

You need replacement activities.

Plan activities into your day and follow through, even when motivation is low.

C – Contributing

Contributing helps you step outside your own distress.

You might:

- Help someone else
- Check in on another person
- Offer support or encouragement
- Share what has helped you

Contributing creates:

- Connection
- Perspective
- A sense of purpose

We all need a break from ourselves sometimes.

C – Comparisons

Comparisons help restore balance.

You might:

- Compare yourself to times you struggled more – or that you have improved
- Notice skills you're using now that you didn't have before
- Remember that others are facing even heavier challenges

This isn't about minimizing your pain—it's about widening perspective so distress doesn't shrink your world.

E – Emotions

You can influence how you feel by changing what you do and focus on.

Try activities that bring up different emotions, such as:

- Listening to music that matches what you need

- Watching a favorite show or movie
- Remembering positive moments (without comparing them to now)
- Working on a project or hobby

Emotions shift when attention and experience shift.

P – Push Away

Push Away means moving away from the problem temporarily.

Visualize:

- Leaving the problem in a box
- Placing it on a shelf
- Moving away from the shelf and towards the life you are creating

You might say:

“This is not a today thing.”

Then redirect your attention elsewhere.

Important reminder:

Push Away is short-term.

You can then choose to return to the problem later—when you’re ready

T – Thoughts

You can only focus on one thing at a time.

When distress is high, shift attention to neutral or absorbing thoughts, such as:

- Counting
- Reading
- Puzzles or games
- Focusing on lyrics or dialogue
- Inspirational quotes
- A good conversation

Changing thoughts can cool emotions and reduce urges.

S – Sensations

Sensations use the body to interrupt distress.

These skills are stimulating, not calming.

Try:

- Brisk walking or exercise
- Hot or cold showers or baths
- Splashing cold water on your face
- Loud music
- Strong tastes or smells
- Bright colors or physical movement

Strong sensations can quickly pull attention out of distress.

How to Use ACCEPTS

- Use ACCEPTS early, before urges peak
- Use more than one skill if needed
- Switch strategies if one isn't working
- Stay nonjudgmental—effort counts

ACCEPTS works best when practiced before you're overwhelmed.

Key Takeaway

You don't need to escape distress to survive it.

ACCEPTS helps you get through the moment without damaging what you're building.

When distress comes down, Wise Mind can take the next step.

Choosing Enjoyable and Meaningful Activities

Recovery Skills Worksheet (Mental Health & Substance Use Recovery)

Why This Matters

Recovery is not only about stopping harmful behaviors. It is also about building a life that feels worth living.

- Many people in recovery notice that:
- Free time can feel empty or boring
- Old activities may be connected to substance use
- Depression, anxiety, or low energy can make it hard to start things
- It may take time to rediscover what feels enjoyable or meaningful

This worksheet helps you explore activities that support recovery, improve mood, and add meaning to your life.

Step 1: Understanding Two Types of Helpful Activities

Recovery activities often fall into two categories.

Enjoyable Activities

These help improve mood and stress levels.

Examples:

- Listening to music
- Watching a movie
- Going for a walk
- Playing a game
- Talking with a friend
- Cooking something you like

Meaningful Activities

These help build purpose, connection, and long-term satisfaction.

Examples:

- Helping someone else
- Learning a new skill
- Volunteering
- Spending time with family
- Practicing spirituality
- Working toward personal goals

Many activities can be both enjoyable and meaningful.

Step 2: What Did You Enjoy in the Past?

Think about your life before substance use or during better periods of mental health.

Write down activities you used to enjoy.

Past Activities I Enjoyed

Could I Try This Again? (Yes/Maybe/No)

Questions to consider:

- What hobbies did I used to have?
- What did I enjoy as a child or teenager?
- What activities helped me relax?

Step 3: Trying New Activities

Recovery is also about discovering new interests.

List some activities you might be willing to try. For ideas think of activities you have heard others talk about, one's that friends and those admire do, even things outside your comfort zone.

New Activities I Might Try

Why This Might Be Good For Me

Examples:

- Exercise classes
- Art or music
- Support groups
- Outdoor activities
- Learning something new
- Volunteer work

Step 4: Is This Activity Recovery-Friendly?

Ask yourself the following questions before choosing an activity.

Question: Yes / No

Does this activity support my recovery?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does it avoid people, places, or situations connected to substance use?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does it improve my mood or energy?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Does it help me connect with healthy people?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Would my future self feel proud of doing this?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If most answers are Yes, it is likely a helpful activity.

Step 5: Start Small (Just Noticeable Change)

Large changes can feel overwhelming. Instead, focus on small steps.

Choose one small activity you could try this week.

My activity:

When I will do it:

How long I will try it (even 10 minutes counts):

Who could support me with this:

Step 6: Reflect After Trying the Activity

After trying the activity, ask yourself:

Question

How did I feel before doing it?

How did I feel afterward?

What did I like about it?

Would I try it again?

What might make it easier next time?

Recovery Reminder

You do not need to feel motivated before starting an activity.

Often the pattern works like this:

Action → Small Success → Improved Mood → More Motivation

Taking small steps toward enjoyable and meaningful activities helps build a life that supports recovery.

IMPROVE the Moment

Skills to Make Hard Moments More Bearable

IMPROVE skills help you get through distress when you can't fix the situation right now. Like ACCEPTS, these skills are short-term tools that reduce suffering and help you avoid making things worse.

IMPROVE doesn't remove pain—but it changes how you experience the moment so you can keep moving forward.

I

Imagery

M

Meaning

P

Prayer

R

Relaxation

O

One thing at a time

V

Vacation

E

Encouragement

I – Imagery

Use your imagination to calm your body and steady your mind. Try:

- Visualizing a peaceful or safe place (beach, forest, favorite room)
- Using guided imagery recordings
- Mentally rehearsing yourself using skills and coping well
- Imagining your future life in recovery—stable, sober, and meaningful

Your mind can cue your body to relax: breathing slows, muscles loosen, and tension drops.

Helpful tip: imagery can be especially useful before sleep.

Important reminder: don't rehearse what doesn't work (like imagining substance use or harmful behavior). Practice the life you're building.

M – Meaning

When things feel unbearable, ask:

- Is there anything this struggle might be teaching me?
- Is this a tragedy—or difficult practice?

Meaning doesn't erase pain, but it can reduce hopelessness.

Many people later recognize that adversity helped them develop strength, patience, compassion, or wisdom they didn't know they had.

Dialectical reminder: every hardship can contain growth—even if you don't see it yet.

P – Prayer (or Connection)

If prayer or spirituality is meaningful to you, use it as a source of strength. Try:

- Asking for courage, patience, or guidance
- Seeking steadiness rather than asking “why me”

If prayer isn't your style, you can still connect by:

- Talking silently to someone you admire or love
- Reflecting on a value or principle that grounds you
- Reading something that reminds you you're not alone

The goal is connection beyond the moment, not perfection.

R – Relaxation

Many people used substances to relax. IMPROVE helps you meet this need in healthier ways. Try:

- Slow breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Self-soothe skills
- Stretching, warm showers, or calming music

Relaxation works best when practiced daily, not only during crises.

O – One Thing (or One Step) at a Time

When life feels overwhelming, shrink the focus. Ask:

- What is the most important thing right now?
- What is the next small step I can handle?

In recovery, this might mean:

- Staying sober for one day, one hour, or one minute
- Focusing on one task instead of the whole future

You may need to accept having many problems in order to work on just one.

V – Vacation

Vacation means taking a short, intentional break—either during distress or before distress builds.

Examples:

- Stepping outside for fresh air
- Taking a short walk
- Listening to music for ten minutes
- Watching a favorite show
- Exercising or doing a hobby
- Talking with a friend

If substances were your main way of taking a break, the need for relief is still valid—the method needs to change.

Plan “you time” into your day proactively, not only when overwhelmed.

Important reminder: vacation is time-limited, not long-term avoidance.

E – Encouragement

Notice your self-talk without judgment.

Gently replace discouraging messages with supportive ones, such as:

- “I can do this.”
- “I can survive this next minute.”
- “I’m doing the best I can.”
- “Skills can help me right now.”
- “I have people who care about me.”
- “This moment will pass.”
- “This is teaching me patience (or strength, or resilience).”

You don’t have to fully believe these statements at first. Repeating them is enough to weaken old, harmful patterns.

Create new music—don’t just replay old tapes.

How to Use IMPROVE

- Use IMPROVE when distress is high and change isn't possible yet
- Pick one or two skills that fit the moment
- Switch strategies if something isn't helping
- Stay nonjudgmental—effort matters

IMPROVE buys you time. When distress comes down, Wise Mind can decide what's next.

Key Takeaway

You don't have to escape the moment to survive it.

IMPROVE helps you stay present, supported, and aligned with recovery—even when things are hard.

Bridge Burning

Removing the Means to Act on Urges and Harmful Behaviors

Burning bridges means **actively removing opportunities to act on urges**—before urges turn into actions.

This skill is based on a simple truth:

Urges are much easier to act on when the means are close at hand.

By removing access and adding barriers between urges and behavior, you:

- Buy yourself time
- Create space to use skills
- Reduce impulsive decisions
- Increase the chances that urges will pass

Burning bridges is not about punishment.

It's about **protecting the life you're building**.

Why Burning Bridges Works

Urges rise and fall like waves.

When access is immediate, urges often win.

When access is blocked:

- Urges have time to peak and fall
- Wise Mind and Clear Mind have a chance to show up
- Skills become easier to use

Burning bridges creates **more chances to choose recovery**.

Burning Bridges with Substance Use

Ways to reduce access to alcohol and drugs:

- Remove all alcohol and drugs from your home
- Get rid of items connected to use (glasses, corkscrews, pipes, papers, lighters, etc.)
- Delete phone numbers of people you used with or bought from
- Block those numbers or change your phone number if needed
- Avoid bars, liquor stores, and places tied to using
- Change daily routes and routines to avoid triggers
- Avoid carrying cash
- Tell others clearly that you no longer use substances
- Let someone know right away when urges show up

Add your own ideas here:

(Anything that makes using harder and recovery easier)

Burning Bridges with Self-Injury or Suicidal Urges

Ways to reduce risk:

- Remove razors, lighters, or other self-injury tools
- Change routines or rituals tied to self-injury
- Remove access to the specific method linked to suicidal urges
- Tell others when you feel unsafe
- Seek immediate help (including going to the hospital) when urges escalate

Add your own ideas here:

(Anything that increases safety and buys time)

Burning Bridges with Overspending

Ways to reduce impulsive spending:

- Cut up credit cards
- Freeze a card in water or give it to someone you trust
- Have someone else hold extra money when urges are high
- Set a waiting period before non-essential purchases
- Avoid stores, malls, online shopping, and TV shopping

Add your own ideas here:

Burning Bridges with Unhealthy or Hopeless Relationships

Ways to create distance:

- Delete the person's number
- Block phone calls and texts or change your number
- Route emails to junk or delete them
- Tell others clearly that you've moved on
- Fill free time with healthy activities and supportive people

Add your own ideas here:

Burning Bridges with Overeating

Ways to reduce binge or impulse eating:

- Keep binge or "comfort" foods out of the house
- Portion food before eating and put the rest away
- Eat regularly throughout the day, including planned snacks
- Eat mindfully rather than automatically

Add your own ideas here:

Burning Bridges with Gambling

Ways to reduce access:

- Avoid places where gambling occurs
- Limit access to cash and credit
- Have someone trustworthy hold your money when urges are high
- Block gambling websites and apps

Add your own ideas here:

Important Reminders

- Burning bridges works best alongside other skills
- Removing access must be paired with replacement behaviors
- Avoid trading one unhealthy behavior for another
- This skill is about support, not control
- You can always rebuild bridges to healthy things later

Key Takeaway

Burning bridges doesn't mean you're weak.

It means you're wise enough to protect yourself when urges are strong.

You're not giving something up—you're making room for a better life.

Bridge Building

Finding New Ways to Meet Your Wants and Needs

Core Idea

When you stop an unhealthy behavior, something important is lost—relief, pleasure, connection, excitement, routine, or meaning.

If you don't replace what was lost, urges will return.

Building new bridges means intentionally creating healthier ways to meet the same wants and needs that addiction once met—without harming you or your life.

Burning bridges removes danger.

Building bridges creates a life worth protecting.

Why Bridge-Building Matters

Addiction didn't happen randomly—it worked for something, at least in the short term.

Recovery works best when you:

- Identify what addiction gave you
- Build safer ways to get those same benefits
- Practice them consistently

You're not "giving something up."

You're meeting your needs differently.

If Your Addiction Made You Feel Good (Short-Term Pleasure)

Try building pleasure in healthy ways:

- Increase opportunities to laugh (comedy, shows, jokes, humor with others)
- Practice Build Positive Experience skills
- Boost endorphins through movement, physical touch, or time outdoors
- Practice affirmations and self-encouragement

Other ways I can feel good:

If Your Addiction Helped You Relax

Try healthier ways to unwind:

- Practice Self-Soothe skills
- Use deep breathing regularly (not just during stress)
- Schedule downtime with no responsibilities
- Take breaks from screens and constant stimulation
- Practice letting go of the “small stuff”

Other ways I can relax:

If Your Addiction Involved Ritual or Routine

Create meaningful, grounding rituals:

- Start a meditation practice
- Develop a prayer or reflection routine
- Create morning and bedtime rituals
- Build a daily tea, coffee, or quiet time ritual

Rituals help regulate emotions and create stability.

Other rituals I can build:

If Your Addiction Was Social

Build connection without harm:

- Attend recovery or support meetings (e.g., 12-step or alternatives)
- Get involved in a cause, advocacy group, or volunteer work
- Build friendships with people who support your recovery
- Make time for small talk and everyday connection

Isolation fuels urges. Connection weakens them.

Other ways I can be social:

If Your Addiction Was About Fun

Rediscover enjoyment:

- Explore new hobbies
- Learn a skill or creative project
- Join a sports league or group activity
- Play music, sing, dance, or perform
- Fun doesn't disappear in recovery—it changes form.

Other ways I can have fun:

If Your Addiction Involved Risk or Excitement

Find safe ways to feel alive:

- Try adventurous but healthy activities (hiking, trail running, climbing, etc.)
- Perform creatively (music, comedy, art)
- Take on challenges that stretch you without harming you

Excitement doesn't have to equal danger.

Other safe risks I can take:

If Your Addiction Was a Way to Rebel or Break Rules

Try healthy rebellion:

- Question beliefs that don't sit right with you
- Speak your truth respectfully
- Write, advocate, or support causes you believe in
- Stand out in positive, value-driven ways

Rebellion can be about integrity, not self-destruction.

Other ways I can rebel safely:

Putting It All Together

- Burning bridges protects you in moments of urgency
- Building bridges sustains you long-term
- Recovery is not about deprivation—it's about redesign

Start small. Practice often. Adjust as you learn.

Key Takeaway

You are allowed to want pleasure, rest, excitement, connection, and meaning.

Building new bridges helps you meet those needs in ways that support the life you're creating—not the life you're leaving behind.

Urge Surfing

Riding the Wave Without Wiping Out



Urge surfing means noticing urges without judging them and without acting on them—and allowing them to rise and fall on their own.

An urge is a feeling or impulse, not a command.
You can have an urge without obeying it.

Understanding Urges

Urges are a normal part of being human. They come and go, just like waves.

What often makes urges worse is:

- Judging them (“This is unbearable”)
- Catastrophizing (“I can’t handle this”)
- Fighting them
- Acting on them to escape discomfort

Ironically, these reactions increase the intensity of urges over time.

Why Fighting Urges Doesn’t Work

Fighting urges is like struggling in quicksand:

- The more frantic the effort, the deeper you sink

Acting on urges to escape discomfort may bring short-term relief, but it reinforces the urge-behavior cycle and makes urges stronger and more frequent in the future.

The Key Skill: Float, Don't Fight

Urge surfing is about floating instead of panicking.

You:

- Notice the urge
- Allow it to be there
- Watch it rise, peak, and fall
- Stay present until it passes

This requires a non-judgmental stance—treating urges as sensations and experiences, not threats.

Acceptance Is Not Giving Up

Acceptance does not mean:

- Liking the urge
- Wanting the urge
- Giving in to the urge

Acceptance means acknowledging:

“This is happening right now.”

By accepting what is, you free up energy to respond skillfully instead of reacting automatically.

Over time, acceptance actually reduces the intensity of urges.

How to Practice Urge Surfing

1. Notice the urge
 - Where do you feel it in your body?
 - What thoughts are showing up?
2. Name it
 - “I’m noticing an urge to use.”
3. Breathe and observe
 - Watch the urge like a wave—rising, peaking, falling
4. Stay curious, not critical
 - “How strong is it now?”
 - “Is it changing?”
5. Let it pass
 - Most urges peak and fall within minutes

Start Small

Practice urge surfing when urges are mild or moderate.

Just like learning to surf:

- You start with small waves
- You don't jump into dangerous waters right away

As your skills grow, you'll be better able to handle stronger urges.

Combine Skills When Needed

Urge surfing works best when combined with other skills, such as:

- Distraction (ACCEPTS)
- IMPROVE skills
- Breathing or grounding
- Burning bridges
- Reaching out for support

If one skill isn't working, switch strategies. That's being responsive, not failing.

Important Reminders

- Urges are temporary
- You do not have to act on them
- You can ride them out safely
- Skills get easier with practice

Key Takeaway

You don't have to eliminate urges to recover.

You just have to learn how to ride them.

Stay on the board.

Breathe.

Let the wave pass.

Self-Soothe

Calming Your Mind and Body

Tension, stress, and anxiety often increase urges to use substances and intensify mental health symptoms. Learning how to relax your body and mind is an essential part of recovery.

Self-soothe is the skill of mindfully connecting to pleasant experiences through your senses. When practiced regularly, self-soothing:

- Lowers heart rate and blood pressure
- Slows and deepens breathing
- Relaxes muscles
- Increases feelings of peace and safety

Self-soothing isn't a luxury—it's a protective skill.

Self-Soothe Through the Senses

Sight

Notice what is visually calming or beautiful.

- Nature, light, colors, art, architecture
- Simple everyday beauty around you

Pause and really look—linger with what feels pleasant.

Ways I can self-soothe with sight:

Hearing

Listen mindfully to sounds that calm or ground you.

- Music
- Running water
- Wind, rain, or birds
- A crackling fire

You may want to close your eyes and focus only on sound.

Ways I can self-soothe with hearing:

Smell

Breathe in scents that feel comforting or soothing.

- Fresh air
- Essential oils
- Coffee, tea, or food aromas
- Familiar or comforting scents

Slow your breathing as you notice the smell.

Ways I can self-soothe with smell:

Taste

Eat and drink mindfully, paying attention to:

- Flavor
- Texture
- Temperature

The goal is quality over quantity—getting the most enjoyment from small amounts.

Try to use nourishing foods when possible.

Ways I can self-soothe with taste:

Touch

Notice physical sensations that feel comforting.

- Soft clothing or blankets
- Warmth or coolness
- Sunlight or a breeze
- A pet or safe human touch

Let your body register safety and comfort.

Ways I can self-soothe with touch:

Multisensory

Engage multiple senses at once.

- Eating at a restaurant or creating a special meal at home
- Watching a movie
- Spending time in nature
- Visiting a park or peaceful place

Fully take in the experience—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Ways I can self-soothe using multiple senses:

Mind Sense

Use your thoughts intentionally to create calm.

- Peaceful imagery
- Affirmations
- Meditation
- Daydreams or fantasies that feel safe and pleasant

Guide your mind toward serenity rather than stress.

Ways I can self-soothe with my mind:

Spiritual Sense

Connect with something larger than yourself.

- Prayer or meditation
- Time in nature
- Rituals or reflection
- Personal spiritual practices

This can bring grounding, meaning, and peace.

Ways I can self-soothe spiritually:

Common Barriers to Self-Soothe (and How to Respond)

“I don’t have time.”

Think about how much time substance use, urges, or symptoms have taken in the past. Twenty minutes of self-soothing is a powerful investment.

“I have more important responsibilities.”

You function better, not worse, when you’re calmer and more regulated.

“I don’t deserve this.”

- A calmer life helps you reach your goals
- Relaxation is a human need, not something you must earn

Feeling guilty for self-soothing

Practice telling yourself:

“It’s okay—and helpful—to take care of myself.”

Repeat this until guilt softens.

Struggling with mindfulness

Distraction is normal.

Mindfulness isn’t about doing it perfectly—it’s about practicing returning.

How to Use Self-Soothe

- Practice daily, not just during crises
- Use self-soothe early, before distress spikes
- Pair with other skills (breathing, ACCEPTS, IMPROVE)
- Keep a list of go-to self-soothe options

Key Takeaway

Self-soothing is not avoidance.

It’s regulation.

The calmer your body becomes, the easier it is to:

- Resist urges
- Think clearly
- Act in Wise Mind
- You deserve calm.
- You deserve care.

And you’re allowed to practice it—starting now.

Distress Tolerance Practice Worksheet

Tracking What Helps You Ride Out Urges and Distress

Use this worksheet to notice what works.

There are no right or wrong answers—this is about learning from experience.

Instructions:

1. Rate your distress or urge before using a skill (0–10).
2. Write the skill you used (or skills).
3. Rate your distress or urge after using the skill (0–10).
4. You can use this for substance urges, self-harm urges, emotional distress, or any crisis moment.

Distress / Urge Tracking

Distress or Urge Level Before
(0–10)

Skill(s) Used

Distress or Urge Level After
(0–10)

Optional Reflection (Use If Helpful)

What helped the most this time?

What didn't help, or helped less than expected?

What skill might I try sooner next time?

Important Reminders

Skills don't have to eliminate distress to be successful
Even a small drop in urge or distress matters
Using a skill instead of reacting is progress
Practice builds effectiveness over time

Key Takeaway

You are gathering data, not judging yourself.
Every attempt teaches you something.
Skills learning improves progress.

Pros and Cons (P&C)



Using Reason Mind to Find Wise Mind

Pros and Cons is a Reason Mind skill that helps balance strong emotions and urges. When emotions are intense, it's easy to see only one side of a situation. Pros and Cons helps you slow things down, widen your perspective, and move toward Wise Mind. Many people notice that urges naturally decrease by the time they finish this exercise. Even when urges don't disappear completely, Pros and Cons often makes them more manageable.

When to Use Pros and Cons

Use this skill when:

- Urges feel strong or overwhelming
- Emotions are driving the decision
- You feel torn or stuck
- You're at risk of acting impulsively

Pros and Cons works especially well before acting, not after.

Step One: Identify Your Choices

Start by clearly naming the two options you are deciding between.

Examples:

- Using substances vs. staying sober
- Self-injury vs. staying safe
- Acting on an urge vs. using a skill
- Giving up vs. taking one small step forward

Be specific. Vague choices make unclear decisions.

Step Two: List Pros and Cons

For each option, list:

- Short-term pros (what feels good right away)
- Short-term cons
- Long-term pros (how this affects your life over time)
- Long-term cons

Be honest.

Short-term relief counts—but so do long-term costs.

This is not about judging yourself. It's about seeing the whole picture.

Step Three: Check Your State of Mind

When you finish:

- Pause
- Notice how you feel
- Ask yourself:
“Am I in Wise Mind right now?”

If yes:

- Make the decision that best aligns with your values and goals

If not:

- Table the decision
- Use another skill (breathing, urge surfing, ACCEPTS, IMPROVE)
- Come back to the decision later

Wise Mind decisions are more likely to stick.

Important Reminders

- Pros and Cons is about clarity, not pressure
- You don't have to act immediately
- The goal is responsiveness, not perfection
- If urges stay high, switch skills—this is flexibility, not failure

Key Takeaway

Urges push for quick decisions.

Pros and Cons creates space to choose wisely.

You're not trying to eliminate urges—you're learning how to outthink and outlast them.

Pros and Cons (P&C) Worksheet

Slowing Down to Find Wise Mind

Purpose:

This worksheet helps you balance strong emotions and urges using Reason Mind, so you can access Wise Mind and make a more effective choice.

Instructions:

1. Clearly name the two choices you are deciding between.
2. List short-term and long-term pros and cons for each choice.
3. When finished, pause and notice whether you feel more grounded and clear.
4. If you are not in Wise Mind yet, set the decision aside and use another skill.

Step 1: identify the two choices

Choice A

(for example: using / acting on the urge):

Choice B

(for example: staying sober / using a skill / staying safe):

Step 2:

List pros and cons for choice A

Short-Term Pros

(What feels good or relieving right away)

Short-Term Cons

(Immediate downsides or costs)

Long-Term Pros

(Any possible future benefits, even if limited)

Long-Term Cons

(How this choice affects your life, goals, health, or relationships over time)

List pros and cons for choice B

Short-Term Pros

(Immediate benefits, relief, or protection)

Short-Term Cons

(Discomfort, effort, or inconvenience right now)

Long-Term Pros

(How this choice supports recovery, values, or the life you want)

Long-Term Cons

(Any realistic future costs)

Step 3: Wise Mind Check-In

After completing this worksheet, pause and reflect:

Am I feeling calmer or more balanced?

☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ No

Am I in Wise Mind right now?

☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

If “Yes”, what choice best fits my values and goals right now?

If “Not Yet” in Wise Mind, what skill will I use next?

Reminder

Short-term relief matters—but long-term impact matters too

You don’t have to decide immediately

Even completing this worksheet is a skillful step

Key Takeaway

Urges push for speed.

Pros and Cons creates space.

Space gives Wise Mind a chance to lead.

Grounding Yourself

Coming Back to the Present Moment



Grounding skills help you reconnect with the present moment when you feel disconnected, unreal, spaced out, or dissociated.

Dissociation is a natural survival response. When people face extreme danger or overwhelming experiences, the mind may “check out” to cope. While this can be protective in truly dangerous situations, leaving reality becomes less helpful when you are distressed but not in immediate harm. Over time, dissociation can interfere with daily life, recovery, and relationships.

Grounding brings you back into your body and your surroundings, helping you feel safer, steadier, and more present.

These skills can also be used when:

- Emotions feel overwhelming
- Urges feel intense
- Anxiety spikes
- You feel numb, unreal, or detached

Practice grounding proactively, not just during high distress. Like other skills, grounding becomes more effective with repetition.

Grounding Skills to Practice**Use Your Eyes**

Open your eyes and observe and describe your surroundings in detail.

Ask yourself:

- Where am I right now?
- Who or what is around me?

Describe what you see using as much detail as possible—even small details.

This helps orient your mind to here and now.

Work Your Senses

Name what you can sense right now:

- What do you see?
- What do you hear?
- What do you smell?
- What do you feel physically?

Use detailed, factual descriptions.

You can also use the Sensations skill from ACCEPTS and try different sensory variations.

Ground Through Your Body

Notice how your body is supported.

- Feel your back against the chair
- Notice your legs and feet in contact with the floor
- Feel your arms resting on your lap or chair

Now expand your awareness:

Your body is connected to the chair → The chair is connected to the floor → The floor is connected to the building → The building is connected to the earth

You are held and supported right now.

Use Your Breath

Breathe slowly and deeply.

- Count your breaths
- Feel the air moving in and out
- Let your breathing anchor you to the present

Move Your Body

Gently get up and stretch.

- Move your arms and legs
- Feel muscles engage and release
- Walk around if helpful

Movement reminds your nervous system that you are here and safe.

Use a Grounding Phrase

Repeat a simple mantra such as:

- “This is now, not then.”
- “I am safe in this moment.”
- “I am here.”

Say it slowly and deliberately.

Create Your Own Grounding Tools

Grounding is personal. Add techniques that work for you.

Other ways I can ground myself:

Important Reminders

- Grounding works best with practice
- You don’t have to eliminate distress—just reconnect to the present
- If one grounding skill doesn’t help, try another
- Grounding pairs well with breathing, self-soothe, and distress tolerance skills

Key Takeaway

You don’t have to escape the moment to survive it.

Grounding helps you come back, steady yourself, and respond more effectively—right here, right now.

Radical Acceptance

Letting Go of the Fight With Reality

Many people carry deep pain from trauma, losses, difficult life circumstances, and ongoing struggles with mental health or substance use. Pain is an unavoidable part of life, and it can feel impossible—or unfair—to accept.

Pain is often made worse when we cannot accept a reality that feels overwhelming or self-defeating. This commonly happens with substance use, especially when substances have been meeting important needs like relief, comfort, or escape. While substances may help in the short term, they often create more problems and suffering over time.

When we refuse to accept painful realities, we can become stuck in chronic suffering—trapped in a cycle of fighting what already is. Ironically, it is this resistance that keeps the suffering going.

Radical Acceptance offers a different path.

What Radical Acceptance Is

Radical Acceptance means fully acknowledging reality as it is, without judging it, denying it, or fighting it.

Acceptance does not mean:

- Liking the situation
- Agreeing with what happened
- Saying it was okay or deserved
- Giving up or resigning yourself to misery

Acceptance means saying:

“This is what is happening right now.”

By accepting reality, you stop wasting energy on fighting it—and free up energy to move forward.

Why Acceptance Reduces Suffering

Pain and suffering are not the same thing.

- Pain is the unavoidable experience of loss, illness, trauma, or difficulty.
- Suffering is what happens when we add resistance, judgment, and “this shouldn’t be happening” to that pain.

When we stop fighting reality, pain may still be present—but it changes in quality. It becomes more tolerable, less consuming, and less controlling.

As the saying goes:

“When nothing changes, nothing changes.”

Acceptance releases your resources so that something finally can change.

Acceptance Is a Process

Radical Acceptance usually unfolds over time, much like the stages described by Kübler-Ross. You may move back and forth between these stages, revisit them, or experience more than one at once.

Common Stages of Acceptance

- Denial; *Not believing the loss, problem, or reality is real.*
- Anger; *Feeling angry about why this happened or is happening.*
- Bargaining; *Trying to make deals with reality, others, or a higher power. Examples include telling yourself you'll only use sometimes, or that "this will be the last time."*
- Depression; *Feeling sadness, grief, or hopelessness as reality settles in.*
- Acceptance; *Acknowledging reality without fighting it.*

These stages are not linear. Moving through them—at any pace—is part of healing and change.

Acceptance and Change Go Together

Acceptance is not the opposite of change.

Acceptance is often what makes change possible.

When you accept:

- You stop wasting energy on denial and self-criticism
- You become more grounded in the present
- You can respond rather than react
- You gain freedom to choose skillful actions

Just like the stages of change, each stage of acceptance has something to teach you.

Important Reminders

- Acceptance takes practice
- You may need to accept the same reality again and again
- Feeling emotions is part of acceptance—not a failure
- Acceptance does not happen all at once

If you notice yourself resisting, judging, or bargaining—gently remind yourself:

"This is part of the process."

Key Takeaway

You don't have to approve of reality to accept it.

By accepting what is, you loosen suffering's grip—and create space for healing, growth, and change.

Everyday Acceptance

Practicing Acceptance as a Way of Life

Radical Acceptance is the skill we use for major, painful, or life-altering realities. Everyday Acceptance is how we practice acceptance daily, in ordinary moments.

This skill helps maintain mental health and abstinence by reducing the emotional fuel that feeds distress, urges, and reactivity. Painful emotions and urges often grow stronger when we fight reality, resist inconvenience, or demand that life be different than it is.

Everyday acceptance gently shifts us from willfulness (“this shouldn’t be happening”) to willingness (“this is happening, now what?”).

What Everyday Acceptance Looks Like

Everyday acceptance means allowing normal frustrations and discomforts without escalating them.

Examples include:

- Feeling an uncomfortable emotion or urge without reacting
- Accepting that life sometimes feels like one long HASSLE
- Being last in line
- Knowing that getting drunk or high is no longer an option
- Receiving criticism from someone
- Being out of shape
- Being around crabby, unappreciative, or disrespectful people
- Being behind on laundry, dishes, or other tasks
- Losing your keys
- Wanting to get high and knowing you cannot
- Having to work when you don’t want to
- Missing out on something fun
- Noticing an increase in symptoms
- Having your car, bike, or transportation break down

These moments are not emergencies—but they are frequent tests of acceptance.

Why Everyday Acceptance Matters

Small resistances add up.

When we don’t accept everyday realities, we often:

- Add anger, frustration, or shame on top of inconvenience
- Drain emotional energy needed for problem-solving
- Increase urges to escape or avoid
- Feel overwhelmed by things that could be manageable

Everyday acceptance keeps problems the size they actually are.

Acceptance Is Not Resignation

Acceptance does not mean:

- Being walked on
- Giving up
- Staying helpless
- Ignoring problems that need solutions

Many situations still require action, boundaries, or skillful problem-solving.

Acceptance simply gives you the emotional balance to respond effectively.

In fact, acceptance often makes solutions easier, not harder.

Acceptance as Empowerment

When you practice everyday acceptance:

- You waste less energy fighting reality
- You recover faster from frustration
- You stay grounded in Wise Mind
- You reduce vulnerability to urges and emotional spirals

Acceptance doesn't shrink your life—it expands your capacity to live it.

A Gentle Practice

You might practice everyday acceptance by quietly saying:

- “This is inconvenient, and I can handle it.”
- “This is part of life.”
- “I don't like this—and I can accept it.”

Acceptance may need to be practiced again and again, sometimes many times a day.

That's normal.

Key Takeaway

Everyday acceptance is not about liking life as it is.

It's about meeting life as it is, without making it heavier than it needs to be.

Acceptance isn't weakness.

Acceptance is strength, flexibility, and freedom.

Willingness (WI) Versus Willfulness

Choosing What Works Instead of Fighting Reality

Willingness means doing what is needed to meet the demands of the situation you are in—as it is, not as you wish it were. It involves accepting reality, setting aside judgments, and responding with actions that actually works

Willingness is not about liking the situation.

It's about asking:

“Given what’s happening right now, what would be effective?”

What Willingness Looks Like

Willingness includes:

- Accepting reality as it is in this moment
- Letting go of judgments like “this isn’t fair” or “this shouldn’t be happening”
- Setting aside emotions that block effectiveness (pride, fear, self-righteousness, doubt)
- Using the skills and resources available to you
- Playing the hand you were dealt as skillfully as possible

Life rarely unfolds according to our preferences. In many situations, we don’t get to choose the cards—we only get to choose how we play them.

What Willfulness Looks Like

Willfulness is resistance to reality. It’s knowing—or partly knowing—what would help, but refusing to do it.

Willfulness can show up in obvious ways, such as:

- Acting against your own best interests to “prove a point”
- Engaging in behaviors that clearly sabotage your goals

It can also be subtle, such as:

- Procrastinating
- Half-doing skills
- Quietly giving up
- Making small choices that slowly pull you away from what you want

Willfulness often feels justified in the moment, but over time it erodes progress.

Noticing Willfulness Is the First Step

You can’t force willingness. But you can notice willfulness.

Once you recognize:

“I’m being willful right now,”

You create the opportunity to pause and ask:

- What am I resisting?
- What is reality asking of me right now?
- What would actually help me move toward my goals?

That pause is powerful.

Willingness Is Not Willpower

Many people are taught the idea:

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

In recovery and mental health, a more helpful truth is:

“Where there is willingness, there is a way.”

Willingness is not the same as “trying harder” or forcing yourself through sheer willpower.

- Willpower says: “I’ll control this by force.”
- Willingness says: “I’ll work with reality and use skills.”

Willingness is flexible.

Willpower often breaks under pressure.

Why Willingness Helps

Like acceptance, willingness:

- Reduces emotional suffering
- Increases effectiveness
- Brings more peace and clarity
- Helps you stay aligned with your values
- Makes skill use easier and more consistent

Willingness doesn’t make life perfect—but it makes life workable.

Practicing Willingness

You might practice willingness by saying:

- “I don’t like this, and I’m willing to deal with it.”
- “This is what’s needed right now.”
- “I’m choosing what works over what feels right.”

Willingness often needs to be chosen again and again, sometimes moment by moment.

That’s normal.

Key Takeaway

You don’t need more willpower. You need willingness.

Willingness means opening your hands to reality, using your skills, and choosing effectiveness—even when it’s uncomfortable.

That choice is where change happens.

Introduction to Problem-Solving

A Simple System Helps You Solve Problems More Effectively



Core Idea

Problems—big and small—are a normal part of life. But if problems aren't addressed, they tend to:

- Grow in number
- Feel heavier over time
- Create chronic overwhelm
- Leave you feeling stuck or paralyzed

Many people try to solve problems by trial and error or in a scattered way. Sometimes that works—but often it leads to more stress and fewer results.

DBT-S encourages a more helpful approach: a simple, systematic method that brings you into Wise Mind so you can respond effectively.

Why Wise Mind Matters for Problem-Solving

When emotions run high, it's easy to fall into Emotion Mind “problem-solving.” That often looks like:

- Reacting quickly
- Focusing only on feelings
- Missing key facts
- Making choices that feel urgent but don't help long-term

Wise Mind problem-solving means:

- Validating how you feel
- Noticing your priorities, goals, and values
- Using both emotion and reason
- Choosing what works

Problem-solving begins with two things:

1. Noticing the problem
2. Being willing to address it

Principles of Problem-Solving

Use These Principles When You Work Through a Problem

1. Take One Problem at a Time

Most people have multiple problems at once. That can feel overwhelming—but you can only solve one thing at a time.

Start somewhere:

- The easiest problem
- The most important problem
- Or the problem that must be solved first to unlock others

Small wins build momentum.

2. Understand and Define the Problem

Once you choose one problem, define it clearly using nonjudgmental, descriptive language.

A clear definition helps you see a clear solution.

Instead of: “I’m a mess.”

Try: “I missed two appointments this month because I didn’t check my calendar.”

The more specific you are, the more workable the problem becomes.

3. Research the Facts

Good problem-solving needs good information.

Ask:

- What information am I missing?
- Who can I ask?
- What do I need to learn?

Information is power. It turns “I’m stuck” into “I see my next step.”

4. Identify the Cause Without Blame

Sometimes solving a problem means understanding what’s causing it.

Do this without slipping into blame—especially self-blame.

“Blaming mind” usually:

- Increases distress
- Reduces clarity
- Makes problems harder to solve

Instead, ask:

- What is contributing to this?
- What can I change?
- What can I reduce or remove?

5. Do More of What Works

Ask yourself:

- Have I solved something like this before?
- What helped then?
- What works when the problem is not happening?

Then do more of what works.

Wise Mind focuses on effectiveness:

“What action helps me move toward my goal?”

6. Do Less of What Doesn’t Work

Also ask:

- What have I tried that hasn’t helped?
- What makes the problem worse?
- What am I doing (or not doing) when the problem happens?

Then reduce or stop the behaviors that keep the problem going.

This is not about shame. It’s about learning.

7. Take It One Step at a Time

Some problems are big. That doesn’t mean they’re impossible.

Break the problem into steps:

- What’s step one?
- What’s the smallest next action?

Then do the first step.

Progress comes from movement—not from having everything figured out.

8. Use Willingness, Commitment, and Follow-Through

Often, the effective solution isn’t our favorite option.

Willingness means:

- Putting aside “how it should be”
- Doing what’s needed in reality
- Cooperating with others when helpful
- Asking for help when needed
- Following through on your plan

Willingness turns plans into progress.

Key Takeaway

Problems don’t shrink by avoiding them.

They shrink when you use a clear method—one problem, one step, one skill at a time.

Problem-solving isn’t about being perfect.

It’s about being effective.

Using SOLVED (SO)

A Step-by-Step Way to Solve Problems Effectively

CORE IDEA

Problems are easier to manage when you approach them systematically instead of reactively.

SOLVED is a structured problem-solving skill that helps you slow down, reduce emotional interference, and choose actions that actually work.

Use SOLVED to move from feeling stuck to taking effective, values-driven action.

What SOLVED Stands For



Step back and be objective



Observe available options



Limit barriers



Values driven



Effectiveness first



Dialectical thought and action

Each step builds on the one before it.

S – Step Back and Be Objective

Pause and move into Reason Mind or Wise Mind.

- Observe and describe the problem using nonjudgmental language
- Stick to the facts:
 - Who is involved?
 - What is happening?
 - Where and when does it occur?
 - How does it show up?
 - Why might it be happening?

Avoid blaming, exaggerating, or minimizing.

Writing the problem down can help clarify it.

O – Observe Available Options

Brainstorm possible solutions.

- List all options—even ones that seem imperfect
- Notice what options are actually available, given reality
- Identify resources you can use (people, skills, services, information)

If you need help:

- Ask for ideas or guidance
- Use communication skills (like DEAR MAN) to request support

This step is about expanding choices, not deciding yet.

L – Limit Barriers (Emotional and Environmental)

Identify and reduce anything that gets in the way of solving the problem.

Common barriers include:

- Emotional barriers (fear, pride, shame, anger)
- Mental barriers (judgments, catastrophizing)
- Environmental barriers (lack of access, time, or support)

Use:

- Radical or Everyday Acceptance
- Willingness
- Nonjudgmental Stance

Do not make the problem bigger—or smaller—than it is.

Address it in a matter-of-fact way.

If barriers involve other people or systems, ask for help.

V – Values Driven

Let your values, priorities, and goals guide your choice.

Ask yourself:

- Which option best aligns with what matters most to me?
- Which choice helps me maintain or build self-respect?

- Which option supports my long-term goals?

Values are a reliable compass—they help prevent short-term fixes that create long-term problems.

E – Effectiveness First

Now ask the key question:

What will actually work?

The most effective solution may not be your favorite one.

Accept that:

- Problems are part of life
- Solving this problem helps free energy for the next one
- Doing what works is often more important than doing what feels good

Choose the option that best moves you forward.

D – Dialectical Thought and Action

Many problems are not “either/or.”

Effective solutions often come from the middle ground.

- Look for compromise where possible
- Hold multiple truths at once
- Balance your needs with reality and others’ needs

Once you choose a solution:

- Take action
- Observe the outcome
- Adjust as needed

SOLVED is a flexible process—you can revisit it anytime.

Key Takeaway

You don’t need the perfect solution.

You need a workable one.

SOLVED helps you respond thoughtfully, stay aligned with your values, and move forward—one problem at a time.

SOLVED Problem-Solving Worksheet

A Step-by-Step Way to Work Through Problems

Purpose:

Use this worksheet to slow down, reduce emotional overwhelm, and choose an effective, values-driven solution. You must honestly explore the resources you have for each step as well as the barriers to success. A plan you cannot do for lack of tools or resources is a failed plan. A plan that currently has insurmountable barriers is just a likely to fail.

You do not need to complete this perfectly.

You just need to start where you are.

S – Step Back and Be Objective

Describe the problem using facts only (no judgments or blame).

What is the problem?

(Who, what, where, when, how, and why)

O – Observe Available Options

List as many possible solutions as you can—even imperfect ones.

Possible options:

Resources I can use (people, skills, services, information):

L – Limit Barriers

Identify and reduce anything that could block progress.

Emotional barriers (fear, shame, anger, avoidance, etc.):

Environmental barriers (time, access, money, transportation, support):

Skills I can use to reduce barriers (acceptance, willingness, asking for help):

V – Values Driven

Reconnect with what matters most.

What values, priorities, or goals are important here?

Which option best supports my self-respect and long-term goals?

E – Effectiveness First

Focus on what will actually work.

Which option is most likely to solve or improve the problem right now?

What makes this option effective (even if it's not my favorite)?

D – Dialectical Thought and Action

Look for balance and flexibility.

Is there a compromise or middle-ground solution? If so, describe it:

Decision and Action

What decision am I making?

What is my first action step?

When will I do it?

Review and Adjust (After Action)

Use this section after trying your solution.

What worked?

What didn't work or needs adjustment?

What will I try next (using SOLVED again if needed)?

Reminders

- One problem at a time
- Effective beats perfect
- Willingness matters more than willpower
- You can revise your plan

Key Takeaway

You don't need to solve everything today.

You just need a clear next step.

Part Five

Emotion Regulation



Emotion Regulation Module

Reducing Emotional Vulnerability and Strengthening Recovery

Emotion regulation skills help you reduce vulnerability to intense emotions and urges—especially urges to use substances or engage in other unhelpful behaviors.

A common recovery acronym is **HALT**:



Hungry



Angry



Lonely



Tired

When any of these are present, emotions and urges are more likely to spike. The skills in this module directly address these vulnerability states so you can stay more balanced and effective.

Understanding Emotions

One goal of emotion regulation is learning how emotions work.

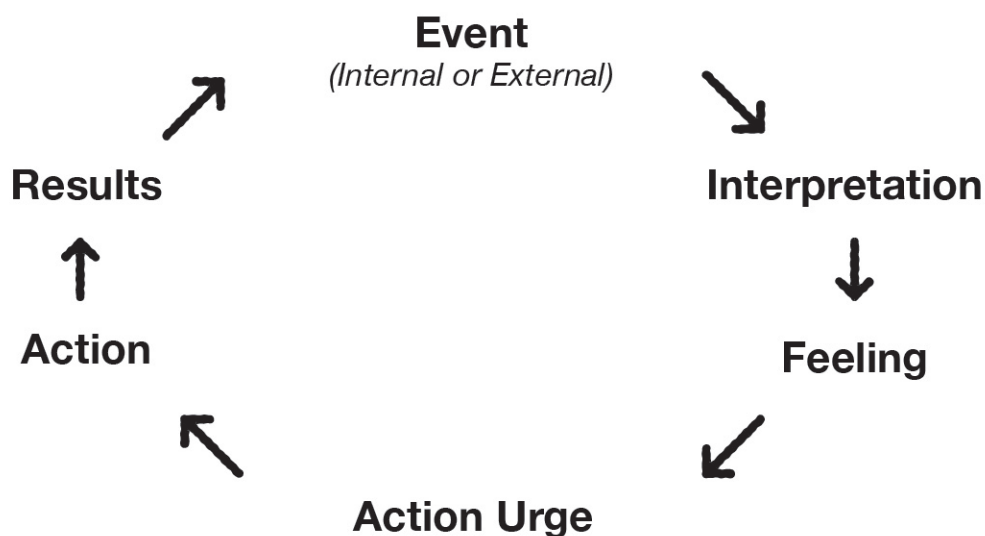
Emotions don't appear out of nowhere. They are influenced by:

- Events that happen around you
- How you interpret those events
- Your physical state (sleep, food, health)

Understanding your emotions gives you more choice. When you can see how emotions arise and change, they feel less overwhelming and more manageable.

Knowledge creates power.

The following graphic illustrates a path to emotional states.



Event: Emotions start with events that can be internal (within us) or external (in our environment).

Interpretation: Our interpretation of an event is pivotal in the resulting emotion. Refer to some of the ways we get stuck with thinking in the next handout to work with your self-talk.

Emotion: Use your mindfulness skills to connect with your emotional experience. What is happening in your body (e.g., muscle relaxation or tension, heart rate, breathing)? What is happening externally with what your body is communicating (e.g., facial expressions, posture)? Based on this information, try to give a name to your emotion.

Action Urge: What is your emotion pulling you to do (or not do)? Remember that we are not our emotions or urges, and they do not always require action!

Action: What are you doing (or not doing)?

Results: What are the effective and ineffective consequences of your actions? How do these consequences benefit you or create vulnerabilities that will influence the next event?

Changing Your Relationship With Emotions

Emotion regulation is not about getting rid of “negative” emotions.

Judging emotions or trying to push them away often:

- Makes them stronger
- Increases suffering
- Triggers urges to escape

Instead, emotion regulation encourages:

- Accepting emotions as signals
- Listening to what they are telling you
- Having a relationship with emotions rather than fighting them

Paradoxically, when emotions are accepted and understood, they tend to settle and soften over time.

Self-Care Is Foundational

Strong emotions are much harder to manage when basic self-care is missing.

Emotion regulation depends on:

- Regular, balanced eating
- Adequate sleep
- Physical activity
- Treating physical illness or pain

It is extremely difficult to feel emotionally stable if your body is depleted. Taking care of your physical needs is not optional—it is a core emotion regulation skill.

Building Positive Emotional Momentum

Emotion regulation also means:

- Scheduling positive events in your life
- Creating moments of pleasure, mastery, and connection
- Practicing skills that increase positive emotions

At the same time, emotion regulation involves stepping out of mood-congruent behaviors that keep emotions stuck, such as:

- Isolating when depressed
- Avoiding when anxious
- Acting aggressively when angry

Changing behavior can change emotion—even when motivation is low.

Key Takeaway

You don't regulate emotions by controlling them.

You regulate emotions by understanding them, caring for your body, and responding skillfully.

Emotion regulation reduces suffering, lowers urges, and supports long-term recovery—one day, one skill, one choice at a time.

Effective Thinking:

Shifting and Expanding How You Interpret Events

Our emotions affect how we think, and our thoughts strongly affect how we feel. An **interpretation** is the meaning you give to an event. It is an *internal behavior*—something your mind does automatically, often without you realizing it.

Because interpretations are based on perspective, **no single interpretation is the absolute truth**. When we get stuck in one way of thinking, emotions and urges often intensify. When we learn to **shift and expand interpretations**, we reduce emotional suffering and increase our ability to respond skillfully—especially when urges to use substances or act impulsively show up.

The goal of effective thinking is **flexibility**, not “positive thinking.” Dialectical thinking means staying open, curious, and willing to look at situations from more than one angle.

Below are common thinking patterns that can increase distress, along with **dialectical shifts** that help you move toward Wise Mind.

Common Interpretations That Increase Distress—and How to Shift Them

Black-and-White Thinking (All-or-Nothing)

Using words like always, never, everyone, nothing ever works.

(Ex: This always happens)

This kind of thinking misses the middle ground and increases rigidity.

Dialectical Shift:

Practice finding the middle. Look for exceptions, partial truths, or “both-and” perspectives—even if you don’t fully believe them yet.

Regret Thinking (Woulda / Coulda / Shoulda)

Staying stuck in the past and replaying decisions with the benefit of hindsight.

(Ex: I should have known, or not done that)

Dialectical Shift:

Acknowledge what you learned, then refocus on what you can do right now to move forward effectively.

Mind-Reading

Assuming you know what others are thinking or feeling without checking.

Dialectical Shift:

Notice the assumption. If it matters, check it out directly. The only way to know is to ask.

Minimization

Downplaying something important or painful, often invalidating your own experience. (Ex: It is not a big deal, even when it hurts this much)

Dialectical Shift:

Observe and describe the situation accurately—without shrinking or dismissing it. Validate that it matters.

Magnification

Blowing something small out of proportion, making it feel overwhelming.

(Ex: This is so huge, I can never come back from this)

Dialectical Shift:

Stick to the facts. Describe what is actually happening—no more, no less.

Catastrophizing

Imagining worst-case scenarios and escalating them into disasters.

(Ex: There is no way this turns out well for me)

Dialectical Shift:

Focus on the single problem in front of you. Take one step at a time.
(Alternatively, exaggerate it to the point of absurdity to break the cycle.)

Fortune-Telling

Assuming you already know the future—and that it will go badly.

Dialectical Shift:

Return to the present moment. Ask: What can I do effectively right now?

Overgeneralization

Taking one situation and applying it to all people or all situations.

Dialectical Shift:

Look for exceptions. Stay open to the possibility that this situation is different.

Selective Attention (Confirmation Bias)

Only noticing information that fits what you already believe.

Dialectical Shift:

Actively seek information or perspectives that challenge your current view.
You don't have to agree—just consider.

Labeling (Judging)

Reducing yourself or others to a single word or category.

(Ex: I am nothing, just like they say)

Dialectical Shift:

Let go of labels. People and situations are more complex than names or judgments.

Personalization

Assuming everything is about you.

Dialectical Shift:

Take responsibility for what is truly yours—and release what is not. Most things aren't personal.

Emotion-Mind Reasoning

Believing something is true because it feels true.

Dialectical Shift:

Use mindfulness to step into Wise Mind. Re-evaluate using both emotion and reason.

“Should” Statements

Judging reality based on how things should be instead of how they are.

Dialectical Shift:

Focus on what is. Replace “should” with curiosity and problem-solving.

Discounting Positives

Ignoring or minimizing strengths, progress, or good moments.

Dialectical Shift:

Actively notice positives. Let them count. Give yourself credit.

Blaming

Placing all responsibility outside yourself, which removes your sense of control.

(Ex: I do not have the power to change my life)

Dialectical Shift:

Even if others contributed, your power lies in how you respond and what you choose to do next.

Why This Skill Matters

Shifting interpretations:

- Lowers emotional intensity
- Reduces urges to use substances or act impulsively
- Increases flexibility and effectiveness
- Helps you stay grounded in Wise Mind

Effective thinking is not about forcing yourself to think differently—it's about loosening your grip on one rigid story and making room for more than one truth.

Skills work best with practice. Be patient. Flexibility grows one thought at a time.

Shifting and Expanding Interpretations Worksheet

Identify your current interpretation, thought, belief, or self-talk:

Identify the origins of this interpretation, thought, belief, or self-talk. Where did it come from and how could it have been useful at that time or in certain situations?

Describe how this interpretation, thought, belief, or self-talk is facilitating (or not facilitating) the attainment of your goals and/or what you want or need in the current situation.

What alternative interpretations, thoughts, beliefs, or self-talk are possible? Can you identify an expansion or shift?

Describe how these alternatives, expansions, or shifts might facilitate your goals and/or what you want or need in the current situation.

Emotions on a Continuum

Anger

1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6 - 7	8 - 9	10
Frustrated	Irritated	Mad	Disrespected	Resentful
Annoyed	Provoked	Upset	Numb	Pissed
Bothered	Impatient	Angry	Shut down	Agitated
Peeved	Displeased		Hostile	Outraged
				Furious
				Livid
				Irate

Depression

1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6 - 7	8 - 9	10
Deflated	Sad	Depressed	Victimized	Apathetic
Unhappy	Lonely	Inadequate	Forlorn	Listless
Blue	Hurt	Melancholy	Heavy	Isolated
Abandoned	Aloof	Miserable	Mediocre	Despicable
Down	Insignificant		Trivial	Wretched
				Insignificant

Anxiety

1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6 - 7	8 - 9	10
Nervous	Hesitant	Anxious	Fearful	
Uneasy	Troubled	Concern	Scared	
Apprehensive	Bothered	Worried	Overwhelmed	Panic
		Tense	Distressed	Terror
			Petrified	

Happiness

1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6 - 7	8 - 9	10
Content	Glad	Optimistic	Cheerful	Excited
Okay	Satisfied	Joy	Happy	Overjoyed
Calm	Positive	At peace	Bright	Euphoric
Still	Soothed	Serene	Loving	
	Lifted			Ecstatic
				Elated

Changing How You Relate to Emotions

Emotions are **not** good or bad, right or wrong. They are part of being human. The first step toward changing your relationship with emotions is to become curious about them and the messages they carry.

Emotions exist for a reason. They motivate us to act, connect with others, and protect ourselves—often very quickly, without conscious thought. For example, fear can instantly motivate a parent to run into the street to protect a child. In moments like this, emotion—not logic—keeps people safe and alive.

Even when emotions feel overwhelming—such as depression, anxiety, anger, or shame—they still contain important information. Instead of judging emotions or trying to push them away, practice **accepting them and listening**. When emotions are ignored, rejected, or invalidated (by others or by yourself), they usually grow stronger. If a feeling isn't heard, it often gets louder.

Trying to get rid of emotions, fighting them, or judging yourself for having them usually **adds suffering** on top of emotional pain. Acceptance does not mean liking the feeling or agreeing with it—it means allowing it to exist without a struggle. Being willing to sit with your emotions often calms them. Just as people feel soothed when someone listens to them without trying to “fix” them, emotions often settle when they are acknowledged.

Not every emotion requires action. Strong feelings can be present without needing to be acted on. Through mindfulness, you can learn to **hold emotions** rather than react to them. Holding an emotion means recognizing it as part of your experience—not as who you are. Feelings come and go; they do not define you.

As you observe your emotions mindfully, you may notice that they rise and fall like waves. When you allow this natural process, intensity often decreases on its own. If emotions become overwhelming, that is not a failure—simply shift strategies and use distress tolerance skills to support yourself.

Over time, you may discover that emotions offer valuable guidance and that they soothe themselves when they are heard. **Acceptance in the moment loosens the grip emotions have on you** and allows you to respond more effectively, calmly, and in line with your values.

Feelings model worksheet

Prompting Event:
(Internal/External)

Skills:

Thoughts/ Interpretation/Self-talk:

Skills:

Emotion:

Skills:

Action Urge:

Skills:

Action/Behavior:

Skills:

Consequences/ Results/Outcomes:

Skills:

Vulnerabilities:

Skills:

PLEASED:

Daily Self-Care to Support Emotional Balance and Recovery

Self-care is often the first thing to slip when mental health symptoms or substance use are present. Unfortunately, poor sleep, unbalanced eating, lack of movement, and untreated medical issues make emotions harder to manage—and stronger emotions increase urges to use substances. This can turn into a painful cycle.

The good news: improving self-care reduces emotional vulnerability. When your body is better cared for, your mind is more regulated, and skills work better. PLEASED is a simple way to remember the daily habits that support emotional balance and recovery.

PLEASED

Use this acronym to guide daily self-care:

P

Physical Health

L

List Resources and Barriers

E

Eat Balanced Meals

A

Avoid Drugs and Alcohol

S

Sleep 7–10 Hours

E

Exercise 20–60 Minutes

D

Daily

P – Physical Health

Your physical health directly affects your emotions and urges.

- Keep up with routine medical care
- Treat illnesses and injuries promptly
- Take medications as prescribed (or talk with your provider if something isn't working)
- Notice how physical symptoms impact your mood and cravings

Caring for your body is not optional—it's foundational.

L – List Resources and Barriers

Self-care is easier when you plan for it.

- Resources: skills you already use, supportive people, routines, knowledge
- Barriers: time, motivation, symptoms, finances, habits

Identify both. Then use skills (like problem-solving, willingness, or asking for help) to reduce barriers rather than judging yourself for them.

E – Eat Balanced Meals

What and when you eat matters.

- Aim for 3 balanced meals and healthy snacks
- Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid extremes (too much or too little)
- Remember: being overly hungry can trigger emotional distress and urges

Focus on small, sustainable changes—not perfection.

A – Avoid Drugs and Alcohol

Substances often feel helpful short-term but worsen emotional regulation over time.

- Increased tolerance, cravings, and loss of control are warning signs
- Using substances to cope physically or emotionally keeps the cycle going

PLEASED works best when substances are removed and skills are practiced consistently.

S – Sleep 7–10 Hours

Sleep is essential for emotional regulation.

- Find the amount of sleep that works best for you
- Use a consistent sleep routine when possible
- Poor sleep makes emotions louder and harder to manage

Rest is a skill, not a luxury.



E – Exercise 20–60 Minutes

Movement helps regulate mood and reduce urges.

- Aim for 20 minutes, 3–5 times per week
- Choose activities you can stick with
- Small movements count: stairs, walking, stretching, playing

Your body is designed to move—motion supports recovery.

D – Daily

PLEASED works when it becomes daily practice.

You don't need to do everything perfectly. Consistency matters more than intensity.

Even small daily steps reduce vulnerability and make other DBT skills easier to use.

Key Takeaway

PLEASED is not about “fixing” yourself—it's about supporting your nervous system so emotions are easier to manage and urges have less power.

Better self-care → more emotional balance → fewer urges → more effective choices.

Start where you are. Build gradually. Your body and mind will thank you.

PLEASED: Daily Self-Care Worksheet

Purpose:

This worksheet helps you reduce emotional vulnerability and urges by strengthening daily self-care. You do not need to do everything perfectly. Small, consistent steps matter.

P – Physical Health

How am I taking care of my physical health right now?

Current health concerns (if any):

Medical care or medications I need to follow through on:

One small step I can take this week to support my physical health:

L – List Resources and Barriers

Resources I already have (skills, people, routines, strengths):

Barriers that make self-care harder:

Skills or supports I can use to work around barriers:

E – Eat Balanced Meals

How am I fueling my body?

What is working well with eating right now?

Challenges with eating (timing, appetite, cravings, access):

One realistic improvement I can try (not perfection):

A – Avoid Drugs and Alcohol

How am I supporting sobriety and recovery?

Triggers or situations that make avoidance harder:

Skills or supports I can use when urges show up:

One commitment I am making today to protect my recovery:

S – Sleep (7–10 Hours)

How is my sleep affecting my emotions?

Average hours of sleep recently: _____

Sleep challenges (falling asleep, staying asleep, routine):

One change I can try to improve sleep:

E – Exercise (20–60 Minutes)

How am I moving my body?

Types of movement I enjoy or tolerate:

Barriers to movement:

One doable movement goal (small counts):

D – Daily

PLEASED works best when practiced daily.

Which PLEASED area needs the most attention right now?

One daily habit I am willing to practice this week:

Reflection

How does caring for my body support my emotions, choices, and recovery?

Reminder:

Self-care is not selfish. It lowers emotional intensity, reduces urges, and helps skills work when you need them most.

Using ROUTINE (RO):

Building Structure That Supports Recovery

CORE CONCEPT:

A consistent routine helps get life back on track. Structure reduces chaos, lowers emotional vulnerability, and makes it easier to follow through on goals—especially when motivation is low.

ROUTINE is a practical way to build a schedule that supports your mental health, recovery, and quality of life.

R

Responsibilities

O

Ongoing Structure

U

Use of Skills

T

Traditions

I

Interests Included

N

Novelty

E

Envision a Satisfying Life

R – Responsibilities

When responsibilities pile up, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and shut down.

- Break large responsibilities into small, daily steps
- Include both major responsibilities (work, appointments, bills) and minor ones (laundry, emails, meals)
- Doing a little every day prevents problems from snowballing

Ask yourself:

What needs regular attention so it doesn't become a crisis later?

O – Ongoing Structure

Routines work best when they are:

- Predictable
- Repeating
- Realistic

Structure keeps symptoms and urges from filling empty time. It also reduces decision fatigue—when you already know what comes next, you don't have to rely on motivation alone.

Use a daily or weekly schedule and follow it as best you can, even when you don't feel like it. Consistency matters more than perfection.

U – Use of Skills

Skills only work if they are practiced regularly.

- Build skill practice into your routine, just like homework
- Plan which skills you will practice each day
- Remember: you may need skills to follow your routine (like Opposite to Emotion, Willingness, or Distress Tolerance)

Practicing skills on “good days” makes them available on hard days.

T – Traditions

Traditions add meaning, connection, and stability to life.

Traditions don't have to be big or tied to holidays.

They can be simple and personal, such as:

- A weekly family meal
- A regular walk with a friend
- Celebrating accomplishments (yours or others') in a special way

You can return to old traditions or create new ones that fit who you are now.



I – Interests Included

Routines that include only responsibilities are hard to maintain.

- Build in activities you enjoy
- If you're unsure what you enjoy, experiment
- Use a Nonjudgmental Stance when trying new things—interest often comes after practice, not before

A routine should support your life, not drain it.

N – Novelty

Too much structure can feel rigid and suffocating.

- Leave space for flexibility and spontaneity
- Schedule “open time” for rest or new experiences
- Try something different occasionally to keep life engaging

Balance structure and freedom.

E – Envision a Satisfying Life

Routines take time to build. It's normal to struggle at first.

- Stay connected to why you are building structure
- Link your routine to your values, goals, and priorities
- Do not give up if progress is slow—habits grow with repetition

Every day you follow part of your routine, you are practicing the life you want to live.

Reminder:

Routines don't limit freedom—they create it. Structure supports recovery, stability, and a more satisfying life.

Build Mastery:

Strengthening Confidence and Reducing Emotional Vulnerability



CORE CONCEPT:

Building mastery means doing small, meaningful activities that help you feel capable, competent, and effective. Mastery reduces emotional vulnerability and urges by increasing confidence and self-respect—one step at a time.

When life feels out of control, mastery helps restore a sense of agency. You don't need big wins. Small successes count.

What Is Mastery?

Mastery is the feeling that comes from:

- Practicing skills
- Learning something new
- Completing tasks
- Doing things that are slightly challenging—but doable

Mastery is not about perfection or performance. It's about showing up and practicing, even when motivation is low.

Why Build Mastery?

Building mastery:

- Reduces depression, anxiety, and shame
- Lowers vulnerability to urges and emotional overwhelm
- Increases confidence and self-trust
- Supports recovery and long-term change
- Strengthens Wise Mind decision-making

The more mastery you build, the less power emotions and urges have over your choices.

How Build Mastery Works

Mastery grows through repetition, not intensity.

Think of it like physical training:

- You wouldn't lift the heaviest weight on day one
- You build strength gradually

The same is true emotionally and behaviorally.

Guidelines for Building Mastery

- Start small: Choose tasks you can realistically complete
- Make it daily: Even 5–10 minutes counts
- Increase difficulty slowly: Slight challenge is ideal
- Expect discomfort: Confidence grows after effort, not before
- Use Nonjudgmental Stance: Effort matters more than outcome

Examples of Build Mastery Activities

You can build mastery in many areas of life:

- *Skills & Recovery*
 - Practicing DBT skills
 - Completing a worksheet
 - Attending therapy or group
 - Following your routine
- *Daily Life*
 - Cleaning a small area
 - Paying a bill
 - Making a phone call you've been avoiding
 - Preparing a healthy meal
- *Learning & Growth*
 - Reading a few pages of a book
 - Practicing a hobby
 - Learning a new skill
 - Trying something unfamiliar
- *Physical & Self-Care*
 - Exercising briefly
 - Stretching
 - Keeping a sleep routine
 - Taking medications as prescribed

When Mastery Feels Hard

It's common to avoid mastery when:

- You feel depressed or anxious
- You feel overwhelmed
- You fear failure
- You feel “not good enough”

These are signals to practice mastery, not reasons to stop.

If mastery feels too hard:

- Make the task smaller
- Ask for support
- Pair mastery with encouragement
- Use Opposite to Emotion if avoidance shows up

Mastery and Recovery

Substance use and other harmful behaviors often provide short-term relief but reduce long-term confidence.

Mastery works in the opposite direction:

- It may feel harder at first
- But it builds lasting strength, stability, and pride

Each time you choose mastery, you are investing in your future self.

Key Reminders

- You don't have to feel confident to act
- Confidence follows action—not the other way around
- Small steps done consistently create big change
- Mastery is about progress, not perfection

Bottom Line:

Build mastery every day, even in small ways. Each effort strengthens your ability to cope, choose wisely, and create a more satisfying life.

Build Positive Experience:

Creating More Moments That Feel Worth Living

CORE CONCEPT:

Building positive experiences helps balance painful emotions, reduce vulnerability to urges, and support recovery. When life feels empty, stressful, or overwhelming, intentionally adding positive experiences helps restore emotional balance and hope.

Positive experiences do not need to be intense, expensive, or dramatic. Small, meaningful moments count.

Why Build Positive Experiences?

When life is dominated by stress, symptoms, or substance use, positive experiences often disappear. Without them:

- Painful emotions intensify
- Motivation drops
- Urges increase
- Life feels joyless or pointless

Building positive experiences:

- Improves mood over time
- Increases resilience to stress
- Makes skill use easier
- Helps create a life that feels worth protecting

Short-Term vs. Long-Term Positive Experiences

There are two kinds of positive experiences, and both matter.

Short-Term Positive Experiences

These are small moments that feel pleasant or enjoyable right now.

- Listening to music
- Taking a walk
- Talking with someone supportive
- Watching something funny
- Enjoying good food mindfully

Long-Term Positive Experiences

These come from working toward meaningful goals and values.

- Building relationships
- Learning new skills

- Working toward education or career goals
- Improving health
- Creating stability and purpose

Recovery requires both.

Guidelines for Building Positive Experiences

- Schedule positive experiences intentionally
- Start small and build gradually
- Practice daily when possible
- Stay nonjudgmental—enjoyment grows with practice
- Do not wait until you “feel like it”

Positive experiences are most effective when they are planned, not accidental.

Avoiding Common Traps

Be mindful of activities that:

- Feel good briefly but cause harm later
- Increase urges or emotional crashes
- Interfere with goals or values

Building positive experiences means choosing activities that are healthy, sustainable, and aligned with recovery.

Ideas for Building Positive Experiences

You can build positive experiences in many ways:

Pleasure & Enjoyment

- Music, art, movies, or books
- Time outdoors
- Playing with pets
- Creative activities

Connection

- Talking with friends or family
- Attending groups or meetings
- Helping or supporting others
- Sharing laughter

Mastery & Growth

- Learning something new
- Practicing skills
- Completing meaningful tasks
- Working toward goals

Self-Care & Relaxation

- Mindfulness
- Gentle movement
- Self-soothe skills
- Quiet time

When Positive Experiences Feel Hard

It's common to think:

- “Nothing feels good.”
- “I don’t deserve this.”
- “This won’t help.”

These thoughts are symptoms—not facts.

When positive experiences feel hard:

- Start with very small activities
- Use Opposite to Emotion
- Pair activities with mindfulness
- Keep going even if enjoyment is muted at first

Enjoyment often follows action.

Positive Experiences and Recovery

A satisfying life is one of the strongest protectors against relapse and emotional crisis.

When life includes meaning, pleasure, and connection, urges lose their power.

You are not just reducing problems—you are building something better.

Key Reminders

- You are allowed to enjoy life
- Positive experiences are not rewards—you need them regularly
- Small moments add up
- A life worth living is built on purpose

Attend to Relationships (A2R):

Rebuilding Connection and Support

CORE CONCEPT:

Attending to relationships is a way of building positive experiences and reducing loneliness over time. Healthy relationships support recovery, emotional balance, and a sense of belonging.

Mental health symptoms, substance use, and the behaviors that come with them often strain relationships. You may have lost touch with people you care about, withdrawn because of symptoms, or damaged relationships during difficult periods. Over time, isolation can intensify painful emotions and urges. Reconnecting—carefully and intentionally—helps reverse that cycle.

Why Attend to Relationships?

Healthy relationships:

- Reduce loneliness and isolation
- Create positive emotions over time
- Increase motivation and accountability
- Strengthen recovery and stability
- Help build a life that feels worth living

Attending to relationships is not about fixing everything at once. It's about small, steady investments in people who are safe and supportive.

Choosing the Right People

Focus on people who:

- Have been generally supportive or positive
- Respect your recovery and boundaries
- Do not encourage substance use or other harmful behaviors

Avoid:

- People involved in ongoing conflict or chaos
- Relationships that feel unsafe or hopeless
- Anyone who pressures you to act against your goals

Quality matters more than quantity.

Two Relationship Focus Areas

1. Strengthening Current Relationships

Start with people who are already part of your life and with whom you want a better connection.

Examples of ways to strengthen relationships:

- Sending a text or making a call
- Scheduling regular check-ins
- Practicing listening and validation
- Setting healthier boundaries
- Expressing appreciation
- Being more consistent and reliable

Small actions, done repeatedly, build trust.

2. Reconnecting with Past Relationships

Some meaningful connections fade over time but may be worth revisiting.

When considering reconnection:

- Start slowly
- Keep expectations realistic
- Be open, honest, and respectful
- Accept that not every reconnection will work—and that's okay

Reaching out is an act of courage, not a guarantee of outcome.

Taking Action

As you attend to relationships:

- Use interpersonal effectiveness skills
- Practice Nonjudgmental Stance toward yourself and others
- Expect discomfort—connection often grows after effort
- Focus on progress, not perfection

If emotions feel overwhelming, pair relationship-building with distress tolerance or grounding skills.

Key Reminders

- You do not need to rebuild every relationship
- Healthy connection supports emotional regulation
- Loneliness decreases when effort increases
- You are allowed to seek support and closeness

Bottom Line:

Attending to relationships is a powerful way to build positive experiences and support recovery. Choose safe people, take small steps, and allow connection to grow over time.

Opposite to Emotion (O2E):

Changing What Keeps Painful Emotions Stuck

CORE CONCEPT:

Emotions strongly influence what we do. When we follow emotion-driven urges, we often fall into mood-congruent behaviors—actions that match the emotion but keep it going. Opposite to Emotion (also called Opposite Action) helps you choose behaviors that gently counter what the emotion is pulling you to do, so the emotion can ease.

Opposite to Emotion is not about denying feelings. It's about changing the behaviors that keep them stuck.

Why Emotions Get Stuck

Difficult emotions tend to pull us toward patterns that maintain them. For example, depression may lead to:

- Isolating from others
- Staying inactive or in bed
- Getting stuck in negative or hopeless thinking
- Neglecting hygiene and self-care
- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Stopping therapy or changing medications abruptly

These reactions feel understandable—but they often deepen the emotion.

Opposite to Emotion breaks this cycle by doing the opposite of what the emotion urges.

How Opposite to Emotion Works

- Notice the emotion you're in
- Identify what the emotion is pulling you to do
- Choose small, safe, values-based actions that go in the opposite direction
- Practice consistently, even if the feeling doesn't change right away

Feelings often shift after behavior changes—not before.

Using Opposite to Emotion by Feeling

With Depression

Depression pulls toward withdrawal and inactivity. Opposite actions include:

- Reaching out for support or connection
- Getting moving with activities, hobbies, or responsibilities
- Using Encouragement, Nonjudgmental Stance, or dialectical thinking
- Practicing PLEASED (self-care)
- Attending therapy and talking with your prescriber before changing medications

Start small. Any movement counts.

With Anxiety or Fear

Anxiety pulls toward avoidance. Avoidance brings short-term relief but long-term fear.

Opposite action means:

- Approaching fears gradually, one step at a time
- Staying present with anxious sensations without judging or catastrophizing
- Allowing anxiety to rise and fall on its own

Repeated approach teaches your nervous system that fear is tolerable—and it eases over time.

With Anger

Anger pulls toward replaying grievances, hostility, or lashing out.

Opposite actions include:

- Practicing kindness and compassion toward yourself and others
- Doing soothing or calming activities
- Spending gentle, mindful time with pets or children
- Using distraction for angry thoughts (counting, alphabet, Thoughts skill)

When anger is manageable, check Wise Mind and use Interpersonal Effectiveness if needed.

Avoid stuffing anger—unexpressed anger can turn into rage.

With Guilt

Guilt shows up when we believe we've caused harm.

Opposite action involves:

- Acknowledging responsibility without judgment
- Making amends or apologizing when appropriate
- Repairing what you can and planning to act differently next time

A genuine apology is about repair—not avoiding consequences. After repair, use Radical Acceptance and let go.

Sometimes guilt does not fit Wise Mind (e.g., guilt for setting boundaries, self-care, or saying no).

In these cases, the opposite action is to keep doing the healthy behavior until guilt fades.

With Shame

Shame pulls toward hiding and believing you are damaged or unlovable.

Opposite action with shame means:

- Coming out of hiding
- Talking with someone safe, accepting, and nonjudgmental
- Using Distress Tolerance while staying connected

Shame weakens when it is met with understanding and compassion.

Helpful Reminders

- You don't need to feel ready to act—act first
- Start small and build gradually
- Pair O2E with mindfulness and self-compassion
- Accountability and compassion can coexist
- Opposite to Emotion works best with repetition

Bottom Line:

When emotions pull you toward behaviors that keep you stuck, Opposite to Emotion helps you move—gently and intentionally—toward what supports healing, recovery, and a life that works.

Opposite to Emotion with Urges to Use:

The U-Turn

CORE CONCEPT:

A U-Turn means making a deliberate change in direction as soon as you notice you're heading somewhere you don't want to go. When urges to use show up, they often pull you into behaviors that quietly move you closer to relapse. The U-Turn is the skill of interrupting that movement and turning back toward recovery.

How the U-Turn Works

Imagine a road with two directions:

- One direction leads toward health, recovery, and well-being
- The other leads toward substance use and its consequences

At times—by habit, impulse, or choice—you may start moving in the wrong direction. The U-Turn reminds you that you are not stuck. As long as you haven't acted on the urge, there are many opportunities to stop, reassess, and turn around.

Even after a lapse, it is still possible to change course and prevent a full relapse.

Recognizing When You Need a U-Turn

Warning signs you may be heading toward use include:

- Thinking about using “just a little”
- Planning or fantasizing about substances
- Reaching out to people or places linked to use
- Loosening boundaries or bridge-burning protections
- Minimizing risks or consequences

Noticing these early gives you more chances to turn around.

How to Make a U-Turn

When you notice yourself moving toward use:

1. Stop and Notice

Observe what's happening without judgment. Name the urge and the direction you're moving.

2. Reassess

Ask yourself: Is this moving me closer to the life I want—or farther away?

3. Change Direction

- Immediately engage in recovery-supportive actions, such as:
- Calling or texting a support person
- Using Urge Surfing
- Practicing Distress Tolerance or grounding
- Leaving a high-risk situation

- Using Bridge-Burning strategies
- Reviewing your commitments or plans

4. Keep Moving Forward

Stay engaged in skills and recovery behaviors until the urge passes.

U-Turns After a Slip

If you've already had a lapse:

- Recognize it quickly
- Repair what you can
- Recommit to abstinence
- Use skills immediately

One mistake does not require more mistakes. A U-Turn is always available until you decide not to take it.

Planning Ahead

Knowing your vulnerabilities and triggers helps you spot intersections where U-Turns are possible. The more you practice noticing and turning early, the easier it becomes.

Key Reminders

- Urges are not commands
- Direction matters more than speed
- Turning around is strength, not failure
- The earlier the U-Turn, the easier it is

Bottom Line:

When urges try to take the wheel, you can take it back. Notice early, act quickly, and make a U-Turn toward recovery.

Mood Momentum (MM):

Keeping Positive Feelings Going—Skillfully

CORE CONCEPT:

Our emotions are influenced by the behaviors we choose. When you notice a positive emotion—such as happiness, calm, pride, or relief—you can use Mood Momentum to keep that feeling going in healthy, skillful ways.

Mood Momentum helps you ride a natural “high” without relying on substances or other behaviors that feel good briefly but cause problems later. This skill is especially helpful if you’ve used substances in the past to extend positive moods.

How Mood Momentum Works

Emotions naturally pull us toward behaviors that “match” them. Mood Momentum is the mindful choice to engage in healthy mood-congruent behaviors when they are helpful.

Instead of letting a good feeling fade—or trying to hold onto it in harmful ways—you intentionally choose actions that support and extend it.

Ways to Use Mood Momentum

When you notice a positive emotion, consider doing one or more of the following:

- Build Positive Experience (short-term or long-term)
- Balance pleasure with Build Mastery
- Mindfully reflect on the positive emotion you’re experiencing
- Use PLEASED (self-care) skills
- Balance active positive experiences with relaxing ones
- Spend time in healthy, supportive relationships
- Work on a responsibility and mindfully notice your effort and progress (without judgment)
- Practice mindfulness exercises
- Work on a hobby, project, or something from the Activities List
- Try something new that fits your values and goals

The goal is to stay engaged in life while you’re already feeling good.

Keep It Balanced and Fresh

No single activity stays enjoyable forever. Mood Momentum works best when you:

- Use a variety of positive activities
- Switch strategies when something stops helping
- Balance fun, connection, productivity, and rest

Flexibility keeps positive momentum alive.

Mood Momentum and Recovery

If substances were once your way of extending good feelings, Mood Momentum offers a healthier replacement. You still get to enjoy feeling good—without compromising your mental health, relationships, or recovery.

Positive emotions are meant to be enjoyed and built upon, not escaped into.

Key Reminders

- You don't need substances to keep feeling good
- Positive emotions are opportunities, not accidents
- Skillful choices strengthen confidence and stability
- Feeling good and staying well can go together

Bottom Line:

When positive emotions show up, lean into them skillfully. Use Mood Momentum to build a life where feeling good supports—rather than undermines—your recovery.

Interpersonal Effectiveness



Interpersonal Effectiveness:

Skills for Healthier Relationships

CORE CONCEPT:

Interpersonal effectiveness skills help you interact with others in ways that support your goals, protect your self-respect, and strengthen relationships. These skills are especially important when mental health symptoms or substance use have strained connections with others.

Interpersonal effectiveness in DBT has three skill sets, each serving a different purpose. Used together, they help you navigate relationships more clearly, calmly, and effectively.

The Three Interpersonal Effectiveness Skill Sets

1. FAST – Self-Respect Effectiveness

Goal: Maintain self-respect and live according to your values.

FAST skills help you feel good about who you are and how you act, regardless of how others respond. When you respect yourself, relationships tend to improve naturally.

FAST helps you:

- Act in ways that align with your values
- Be honest and fair
- Avoid sacrificing self-respect to avoid conflict
- Strengthen your sense of identity

When you have a healthy relationship with yourself, it becomes easier to have healthy relationships with others.

2. GIVE – Relationship Effectiveness

Goal: Build and maintain positive relationships.

GIVE skills focus on how you show up for others. They help you demonstrate interest, understanding, and respect—especially during difficult conversations or conflict.

GIVE skills help you:

- Show genuine interest in others
- Listen and validate their experience
- De-escalate conflict
- Strengthen trust and connection

These skills are especially useful when emotions are high or when misunderstandings arise.

3. DEAR MAN – Objective Effectiveness

Goal: Get your wants and needs met (or say no) in a clear, assertive way.

DEAR MAN helps you speak up for yourself while staying respectful. These skills are essential for:

- Asking for what you need
- Saying no to requests that don't fit your goals
- Setting and maintaining boundaries
- Refusing substances or other harmful behaviors

DEAR MAN increases the likelihood that others will understand you and take your requests seriously.

Why Interpersonal Effectiveness Matters in Recovery

Strong interpersonal skills:

- Reduce conflict and emotional stress
- Lower vulnerability to urges and relapse
- Improve support systems
- Increase confidence and self-respect
- Help repair or rebuild relationships

When relationships improve, recovery becomes easier to maintain.

Using the Skills Together

These skill sets work best when combined:

- FAST keeps you grounded in your values
- GIVE helps maintain connection
- DEAR MAN helps you advocate for yourself

You may use different skills with different people or situations—and that's okay.

Key Reminders

- You cannot control others, only how you show up
- You can be kind and assertive
- Protecting self-respect supports long-term recovery
- Healthy boundaries strengthen relationships

Bottom Line:

Interpersonal effectiveness skills help you build relationships that support your recovery, reflect your values, and meet your needs—without losing yourself in the process.

FAST: Protecting Self-Respect in Relationships

CORE CONCEPT:

FAST skills help you protect and build self-respect. Self-respect is the foundation of liking yourself, trusting yourself, and having healthy relationships with others. When you act in line with your values, you strengthen your sense of identity and feel more confident in your choices.

FAST is especially important when relationships feel stressful, when you're tempted to please others at your own expense, or when substance use or symptoms have pulled you away from your values in the past.

F

Fair

A

Apologies Not Needed

S

Stick to Values

T

Truth and Accountability

F – Fair

Be fair to yourself and others.

- Take a nonjudgmental stance
- Avoid extremes in interactions
- Respond thoughtfully rather than reacting emotionally
- Use respectful words and actions

Think of fairness like good weather—not too hot, not too cold, and without storms. You don't treat others with respect because they've earned it; you do it because it builds your own self-respect.

A – Apologies Not Needed

Do not apologize when no apology is necessary.

- You do not need to apologize for having opinions
- You are allowed to disagree
- You are allowed to be who you are
- Do not apologize for things outside your control

Chronic, unnecessary apologies slowly erode self-respect and make real apologies lose their meaning.

This does not mean avoiding apologies when you have genuinely hurt someone—those still matter.

S – Stick to Values

Use your values as your guide.

- Identify what matters most to you
- Let values—not fear or pressure—guide your behavior
- Know which values are non-negotiable
- Use Wise Mind when values conflict

Living in alignment with your values builds long-term self-respect, even when situations are uncomfortable.

T – Truth and Accountability

Be honest and take responsibility.

- Tell the truth, even when it's uncomfortable
- Be accountable for your choices
- Avoid deception, excuses, or pretending helplessness

Lying and keeping secrets—especially around substance use—almost always increase emotional distress and risk relapse. Being honest closes doors to unhealthy behaviors and strengthens your sense of integrity.

Accountability is not about shame—it's about power and effectiveness.

FAST and Recovery

Using FAST skills helps:

- Reduce shame and guilt
- Strengthen identity and self-trust
- Improve relationships
- Support sobriety and emotional stability

When you respect yourself, it becomes easier to protect your recovery and make choices that support the life you want.

Key Reminders

- Self-respect comes from how you act, not how others respond
- You can be kind without sacrificing yourself
- Honesty strengthens recovery
- Living your values builds confidence over time

Bottom Line:

FAST skills help you act in ways that protect your self-respect, align with your values, and support healthy relationships—starting with the one you have with yourself.

Values Clarification Worksheet:

Finding Your Compass During Change

CORE CONCEPT:

During life transitions—such as recovery, mental health treatment, loss, or major change—it's common to feel unsure about who you are or what truly matters to you. Symptoms, substance use, and survival mode can pull us away from our values, leaving us reacting instead of choosing. Values are not goals and not rules. They are the qualities and principles that guide how you want to live and who you want to be. Understanding your values helps you:

- Make sense of change
- Stay motivated during hard moments
- Make Wise Mind decisions
- Build a life that supports health and sobriety

Change becomes more sustainable when it is values-driven.

How to Use This Worksheet

- Read through the values below slowly
- Notice which words stand out or feel meaningful
- You do not need to choose perfectly
- Values can evolve over time
- You may circle, underline, or write in additional values
- The list is not complete, please consider adding values of your own. A good way to add to the list is to think of people you admire and the values that they demonstrate.

After reviewing the list, reflect on which values you want to move toward, even if you are not fully living them yet.

Values That Support Change, Growth, and a Healthy Lifestyle

Values of Change

Willingness
Openness
Courage
Responsibility
Accountability
Honesty
Commitment
Acceptance
Flexibility
Integrity
Non-judgment
Effort

Values of Growth

Learning
Personal growth
Self-awareness
Insight
Wisdom
Curiosity
Resilience
Emotional maturity
Confidence
Purpose
Self-respect
Meaning

Values of health & Sobriety

Sobriety
Health
Balance
Stability
Safety
Self-care
Recovery
Well-being
Reliability
Clarity
Mindfulness
Consistency

Reflection Questions

Use the space below to reflect or write freely.

Which values feel most important to me right now?

Which values feel hardest to live by at this stage of my life?

Which values support my recovery, mental health, and sobriety?

How might living by these values change the way I respond to challenges?

Important Reminders

- You don't have to live your values perfectly
- Acting in line with values often comes before motivation
- Values guide direction, not outcomes
- Even small value-based actions matter

Bottom Line:

Values are the heart of meaningful change. When you reconnect with what matters to you, choices become clearer, setbacks become easier to navigate, and recovery becomes more than just stopping behaviors—it becomes building a life that fits who you are becoming.

Now it's your turn:

I value:

Describe three specific ways you can live this value:

I value:

Describe three specific ways you can live this value:

I value:

Describe three specific ways you can live this value:

I value:

Describe three specific ways you can live this value:

Values Conflict Worksheet

Our values frequently come into conflict, and we need to find ways to resolve those tensions in different situations. To move toward resolution, try to decide what your highest ranking values and priorities are and what will best meet the demands of the situation. The overall goal is to maintain and build self-respect. Choices that maintain and build self respect may mean committing to difficult decisions and actions in some cases. Use Wise Mind to consider the short and long-term results of each potential course of action. This exercise can also be helpful when you are struggling to maintain mental health and sobriety.

The following exercise will help you resolve value conflicts.

Describe the situation non-judgmentally:

Describe the priorities, goals, and values in conflict:

Rank the priorities, goals, and values from most to least important:

Describe options that either honor your top-ranked value(s) or that show adequate respect across values:

Evaluate the options. Describe a course of action from Wise Mind that maintains or builds self-respect:

Note: Occasionally we must make choices that sacrifice important values. Make these decisions from Wise Mind and only when the outcome is essential.

GIVE (G):

Strengthening Relationships Through Connection

CORE CONCEPT:

Healthy relationships are built on balance—between your needs and the needs of others. GIVE skills help you stay connected, reduce conflict, and strengthen relationships through genuine interest and validation. These skills are especially important in recovery and mental health, where isolation, misunderstandings, or conflict can increase distress and risk.

GIVE skills focus on how you interact with others, not on winning, fixing, or controlling. When used consistently, GIVE helps create relationships that feel safer, more supportive, and more satisfying.

The GIVE Skills

Use the acronym **GIVE** to remember the building blocks:



Genuine



Interested



Validate



Easy Manner

G — Genuine

Be honest, sincere, and real in your interactions.

- Speak and act from the heart
- Be present with others using mindfulness
- Show that you value the other person through words and actions
- Treat others with respect, even during disagreements
- Notice how substance use or recovery may affect your ability to be open and genuine

Genuine connection builds trust and strengthens bonds.

I — Interested

Show interest in the other person and their experience.

- Let the other person have the focus
- Listen fully before responding
- Ask questions and really hear the answers
- Pause instead of rushing to talk
- Pay attention to nonverbal communication:
 - Make appropriate eye contact
 - Keep your posture open and relaxed
 - Face the person and limit distractions

Interest communicates: “You matter.”

V — Validate

Validation means acknowledging another person’s experience without judgment.

- Recognize and name their feelings, thoughts, or perspective
- Show that their experience makes sense given their situation
- You do not have to agree to validate
- Validation is about understanding, not approving
- Remember to validate yourself as well

Validation reduces defensiveness and increases connection.

E — Easy Manner

Approach interactions with kindness and flexibility.

- Keep your tone calm and respectful
- Avoid being rigid, intense, or judgmental
- Use humor gently when appropriate
- Allow space for others to be themselves
- Start with a relaxed approach—you can always increase intensity later if needed

An easy manner helps others feel safe and open.

When to Use GIVE

- In everyday conversations
- During conflict or disagreements
- When repairing or rebuilding relationships
- When supporting others
- When you want to strengthen connection and trust

Reflection

Use the space below to personalize this skill.

Which GIVE skill is easiest for me?

Which GIVE skill is hardest for me?

How could using GIVE improve one important relationship in my life?

Bottom Line:

GIVE skills help you build and maintain relationships that support mental health, recovery, and a meaningful life. When you interact with others using genuineness, interest, validation, and an easy manner, connection becomes more likely—and conflict becomes easier to navigate.

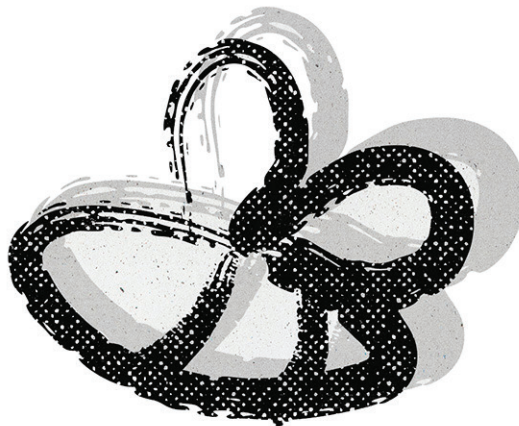
VALIDATION (V):

Deepening Understanding and Connection

CORE CONCEPT:

Validation is the skill of communicating to others that their thoughts, feelings, and experiences make sense and matter. Validation does not mean agreeing, approving, or giving in—it means showing understanding and respect. When people feel validated, defensiveness goes down, trust goes up, and conflict becomes easier to work through.

Validation is a core part of GIVE skills and is especially important in relationships affected by mental health challenges, substance use, stress, or conflict.



The **VALIDATE** Skill

Use the acronym **VALIDATE** to remember the building blocks:

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'V' with a grey shadow.

Value Others

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'A' with a grey shadow.

Ask Questions

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'L' with a grey shadow.

Listen & Reflect

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'I' with a grey shadow.

Identify with Others

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'D' with a grey shadow.

Discuss Emotions

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'A' with a grey shadow.

Attend to Nonverbals

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'T' with a grey shadow.

Turn the Mind

A large, stylized, 3D-effect letter 'E' with a grey shadow.

Encourage Participation

V — Value Others

Start from the belief that others have inherent worth.

- Adopt an attitude of acceptance
- Communicate care and concern
- Let others know they matter to you
- Treat others with respect, even when you disagree

Validation begins with valuing the person, not the behavior.

A — Ask Questions

Ask questions to better understand the other person's experience.

- Ask about feelings, thoughts, and beliefs
- Clarify details rather than making assumptions
- Be genuinely curious about what is behind behaviors
- Use questions to draw out their perspective

Questions signal interest and openness.

L — Listen and Reflect

Listen carefully and reflect back what you hear.

- Summarize key points or themes
- Reflect feelings and meanings, not just facts
- Check for accuracy: "Did I get that right?"
- Continue listening and clarifying as needed

Being heard is often more important than being fixed.

I — Identify with Others

Try to see the situation through their eyes.

- Ask yourself: "How does this make sense for them?"
- Identify similarities when possible
- Accept differences when you cannot relate
- Respect that others' experiences may differ from yours

Understanding does not require sameness.

D — Discuss Emotions

Acknowledge the emotional impact of their experience.

- Name feelings you hear or observe
- Focus on how the situation affects them, not you
- Normalize emotions given the circumstances

Emotions feel less intense when they are acknowledged.

A — Attend to Nonverbals

Pay attention to what is communicated without words.

- Notice posture, facial expression, and tone
- Observe eye contact or withdrawal

- Check your observations: “You look tense—am I reading that right?”
- Nonverbal cues often reveal what words do not.

T — Turn the Mind

Choose validation even when it feels difficult.

- Remind yourself: validation ≠ agreement
- Let go of judgments and defensiveness
- Especially important during conflict or strong emotions
- Keep turning your mind back toward understanding

Validation is a choice you make again and again.

E — Encourage Participation

Support continued engagement and connection.

- Encourage yourself and others to stay involved
- Do not give up when things feel awkward or tense
- Keep inviting dialogue, even during conflict

Connection grows through persistence.

When to Use VALIDATE

- During conflict or disagreements
- When someone is upset, hurt, or overwhelmed
- When repairing or rebuilding relationships
- When supporting someone in distress
- When you want to strengthen trust and closeness

Reflection

Use the space below to personalize this skill.

Which VALIDATE step is easiest for me?

Which step is hardest for me?

How could using validation improve an important relationship in my life?

Bottom Line:

Validation helps people feel seen, heard, and respected. When you practice VALIDATE, you reduce conflict, strengthen relationships, and create space for problem-solving and healing—even when emotions are strong or perspectives differ.

What Validation Is Not

CORE CONCEPT:

Some interactions can look like validation but are not experienced as validating. Understanding what validation is not helps sharpen this skill and prevents common missteps that can unintentionally increase distance, defensiveness, or distress.

Validation is nuanced and takes practice. The following ways of relating are often confused with validation. Some may be useful in balance, but none should replace accurate, mindful validation.

Common Interactions That Are Not Validation

Personalizing Others' Experience

Validation keeps the focus on the other person.

- Sharing one brief, relevant personal statement can sometimes help
- Telling your own story too much shifts attention away from them
- When the conversation becomes about you, validation is lost

Reminder: This is their moment, not yours.

Getting Too Absorbed

Validation is connection—not emotional fusion.

- You can care without taking on others' distress
- Avoid becoming responsible for how someone feels
- Do not turn the person into a “project” you need to fix
- Stay grounded and present without drowning in their emotions

Be with the emotion, not inside it.

Fixing, Giving Advice, or Offering Solutions

Problem-solving is not the same as validation.

- Advice and solutions are sometimes helpful—but not first
- Most people already know what they “should” do
- Jumping to fixing can feel dismissive or invalidating
- Validation often reduces distress without solutions

Understand before you solve.

Cheerleading or Encouragement (Too Soon)

Encouragement without validation can feel minimizing.

- “You’ve got this” may land as dismissive if feelings aren’t acknowledged
- Looking on the bright side too early can shut people down
- Saying “it could be worse” or one-upping comparisons rarely help

Validate the pain before promoting hope.

Agreeing or Giving In

Validation does not require agreement.

- You can validate feelings and still disagree
- You can validate and still hold boundaries
- You can validate and still want change
- Validation is often the starting point for effective change

Understanding ≠ agreeing.

Key Takeaways

- Validation is about acknowledging experience, not correcting it
- Validation reduces defensiveness and opens the door to change
- Validation can coexist with boundaries, limits, and problem-solving
- When in doubt, slow down and reflect before responding

Reflection

Use the space below to personalize this skill:

Which “non-validation” habit do I fall into most often?

How might pausing to validate first change my relationships?

What would it look like to validate without fixing or minimizing?

Bottom Line:

Validation is not about fixing, agreeing, rescuing, or reframing. It is about seeing, hearing, and acknowledging another person’s experience in a way that builds trust, safety, and connection.

TRUST (T) and Relationships

CORE CONCEPT:

Learn how to develop trust in relationships.

People who have been hurt or betrayed and/or who have experienced inconsistent relationships commonly struggle with trust. It is difficult to have rewarding friendships and other relationships if trust does not develop. The information below will help you decide whether people are trustworthy and will assist you in becoming more trustworthy yourself.

Use the acronym **TRUST** to remember the building blocks (**T**ruthful, **R**espectful, **U**nderstanding, **S**table, and **T**ime) of this skill. These building blocks are described in further detail in the paragraphs that follow.

T

Truthful

R

Respectful

U

Understanding

S

Stable

T

and **T**ime

T — Truthful

Trustworthy people tell the truth, even when it is inconvenient, difficult, or will result in consequences. Do not give your trust to other people whom you know to be dishonest, and do not erode others' trust in you by being dishonest.

R — Respectful

Being respectful means that others (and oneself) are treated fairly and with dignity. People who shout, intimidate, bully, are aggressive, or are otherwise disrespectful are not trustworthy.

U — Understanding

People who care enough to understand others and take their perspectives, wants, and needs into account tend to be more trustworthy. It is difficult to trust those who cannot look outside themselves to care for others too.

S — Stable

Trustworthy people are stable and consistent, and others can rely on their predictability. By contrast, erratic, unstable, and inconsistent people can be too hard to predict and have poor follow-through, both of which erode trust.

T — Time

Time is one of the best ways to gauge trustworthiness. Trust should not be automatic; it should be developed over time. For people who have destroyed trust, working the other components of the TRUST acronym over time will help in repairing it.

Making Friends

CORE CONCEPT:

Making friends takes positivity, time, and consistency. Friendships usually grow slowly through shared experiences, mutual interest, and repeated contact—not through instant closeness or pressure.

Many people want a few meaningful friendships but feel unsure how to build them. The guidelines below are meant to help you take practical, realistic steps toward creating and maintaining healthy friendships—especially during recovery or life transitions.

Guidelines for Making Friends

Seek Shared Values and Interests

Friendships often form between people with similar interests or values.

- Join clubs, groups, or classes related to hobbies (music, crafts, fitness, technology, volunteering)
- Get involved in causes or organizations you care about (community groups, advocacy, support organizations)
- Parenting groups, dog parks, classes, or community events are natural places to connect

Similarity helps, but don't over-limit yourself—sometimes friendships grow across differences.

Connect with People Around You

Proximity matters.

- Neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and familiar faces are common friendship starting points
- Repeated exposure builds comfort and trust over time
- You still need to engage—friendships don't grow without participation

Familiarity often bridges differences that seem important at first.

Be Curious and Interested

Most people enjoy feeling seen and heard.

- Ask questions and genuinely listen
- Show interest without interrogating
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues—interest, discomfort, engagement
- Respect boundaries

Early on, avoid overly personal or controversial topics unless the context naturally supports them.

Practice Give and Take

Healthy friendships are balanced.

- Too much taking → others burn out
- Too much giving → resentment builds
- Aim for mutual effort, care, and support

A helpful guideline: be the kind of friend you would want to have.

Be Rewarding to Be Around

From a behavioral perspective, relationships continue when they feel rewarding.

- Work toward being pleasant, respectful, and emotionally safe
- This doesn't mean being positive all the time
- It means that interactions are not consistently draining, chaotic, or overwhelming

Support can go both ways—but balance matters.

Share in the Middle Ground

Avoid extremes in self-disclosure.

- Sharing too much too fast can feel overwhelming to others
- Sharing too little can come across as disinterest or distance
- Aim for gradual, mutual sharing

Let trust and closeness develop naturally over time.

Respect Different Social Needs

People vary widely in how much connection they want.

- Some enjoy frequent contact, others less
- Some want deep emotional closeness, others prefer lighter connections
- Differences don't mean rejection

Look for people whose social needs are compatible with yours, and accept differences when they exist.

Take Your Time

Most friendships are built through consistency, not intensity.

- Show up regularly
- Be reliable
- Allow relationships to develop gradually

Patience protects you from disappointment and burnout.

Build Respect First

Respect is more stable than approval.

- Acting in ways that build respect often leads to being liked
- Chasing approval without self-respect can undermine relationships
- Focus on being fair, honest, and values-driven

Friendships grounded in respect tend to last longer and feel safer.

Reflection

Use the space below to personalize this skill:

Places I could meet new people:

Qualities I want to bring into friendships:

Small steps I can take this week:

Bottom Line:

Friendships are built through shared experiences, balanced effort, patience, and respect. You don't need to rush, perform, or be perfect—showing up consistently and genuinely is enough to let real connections grow.

DEAR MAN (DM):

Asking for What You Need, Saying No, and Setting Boundaries

CORE CONCEPT:

Clear, direct communication helps you protect your mental health, recovery, and self-respect. DEAR MAN is the DBT skill for assertiveness—asking for what you need, saying no, and setting boundaries in a way that is respectful, effective, and values-driven.

DEAR MAN helps reduce resentment, confusion, and unspoken expectations. It does not guarantee you will always get what you want—but it greatly increases the chances, and it strengthens your self-respect even when the answer is no.

Important Guidelines Before You Begin

Others cannot read your mind.

Even people who love you do not automatically know what you want, need, or feel. If something matters to you, you must say it out loud.

Effective communication requires words.

Sighing, withdrawing, being passive-aggressive, or “hoping they notice” rarely works. Clear words work better than unclear behaviors.

DEAR MAN doesn’t always work—and that’s okay.

The goal is effectiveness and self-respect. Sometimes speaking up is the win, even if the outcome isn’t perfect.

Know your goal ahead of time.

Decide what is non-negotiable and what you are willing to compromise on before you start.

Balance DEAR MAN with GIVE and FAST.

Attending to others (GIVE) and staying grounded in your values and self-respect (FAST) makes DEAR MAN more effective.

Assertiveness prevents resentment.

Unspoken needs and unmet boundaries often turn into anger, guilt, or relapse risk. Speaking up early helps protect relationships—and you.

The DEAR MAN Steps

Use as many steps as the situation requires. Some situations need all of them; others only need one or two.

D

Describe

E

Express

A

Assert

R

Reward

M

Mindful

A

Appear Confident

N

Negotiate

D — Describe

Describe the situation using facts only, without blame or judgment.

- Who did what?
- When and where did it happen?
- Stick to observable facts

Example:

“When meetings run past the scheduled end time...”

E — Express

Share your feelings or opinions if it helps the other person understand.

- Use “I” statements
- Keep it brief and relevant
- This step is optional

Example:

“I feel overwhelmed and stressed when that happens.”

A — Assert

Clearly state what you want, need, or are saying no to.

- Be direct
- Be specific
- Be matter-of-fact

Example:

“I need meetings to end on time,” or
“I’m not able to do that.”

R — Reward

Explain what’s in it for them—or for the relationship.

- Focus on benefits, not threats
- Matter-of-fact, not manipulative
- Sometimes consequences (not rewards) need to be named

Example:

“It helps me stay focused and contribute better,” or
“That will make it easier for me to say yes in the future.”

M — Mindful

Stay focused on your goal.

- Expect pushback, distractions, or side comments
- Use the “broken record” technique—calmly repeat your point
- If it’s not working, pause and reassess

A — Appear Confident

Act confident—even if you don’t feel it yet.

- Use steady eye contact
- Speak clearly and calmly
- Stand or sit upright
- Keep your facial expression neutral

Confidence can be practiced.

N — Negotiate

Be willing to problem-solve and compromise when appropriate.

- Decide ahead of time what you can bend on
- Invite ideas: “What do you think would work?”
- Remember: some boundaries are not negotiable

Key Reminders

- Assertiveness is not aggression.
- Saying no does not make you selfish.
- Boundaries protect relationships—they don’t destroy them.
- Self-respect is a valid outcome, even when others disagree.

Reflection (Optional)

A situation where I need DEAR MAN:

What I want or need:

What I'm willing (and not willing) to negotiate:

Bottom Line:

DEAR MAN helps you speak up clearly, respectfully, and effectively. Each time you practice it, you strengthen your confidence, protect your recovery, and build healthier relationships—one conversation at a time.

DEAR MAN: Factors to Consider

CORE CONCEPT:

Using DEAR MAN effectively depends not just on what you say, but how, when, and from what state of mind you say it. These factors help you increase the likelihood that your assertiveness will be heard, respected, and effective—while protecting your self-respect and recovery.

Key Factors That Improve DEAR MAN Effectiveness

Be in Wise Mind

DEAR MAN works best when you are grounded in Wise Mind.

- If emotions are intense, consider soothing yourself first using mindfulness, breathing, or distress tolerance skills.
- Wise Mind helps you stay clear, calm, and focused on your goal.
- Exception: If safety is at risk or immediate action is required, you may need to use DEAR MAN even while emotions are high.

Reminder: Assertiveness rooted in Wise Mind is more likely to be heard and respected.

Use GIVE First

Starting with GIVE often opens the door for DEAR MAN.

- Show genuine interest in the other person
- Listen and validate their perspective
- Use an easy, respectful manner

When people feel heard and respected, they are more open to hearing your needs, boundaries, or requests.

Think About Timing

Timing matters—but it should not become avoidance.

- Ask yourself: Is this a moment when the person can realistically hear me?
- Avoid raising sensitive topics during high stress, conflict, or distraction when possible.
- At the same time, do not delay indefinitely when the issue is important or time-sensitive.

Balance: Choose timing wisely, but do not use “bad timing” as a reason to stay silent.

Direct DEAR MAN Appropriately

Make sure you are speaking to someone who can actually help.

- Use DEAR MAN with people who have the authority or ability to respond

- If someone cannot help, they may still be able to direct you to someone who can
- Stay respectful—even if the answer is no

If one person does not respond effectively, it does not mean DEAR MAN failed. It may mean you need a different audience.

Do Not Give Up

DEAR MAN is a skill, not a one-time solution.

- Effectiveness improves with practice
- Start using DEAR MAN in lower-stakes, everyday situations
- Expect mixed results at times—this is normal

Each attempt builds confidence, clarity, and self-respect, even when outcomes vary.

Key Takeaways

- Wise Mind increases clarity and effectiveness
- GIVE helps others feel safe and receptive
- Timing matters—but silence costs more than speaking up
- Assertiveness may require persistence
- Practicing DEAR MAN builds long-term confidence and healthier relationships

Bottom Line:

DEAR MAN is not about controlling others—it is about clearly expressing yourself with respect, courage, and intention. When combined with Wise Mind, GIVE, and persistence, it becomes one of the most powerful tools for protecting your needs, boundaries, and recovery.

DEAR MAN Bill of Rights

CORE CONCEPT:

Assertiveness is not selfish—it is healthy. This Bill of Rights is designed to support you in using DEAR MAN to communicate clearly, protect your recovery, and maintain self-respect. Rights come with responsibility, so use DEAR MAN thoughtfully, intentionally, and from Wise Mind.

Review this list often—especially when you feel guilty, hesitant, or afraid to speak up.

Your DEAR MAN Rights

You have the right:

- *To be treated with respect*
- *To have your own opinions*
- *To express your feelings*
- *To stand up for your values*
- *To disagree with others*
- *To understand a request before agreeing to it*
- *To ask for information*
- *To take time to think about a request*
- *To say no without guilt*
- *To ask for your wants and needs*
- *To set healthy boundaries with others*
- *To be in Wise Mind before entering a discussion*
- *To disengage from a conflict*
- *To have other rights related to your needs and wants*

Important Reminders

- Having rights does not mean using them impulsively
- Effectiveness matters—choose your DEAR MAN moments wisely
- Balance assertiveness with GIVE and FAST
- Self-respect grows when you speak up skillfully, not aggressively
- Saying no, setting limits, or asking for help can protect your mental health and sobriety

Using This Bill of Rights

- Read it before difficult conversations
- Use it to challenge guilt, fear, or self-doubt
- Refer to it when preparing a DEAR MAN
- Keep it accessible—this is a recovery tool

Bottom line:

You are allowed to take up space, speak clearly, and protect your well-being. Using DEAR MAN is not about controlling others—it's about honoring yourself while staying effective in relationships.

Interpersonal Intensity (II)

CORE CONCEPT:

Effective communication is not just what you say—it's how strongly you say it. Interpersonal Intensity helps you adjust your level of assertiveness so your message is more likely to be heard, respected, and effective.

Assertiveness Is a Dialectic

Interpersonal style exists on a continuum:

PASSIVE — — — ASSERTIVE — — — AGGRESSIVE

- Being too passive often leads to being ignored or overlooked
- Being too aggressive often leads to defensiveness and resistance
- Being assertive usually lands in the middle and is most effective

Wise Mind helps you decide where on this continuum to place yourself in each situation.

Start Low and Adjust Up

In most situations, it works best to begin at the low-to-middle assertive range.

- Starting too intense makes it hard to dial things down
- Starting moderately allows you to increase intensity if needed
- Watch how others respond and adjust accordingly

Tip: It's easier to turn the volume up than to turn it down.

Know Your Baseline Style

Your effective assertive level may feel uncomfortable at first.

- If you are usually passive, assertiveness may feel too aggressive
- If you are usually aggressive, assertiveness may feel too passive

Discomfort does not mean you are doing it wrong—it often means you are changing a long-standing pattern.

How to Tell the Difference

Passive

- You say yes when you want to say no
- You avoid conflict at all costs
- You struggle to set boundaries
- You put others' needs ahead of your own automatically

Cost: Your needs go unmet, resentment builds.

Assertive

- You speak clearly, directly, and respectfully
- You maintain eye contact and a steady tone
- You can say no and stick to it
- You take responsibility for yourself
- You work toward solutions, not winning

Benefit: Your needs are expressed while relationships are protected.

Aggressive

- You focus on getting your way regardless of impact
- You speak loudly, forcefully, or confrontationally
- You may intimidate, bully, or dominate
- You take a “win at all costs” approach

Cost: Others become defensive, withdraw, or escalate conflict.

Using Interpersonal Intensity Effectively

- Use Observe and Describe to assess the situation
- Ask: What level of intensity will work best here?
- Start moderate, then adjust based on feedback
- Balance DEAR MAN with GIVE and FAST
- Stay grounded in Wise Mind

Practice Builds Skill

To improve your ability to adjust intensity:

- Practice responding to the same situation at different intensity levels
- Notice what feels effective and what does not
- Reflect on others’ reactions
- Discuss and rehearse in therapy or group when possible

Bottom Line

Interpersonal effectiveness is not about being louder or quieter—it’s about being effective. When you match your intensity to the situation, your values, and your goals, you increase the chances that your voice will be heard and respected.

Boundaries

CORE CONCEPT:

Boundaries keep relationships healthy, safe, and balanced.

Boundaries define where you end and other people begin. They help you stay connected to others without losing yourself, becoming overwhelmed, or feeling resentful. Healthy boundaries allow closeness and independence at the same time.

The goal in relationships is balance—not being too enmeshed (over-involved) and not being too disconnected (isolated). Boundaries help you stay in meaningful contact with others while protecting your emotional, psychological, and physical space.

Why Boundaries Matter

Healthy boundaries:

- Protect your mental health and recovery
- Prevent resentment, burnout, and emotional overload
- Help you take responsibility for your feelings—not others'
- Allow relationships to feel safer and more respectful
- Support self-respect and personal values

Without boundaries, people often:

- Take on others' problems as their own
- Feel guilty for saying no
- Feel used, overwhelmed, or emotionally drained
- Swing between over-giving and shutting down

Boundaries Are Dialectical

Boundaries are not “all or nothing.” They exist on a continuum and change based on:

- The relationship
- The situation
- Your comfort level
- Your values and goals
- Safety and recovery needs

Healthy boundaries balance:

- Connection → Independence
- Caring → Self-protection
- Flexibility → Limits

Types of Boundaries (Think: Fences)

You can think of boundaries like different kinds of fences:

- Invisible fence: Flexible, subtle, based on trust
- Picket fence: Clear but friendly limits
- Razor wire: Very firm boundaries used for safety or protection

Different situations require different fences. For example:

- A close, supportive relationship may need flexible boundaries
- A stressful or unsafe relationship may require firm limits
- Early recovery often requires stronger boundaries than later recovery

How You Decide What Boundaries You Need

Your boundaries are informed by:

- What you observe and describe in interactions
- How you feel during and after contact with others
- Your priorities, goals, and values
- Whether a relationship supports or threatens your well-being
- Whether you feel respected, pressured, or safe

Boundaries help define who you are in relation to others and the world.

Learning Boundaries Takes Practice

Many people struggle with boundaries because:

- They were never modeled growing up
- They were punished for having needs
- Substance use or symptoms blurred limits
- Guilt, fear, or shame get in the way

Boundaries are a skill, not a personality trait. They can be learned, practiced, and strengthened over time—especially using DEAR MAN, FAST, GIVE, and Wise Mind.

Bottom Line

Boundaries are not walls—they are healthy guidelines.

They help you stay connected without losing yourself.

Strong boundaries support recovery, self-respect, and lasting relationships.

BOUNDARY Skill:

A Guide to Healthy Boundaries

CORE CONCEPT:

This skill helps you create and maintain healthy boundaries.

Healthy boundaries are the foundation of safe, respectful, and satisfying relationships. Many people struggle with boundaries because they were never taught where to start, what is reasonable, or how to adjust boundaries without guilt or fear.

The BOUNDARY skill gives you a clear, step-by-step system to help you set boundaries that protect your well-being while still allowing connection with others.

The BOUNDARY Skill

Use the acronym BOUNDARY to remember the building blocks:

B

Be aware of self

O

Observe others and the situation

U

Understand your and others' limits

N

Negotiate sometimes

D

Differences exist

AR

Always Remember your values

Y

Your safety comes first

Each step is explained below.

Be Aware of Self

Start by turning inward.

Use Observe and Describe to notice:

- What you are sharing
- What you are doing
- How your body feels during interactions

Ask yourself:

- Does my behavior fit this situation?
- Does this feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Am I sharing too much, too little, or about the right amount?

Notice whether your boundaries are leaning toward extremes:

- Too open (oversharing, over-giving, over-involving)
- Too closed (withdrawing, shutting down, isolating)

There is no “one right level” of openness—only what fits this situation and these relationships.

Observe Others and the Situation

Next, look outward.

Notice:

- How others are behaving
- How much they are sharing
- Whether their behavior feels respectful and appropriate

Ask:

- Do others seem interested, disengaged, or uncomfortable?
- Are they respecting my limits?
- Does this environment feel safe and healthy?

Observing others does not mean copying them.

Your goal is to stay grounded in self-respect, not to match others' behavior if it does not feel right for you.

Boundaries always exist in relationship to others, but they should still reflect your needs and values.

Understand Your and Others' Limits

Everyone has limits—yours matter.

- Identify what your boundaries are in this situation
- Maintain them from Wise Mind
- Adjust based on context, not pressure

At the same time:

- Notice and respect others' boundaries
- Do not push past limits that others clearly communicate

Healthy relationships involve mutual respect for limits, not control or obligation.

Negotiate Sometimes

In important, established relationships, boundaries can sometimes be negotiated.

Negotiation:

- Happens from Wise Mind
- Is usually small and flexible, not extreme
- Aims for balance, not self-betrayal

Avoid negotiating boundaries:

- In new relationships
- In unsafe relationships
- To be liked, approved of, or accepted

Put self-respect above approval.

If you notice patterns:

- Boundaries too loose → work on firmer limits
- Boundaries too rigid → practice flexibility

Make adjustments thoughtfully, not impulsively.

Differences Exist

People differ in:

- Comfort levels
- Cultural norms
- Personal histories
- Emotional needs

Differences do not mean someone is wrong—or that you need to change yourself to fit them.

Healthy boundaries allow room for differences without abandoning yourself.

Always Remember Your Values

Your values are your compass.

Ask:

- Does this boundary support who I want to be?
- Does it move me toward health, recovery, and self-respect?
- Does it align with my priorities and goals?

Boundaries grounded in values are easier to maintain and harder to regret.

Your Safety Comes First

This is non-negotiable.

If a situation feels:

- Unsafe
- Coercive
- Manipulative
- Threatening to your sobriety or mental health

Your priority is protecting yourself, not being polite, fair, or accommodating.

Leaving, disengaging, or saying no is not failure—it is effective self-care.

Bottom Line

Boundaries are not walls.

They are guidelines that protect you while allowing connection.

The BOUNDARY skill helps you:

- Stay grounded in Wise Mind
- Protect your safety and values
- Build healthier, more respectful relationships

Healthy boundaries are learned skills—and with practice, they become a source of strength, clarity, and peace.

Healthy Boundaries Worksheet

CORE CONCEPT:

Healthy boundaries protect your safety, self-respect, and recovery while allowing meaningful connection with others.

Boundaries define where you end and others begin. They help you stay connected without becoming overwhelmed, controlled, resentful, or unsafe. Many people were never taught how to identify or practice boundaries, especially during periods of mental health symptoms, substance use, or major life transitions.

This worksheet will help you:

- Define your boundaries
- Identify non-negotiable and negotiable boundaries
- Understand how healthy boundaries support self-respect and a more satisfying life

Take your time. There are no right or wrong answers.

Part 1: Understanding Your Boundaries

1. What does the word “boundary” mean to you?

(Use your own words.)

2. How do you usually know when a boundary has been crossed?

(Check any that apply.)

- ☐ I feel resentful
- ☐ I feel drained or overwhelmed
- ☐ I feel pressured or guilty
- ☐ I feel angry or shut down
- ☐ I notice urges to escape (e.g., isolate, use substances, self-sabotage)
- ☐ My body feels tense, anxious, or unsafe

Other signs (list below):

Part 2: Non-Negotiable Boundaries

Non-negotiable boundaries protect your safety, recovery, mental health, and core values. These boundaries are not open to discussion or compromise.

Examples include:

- Sobriety and recovery
- Physical safety
- Emotional safety
- Respectful treatment
- Personal values

3. My non-negotiable boundaries are:

(List as many as apply.)

4. When a non-negotiable boundary is crossed, what action do I need to take?

(Examples: say no, leave, end conversation, ask for help, use DEAR MAN, disengage.)

Part 3: Negotiable Boundaries

Negotiable boundaries can change depending on:

- The relationship
- The situation
- Your energy level
- Your values in that moment

These boundaries may be adjusted from Wise Mind, not pressure.

5. My negotiable boundaries might include:

6. How will I decide when it is okay to negotiate a boundary

(Check what applies.)

- ☐ I feel safe
- ☐ The relationship is important and healthy
- ☐ Negotiation does not violate my values
- ☐ My recovery and mental health are protected
- ☐ I am acting from Wise Mind, not guilt or fear

Other decision rules (list below):

Part 4: Boundaries and Self-Respect

Healthy boundaries are closely tied to self-respect.

When boundaries are weak or unclear, people often feel resentful, used, ashamed, or invisible.

7. How has not having clear boundaries affected my self-respect?

*8. How do I expect my self-respect to change if I consistently practice healthy boundaries?
(Check any that apply.)*

- ☐ I will feel more confident
- ☐ I will feel safer
- ☐ I will trust myself more
- ☐ I will feel less resentful
- ☐ I will feel more authentic
- ☐ I will have healthier relationships

Other changes (list below):

Part 5: Boundaries and Your Life

9. How might healthy boundaries improve your overall life?

(Consider mental health, recovery, relationships, work, and daily stress.)

10. One small boundary I am willing to practice this week is:

11. Who can support me in practicing this boundary?

Reminder

- Boundaries are not walls
- Boundaries are not punishments
- Boundaries are acts of self-respect
- You are allowed to protect your recovery, safety, and values

Healthy boundaries help you build a life that feels safer, calmer, and more satisfying—one choice at a time.

Plan for Quality of Functioning and Life Change

WAYPOINT DBT

During the course of your treatment at MHS, your level of distress and the focus of treatment may change. These criteria help us to know when you are ready for a different level of care. You may move back and forth through these levels over the course of a one-day DBT or three-day DBT program as you move towards graduation. This sheet will help us to know when you are ready for graduation.

Entry		Client	Therapist	Date
1	No mental health/safety hospitalizations or ER visits for 3 months			
2	No significant relapses for 3 months			
3	Up to date and meaningful use of Safety Plan, Skills Implementation Plan, and Substance Use Behavior Prevention Plan			
4	No active SI/SIB issues (plans/acts)			
5	Active engagement in addressing targeted RIB and TIB issues (includes attendance with group, individual, and other providers as applicable)			
6	Distress levels (symptoms) at average of 5/10 or below for 1 month +			
7	Completion of all 4 DBT modules			
8	Completion of assigned DBT homework			
9	Create a strengths-based, clear, and specific Vision of Recovery that is integrated into treatment planning and daily life.			
10	Identify potential system of sober support; begin building support network.			

TOP outcome guidelines for transition and staying in Midway level of care or lower

No TOP “Red Alert” in latest administration

If recent TOP has a “Yellow Alert,” we will reassess if you are meeting the above criteria.

Must not have any “extreme” elevations on scales for depression, mania, psychotic symptoms, substance abuse, social conflict, suicide, violence, or panic

Must not have more than two “moderate” elevations on above scales

Short term elevations in above scales due to unusual events will be considered in decision making process.

Midway		Client	Therapist	Date
1	No mental health/safety hospitalizations or ER visits for 5 months			
2	No significant relapses for 4 months, complete abstinence for 1 month			
3	No significant RIB and TIB issues			
4	Distress levels at average of 3/10 or below for 1 month +			
5	Up to date and meaningful use of Safety Plan, Skills Implementation Plan, and Substance Use Behavior Prevention Plan			
6	Complete Graduation Plan; begin use in daily life.			
7	Complete Vision of Recovery: Reflection 1, and vision is integrated into treatment planning and daily life			
8	Continue building and expanding system of sober support.			

Graduation Preparation		Client	Therapist	Date
1	No significant RIB or TIB issues			
2	No significant relapses for 5 months, complete abstinence for 2 months			
3	Up to date and meaningful use of Safety Plan, Skills Implementation Plan, and Substance Use Behavior Prevention Plan			
4	Up to date and active use of Graduation Plan			
5	Distress levels at average of 3/10 or below for 2 months +			
6	Complete Vision of Recovery: Reflection 2, plan for the future			
7	Consistent use of stable system of sober support			
8	Conversation with care team about graduation and aftercare			
9	Identify and coordinate transitional care for any additional services required for success.			

Urge & Symptom Skills Implementation Plan (USIP)

CORE CONCEPT

This worksheet helps you prepare for how to manage substance use urges and mental health symptoms at different intensity levels.

Urges, emotions, and symptoms often increase gradually, not all at once. When you learn to recognize early warning signs, you can use DBT skills sooner and prevent situations from becoming a crisis.

Knowing what to expect at each level helps you respond more effectively.

Urge & Symptom Intensity Levels

0–1

No Urges or Distress

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: maintaining routine, self-care, recovery activities, mindfulness

1-2

Early Warning Signs

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: mindfulness, reaching out to supports, distraction skills

3-4

Mild Urges or Emotional Distress

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: urge surfing, opposite action, grounding skills

5–6

Increasing Urges or Symptoms

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: distress tolerance skills, contacting supports, changing environment

7–8

Strong Urges or High Emotional Distress

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: crisis survival skills, urge surfing, calling support

9-10

Crisis Level Urges or Symptoms

Typical Situation:

Typical Thoughts:

Feelings:

Behaviors:

Skills to Use:

Examples: crisis plan, immediate support, removing yourself from triggers

Support Contacts

Phone number

Therapist:

Psychiatrist:

Case Manager:

Friend/Support Person:

Other:

Other:

In Case of Emergency

If you have tried your skills and contacted your supports but still feel overwhelmed:

- During work hours, call Mental Health Systems at (952) 835-2002 for skills coaching
- After hours, call COPE at 612-596-1223 or 911
- You may also go to the nearest emergency room for immediate help

Vision of Recovery

Reflection 1

At intake you were asked to identify a Vision of Recovery, a description of what you want your life to look like when you have completed therapy. The Vision of Recovery is stated in terms of what you want, not what you don't want. For example, instead of "I want to feel less depressed" we would say, "I want to feel more content." Having a destination is important; it gives direction, a way to measure progress, and a goal to attain. This will help to focus and motivate you as you move through the program. You can use the four pillars or dimensions of recovery: Health, Home, Purpose, and Community as a template to create a full, satisfying life in the recovery world.

Below, you will update your Vision of Recovery, identify concrete steps you have taken towards it, plan new steps for the coming days, and reaffirm your sense of purpose and direction.

My Vision of Recovery:

Health:

Home:

Purpose:

Community:

What have I already done to move towards this Vision?

Health:

Home:

Purpose:

Community:

What other steps can I take towards my Vision?

Health:

Home:

Purpose:

Community:

Do I still want this Vision of Recovery? Am I making progress towards it?

Health:

Home:

Purpose:

Community:

Graduation Plan

The Graduation Plan is designed to help you reflect on how you will use your time after leaving the program, how you will continue to access support, how you will continue to work on your goals, how you will gain closure, and what you will do to be successful going forward. Please answer the questions thoughtfully.

Step 1: Using my Time

After I leave the program, how will I incorporate meaning and purpose into my life?

What structure will I have in my day?

What judgments and/or unskillful urges will I watch and plan for?

What skills will be most helpful as I leave the program?

How will I keep track of how I am doing?

How will I get my needs met?

Will I use my individual therapy differently? If so, how?

Step 2: Accessing Support

List the most important people who support you:

Name	Phone number/How to Contact Them

What is my support system like?

What are my relationships like?

Who are my strongest supporters?

Who are the people in my life who have supported me the longest?

Who are my most encouraging supporters?

Who are my healthiest supporters?

Who may look supportive but is not a supporter of my change?

What are some supportive environments I can go to when distress is high?

Step 3: Achieving my Goals

What is my vision of recovery?

What are my short term goals?

What are my long term goals?

*Based on my values, how can I increase participation in my community
(e.g. working, volunteering, spiritual activities, artistic expression, etc)?*

What can I do to continue to increase my own self-respect?

Step 4: Closure with group

What tells me I am ready to leave the program?

What feelings come up when I think about my last day in the program?

How can I use group and individual therapy to prepare for my last day?

Step 5: After graduation

What are the skills that help me the most when I feel anger, anxiety or depression?

What are the skills I use the most? Why?

What are the skills I have trouble with sometimes?

What skills do I use the least? Why?

What questions would I like answered before graduating?

Would I benefit from aftercare? If so, how will I prepare for it?

How will I know if I need more support, such as therapy?

Vision of Recovery

Reflection 2

Before you graduate, we ask that you reflect on your Vision of Recovery and update it if needed. The Vision of Recovery is a description of what you want your life to look like. Please state it in terms of what you want, not what you don't want. For example, instead of "I want to feel less depressed" we would say, "I want to feel more content." Having a destination is important; it gives direction, a way to measure progress, and a goal to attain. This will help to focus and motivate you as you move beyond the DBT program.

Below, you will update your Vision of Recovery, identify concrete steps you have taken towards it, plan new steps for the coming days, and reaffirm your sense of purpose and direction.

My Vision of Recovery:

What have I already done to move towards this Vision?

What other steps can I take towards my Vision?

Do I still want this Vision of Recovery? Am I making progress towards it?

Final steps:

- Talk with my program leaders about graduation.
- Set a graduation date for about a month in advance.
- Think about my graduation day; how would I like to celebrate my accomplishments?
- Talk to my individual therapist about this plan and my graduation.
- Talk to my support system about this plan and my graduation.
- Complete this Graduation Plan and review it with my group.
- Celebrate my accomplishments!

My signature:

Date:

Signature of group facilitator:

Date:

Congratulations!