

DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOR THERAPY

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a treatment modality combining elements of cognitive-behavioral techniques, relaxation and soothing skills, and enhancement of self-awareness skills. “Core treatment techniques are problem solving, exposure techniques, skills training, contingency management and cognitive modification.” (Linehan, 1993, p. 19) This technique emphasizes the acceptance of clients as they are while encouraging them and teaching them tools which will enable them to make changes in their life. DBT was developed to provide a structure and frame for the treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder. The areas of focus are categorized in the following manner and are found on page 11 of Linehan’s 1993 book:

- Emotional dysregulation—“emotional responses are highly reactive and the individual generally has difficulties with episodic depression, anxiety and irritability, as well as problems with anger and anger expression.”
- Interpersonal dysregulation—although relationships are frequently chaotic and fraught with difficulties, the individual will engage in frantic activity to prevent perceived abandonment.
- Behavioral dysregulation—“extreme and problematic impulsive behaviors as well as suicidal behaviors. Attempts to injure, mutilate, or kill themselves are common in this population.”
- Cognitive dysregulation—“Brief, nonpsychotic forms of thought dysregulation, including depersonalization, dissociation, and delusions, are at times brought on by stressful situations and usually clear up when the stress is ameliorated.”
- Dysregulation of sense of self—“It is not unusual for a borderline individual to report that she has no sense of a self at all, feels empty, and does not know who she is. In fact, one can consider BPD a pervasive disorder of both the regulation and experience of the self...”

Although Linehan designed this treatment protocol for the treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder, she has acknowledged that the described constellation of symptoms are often found in individuals whose diagnosis is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder secondary to emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse. Such individuals frequently exhibit impaired control and marked instability. Linehan believes that DBT is equally effective for this group of clients

Defining characteristics of DBT:

“The most fundamental dialectic is the necessity of accepting patients just as they are within a context of trying to teach them to change.” (Linehan, p. 19).

Descriptors such as “manipulative”, “needy”, and other pejorative labels for individuals suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder are counterproductive and most often