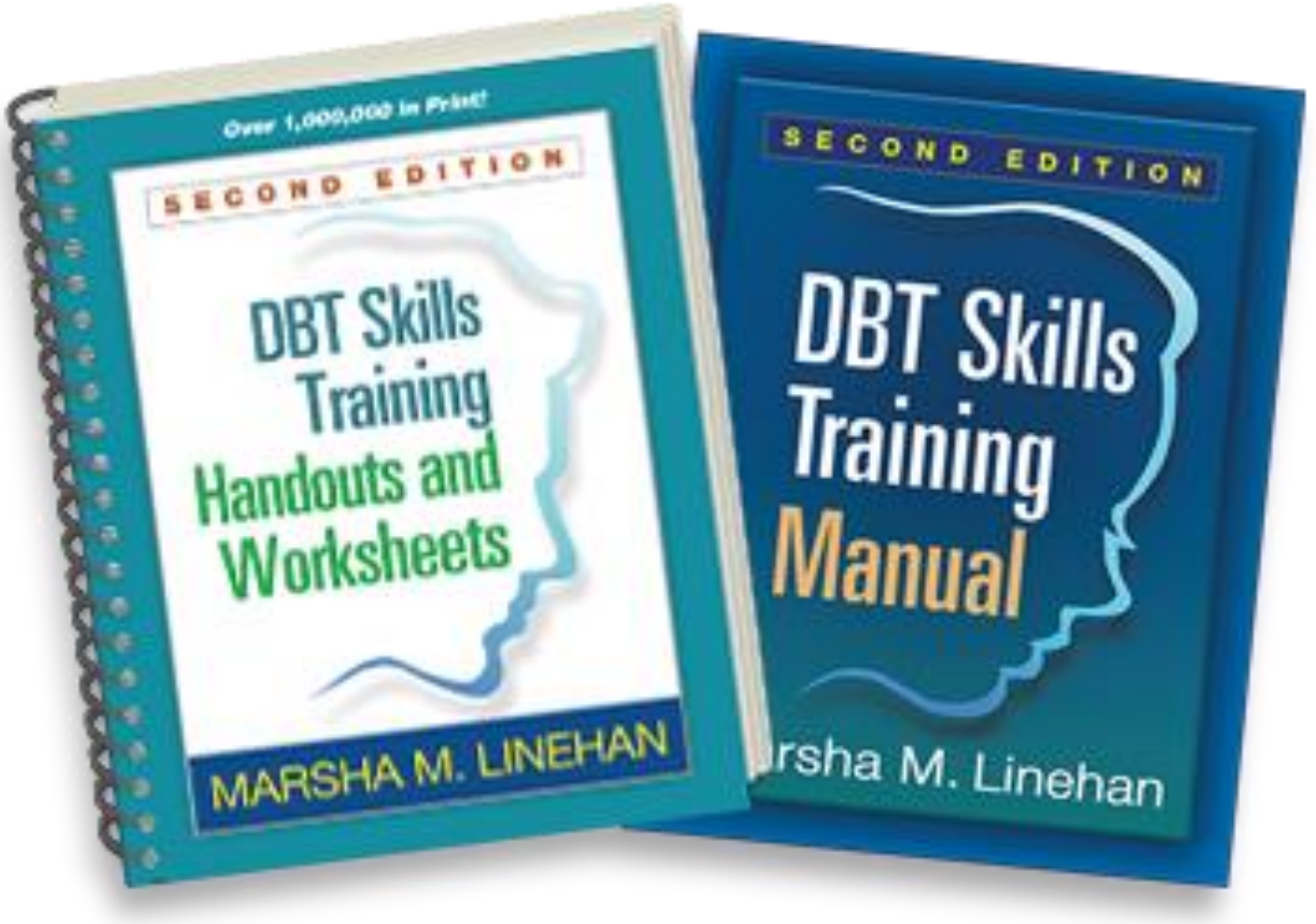
Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) in Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Treatment (Part 1)

Samantha Santamaria, LCSW, C-DBT

Learning Objectives

- At the end of this training, participants will be able to:
  - Distinguish two (2) specific behaviors that DBT is designed to treat, including those related to substance use and co-occurring disorders, and describe the origins of DBT.
  - Describe the four (4) groups of skills utilized in DBT (Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance) and their relevance to forensic populations.
  - Identify two (2) ways in which DBT skills can be useful in forensic mental health treatment, particularly in addressing substance use and co-occurring disorders.

Reference Materials



SOURCES: Linehan, 2014a; Linehan, 2014b

Disclosure

- The use of photocopied materials from the *DBT Skills Training Manual* and *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets* in this training does **not** grant training participants permission to photocopy or otherwise reproduce these materials.
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Agenda

1. **An Overview of DBT**
   - The Fundamentals of DBT
     - Dialectics
     - The Biosocial Model
   - How is DBT Helpful?
2. **Using DBT for SUDs**
   - The Role of Emotion Dysregulation in SUDs
   - Benefits of DBT for SUDs
3. **The DBT Skills**
   - Mindfulness
   - Interpersonal Effectiveness
   - **BREAK**
3. **The DBT Skills (cont'd)**
   - Emotion Regulation
   - Distress Tolerance
5. **Group Activity**
6. **Closing Mindfulness Exercise**

Activity – Word Cloud

- In **one** word, how would you sum up DBT? No multiple-choice here—just your gut reaction!
- We'll create a live word cloud with your responses.

Start the presentation to see live content. For screen share software, share the entire screen. Get help at **pollev.com/app**

An Overview of DBT

History of DBT

- Created in the 1970s by Psychologist Dr. Marcia Linehan
- An evidence-based treatment model that emphasizes skills-building
  - A modified form of cognitive behavioral therapy that integrates emotion regulation and distress tolerance skill-building with a focus on acceptance and mindful awareness
- Originally developed to reduce suicide attempts and non-suicidal self-injury behaviors
- Further adapted to treat Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
- DBT has since proven to be effective for treating and managing a wide range of mental health conditions

The Overarching Goal of DBT

- To increase resilience and develop coping skills to manage negative situations and emotions on our own
  - This is done by ***changing*** patterns that cause problems in our daily lives
    - ***Acceptance*** is necessary for change to occur
- To learn adaptive, effective ways to live in the present moment, regulate emotions, improve interpersonal relationships, and cope with di/stress
  - Individuals learn and build mastery of new **skills** to replace the old skills that are ineffective

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

The Goals of the DBT Skills

Mindfulness

Live in the Moment

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Improve Interpersonal Relationships

Emotion Regulation

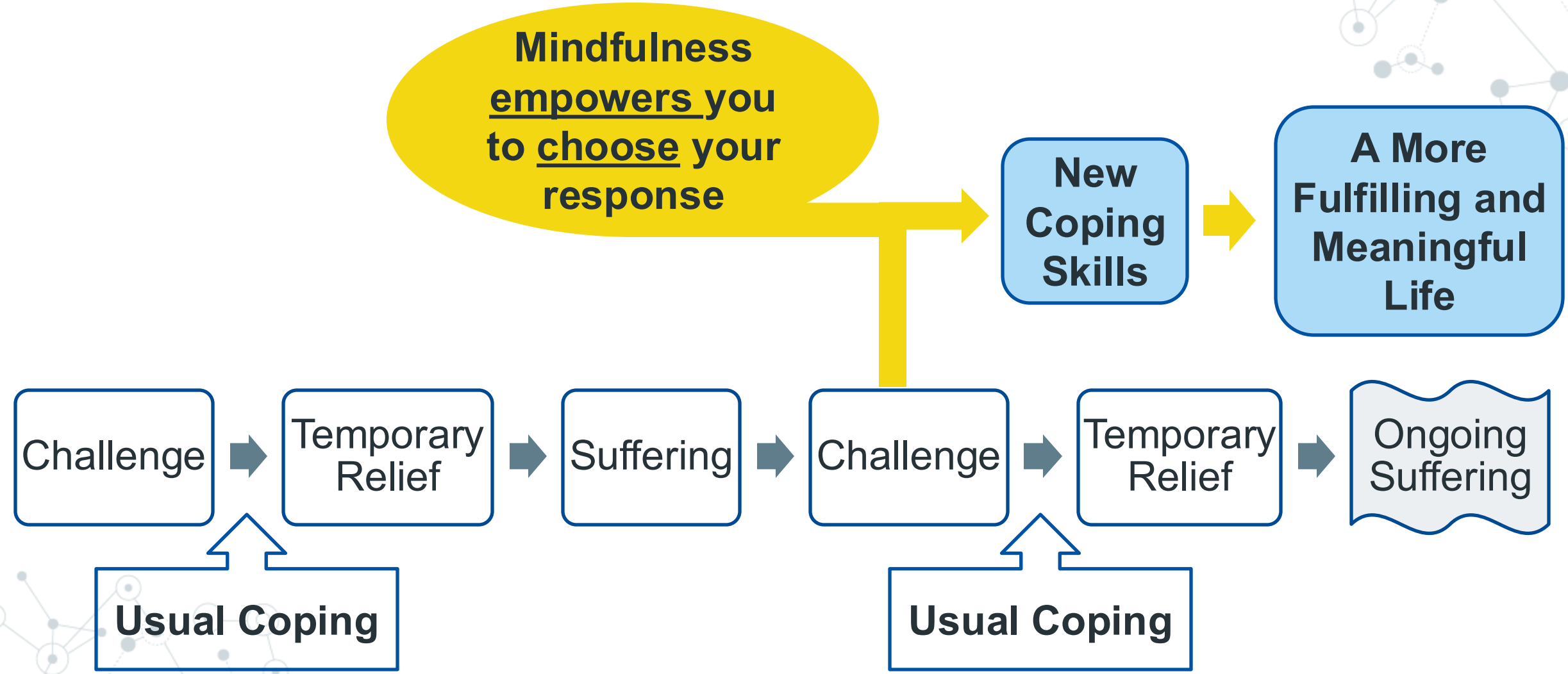
Regulate Emotions

Distress Tolerance

Develop Coping Mechanisms for Stress

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

Visualizing the Goal of DBT



SOURCE: Adapted from https://dbtproviders.com

Balancing Acceptance *and* Change

Concepts/Theories Involved in DBT

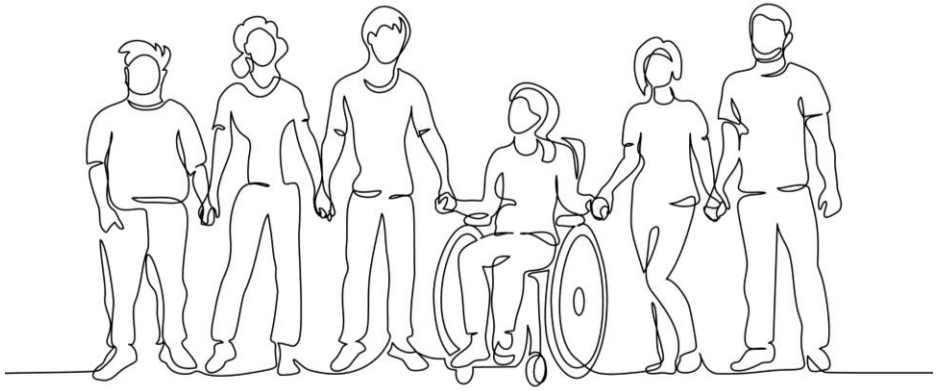
Dialectics

Biosocial Model

Dialectics

What is Dialectics?

- DBT is rooted in dialectics, a philosophical idea that focuses on **balancing and integrating opposing ideas or perspectives**
- Dialectics recognizes contradictions and tensions as **natural**, emerging within us and in the world around us
- This approach helps us move away from rigid thinking toward a more flexible and realistic perspective



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

Dialectical Thinking in DBT

- Two opposing ideas can coexist simultaneously, each holding valuable truths
- **Dialectics** helps us integrate opposing perspectives, fostering balance and realistic understanding
    - In DBT, we learn that truth emerges by integrating opposing thoughts and feelings
- Balancing **acceptance** and change is **key**; sometimes, accepting the present moment/situation is more helpful than striving for change

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

The Dialectical Approach

- The goal is to find balance and integration, not opposition
  - DBT helps us balance **acceptance** of who we are with the desire and benefits of **change**
- This approach helps us recognize that change is a continuous process where new contradictions naturally arise
- Dialectics involves **validating** our experiences and those of others, even when they appear contradictory
  - Emotions and perspectives are always valid, regardless of their seeming contradictions

The Biosocial Model of DBT

The Biosocial Model (1)

- DBT's biosocial model explains how dysregulated behaviors develop and persist over time
- Emotional dysregulation can stem from a combination of biological and environmental factors:
  1. **Innate Emotional Sensitivity**
  2. **Growing Up in an Environment That Feels Invalidating**

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

The Biosocial Model (2)

1. **Innate Emotional Sensitivity**
   - People have different levels of emotional sensitivity, which can be influenced by genetics and biology
   - High emotional sensitivity is a natural variation in how people experience the world
2. **Growing Up in an Environment That Feels Invalidating**
   - Some individuals grow up in environments where their emotions and experiences aren't fully understood or supported
   - When emotions are frequently dismissed, minimized, or misunderstood, it can be challenging to develop **self-trust** and **healthy coping skills**

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

In Summary

- **DBT is…**
  - Skills-based and involves four specific skill sets
    - Practice and repetition of the DBT skills is essential
  - Focused on helping people *understand* and ***accept*** their difficult feelings and unhelpful behaviors, and **learn skills** to manage these feelings and behaviors so that they can make positive ***changes*** in their life
  - Especially effective for people who have difficulty managing and regulating their emotions
  - Grounded in **dialectics** (balancing acceptance and change) and the **biosocial theory**, which explains emotional dysregulation as a result of both biological factors and environmental influences

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

How is DBT Helpful?

Why Choose DBT? (1)

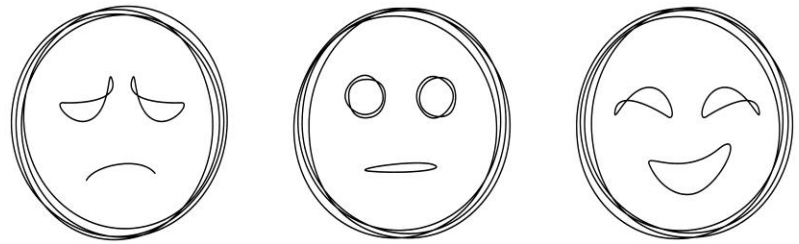
- Applicable and adaptable across various settings and populations
  - **Forensic and Criminal Justice Settings:** Helps individuals manage impulsivity, aggression, and co-occurring disorders in correctional and probation settings
  - **Substance Use Treatment Programs:** Supports recovery by teaching distress tolerance and emotion regulation skills
  - **Mental Health Clinics:** Used to treat mood disorders, anxiety, and personality disorders
  - **Hospitals and Inpatient Units:** Assists individuals in acute distress with crisis management and stabilization

Why Choose DBT? (2)

- There are a variety of therapeutic techniques/interventions to choose from (the four DBT skill sets)
- DBT is a teachable and practical approach that can be utilized by clinicians and non-clinicians at all levels of experience

Treatment of Mental Health Conditions

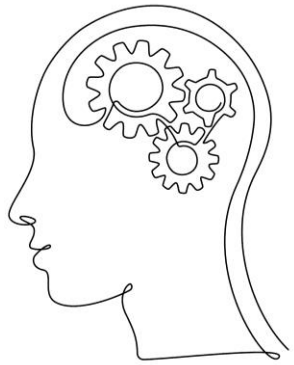
- DBT has proven to be effective for treating and managing a wide range of mental health conditions, including:
  - Substance Use Disorders
  - Co-Occurring Disorders
  - Suicidal and Self-Harming Behaviors
  - Depression and Anxiety Disorders
  - Borderline Personality Disorder
  - PTSD and Trauma-Related Disorders
  - Eating Disorders
- Effective for both adolescents and adults



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014b

Limitations of DBT

- There is no formal trauma processing in DBT
- DBT requires a strong commitment to consistently practice and apply the skills in daily life
- **Skills may not solve every challenge**: Even with excellent skills, you may face complex situations involving difficult individuals or circumstances beyond your control



Using DBT for Substance Use Disorders (SUD)

The Role of Emotion Dysregulation in SUDs

Emotion Regulation vs. Dysregulation

- **Emotion Regulation:**
  - When we are able to influence emotional experiences through **both internal and external processes**
  - It involves monitoring, evaluating, and adjusting emotional responses in a way that is **adaptive and supports well-being**

- **Emotion *Dys*regulation:**
  - When we are **unable** to effectively recognize, manage, and respond to emotions
  - Leads to intense, prolonged, or unhelpful emotional reactions that **disrupt daily life** and reflect a lack of adaptive regulation skills, making it difficult to cope with distress or maintain emotional balance

SOURCE: Dimeff & Linehan, 2008

Visible vs. Hidden Manifestations of Emotion Dysregulation

- Emotion dysregulation can present in ways that are **observable and readily visible to others or remain internalized and hidden**

- Externally Observable Dysregulation
  - **Undercontrolled Expression:** Outbursts, impulsivity, aggression
  - **Mood Lability:** Rapid, unpredictable emotional shifts
  - **Interpersonal Challenges:** Conflict, reassurance-seeking, emotional dependency

- Internally Experienced Dysregulation
  - **Emotional Suppression:** Numbing, detachment
  - **Cognitive Rumination:** Persistent self-criticism, overthinking
  - **Somatic Symptoms:** Headaches, tension, GI distress
  - **Masked Distress:** Appearing composed while struggling internally

Emotion Dysregulation and Impulsivity

- Emotion **dys**regulation often leads to impulsive behaviors as individuals struggle to tolerate distress and **seek immediate relief** through maladaptive coping strategies, such as substance use
  - Poor impulse control, often driven by emotional distress, increases the likelihood of turning to substances for quick relief, **despite its long-term consequences**
- Substance use provides temporary relief but ultimately reinforces the cycle of emotional dysregulation
- DBT equips individuals with skills that can reduce reliance on impulsive behaviors like substance use

SOURCE: Dimeff & Linehan, 2008

Benefits of DBT for SUDs

Benefits of DBT for SUDs (1)

- **Mindfulness skills** and practices assist individuals in finding peace in the present moment, aiding them in recognizing and tolerating negative emotions that may trigger cravings
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness** and communication skills help people to more effectively communicate their experiences, needs, and boundaries
  - Building healthy interpersonal relationships is essential in maintaining long-term recovery
- **Emotion Regulation skills** help people cope with difficult emotions in healthy ways and can decrease the need to use substances to cope
- **Distress Tolerance skills** give people a greater capacity to manage intense emotional experiences and stressors, thereby lessening the need to manage or escape them with substances

SOURCE: Dimeff & Linehan, 2008

Benefits of DBT for SUDs (2)

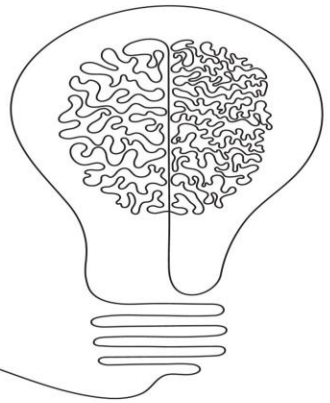
- DBT can also help those with Substance Use Disorders by:
  - Fostering a positive self-image and confidence in personal strengths for sustained recovery
  - Supporting behavior and environment changes to reduce (re)lapse risks
  - Guiding individuals in removing relapse triggers, like unhealthy relationships or drug-associated places
  - Identifying, challenging, and addressing black-and-white thinking and catastrophizing to promote nuanced thinking in stressful situations

SOURCE: Dimeff & Linehan, 2008

The DBT Skills

The DBT Skills (1)

- At its core, DBT helps people build skills in four key areas:
  - **Mindfulness**
  - **Interpersonal Effectiveness**
  - **Emotion Regulation**
  - **Distress Tolerance**



The DBT Skills (2)

Mindfulness

Non-judgmental awareness of the present moment

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Communicate assertively while strengthening relationships and maintaining self-respect

Emotion Regulation

Understand, manage, and change intense emotions and reduce vulnerability to them

Distress Tolerance

Manage an emotional incident with greater calm and acceptance

Mindfulness

Mindfulness Overview

- Mindfulness is:
  - The practice of focusing intentionally on the present moment **without judgment** or attachment
  - Finding calm by staying **grounded in the present**, without dwelling on the past or worrying about the future
  - A valuable tool for managing intense emotions by creating space to respond rather than react
  - **Not necessarily meditation**—it's a state of awareness that can be practiced anytime, anywhere

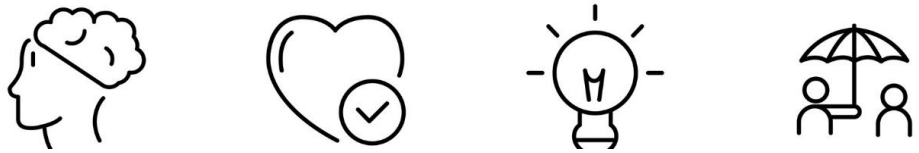
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The Origins of Mindfulness

- Mindfulness rooted in Eastern philosophies, particularly Zen Buddhist practices
- Found in various spiritual and secular traditions, including Hindu practices and yoga
- Also present in Indigenous practices focused on connection to nature and self-awareness

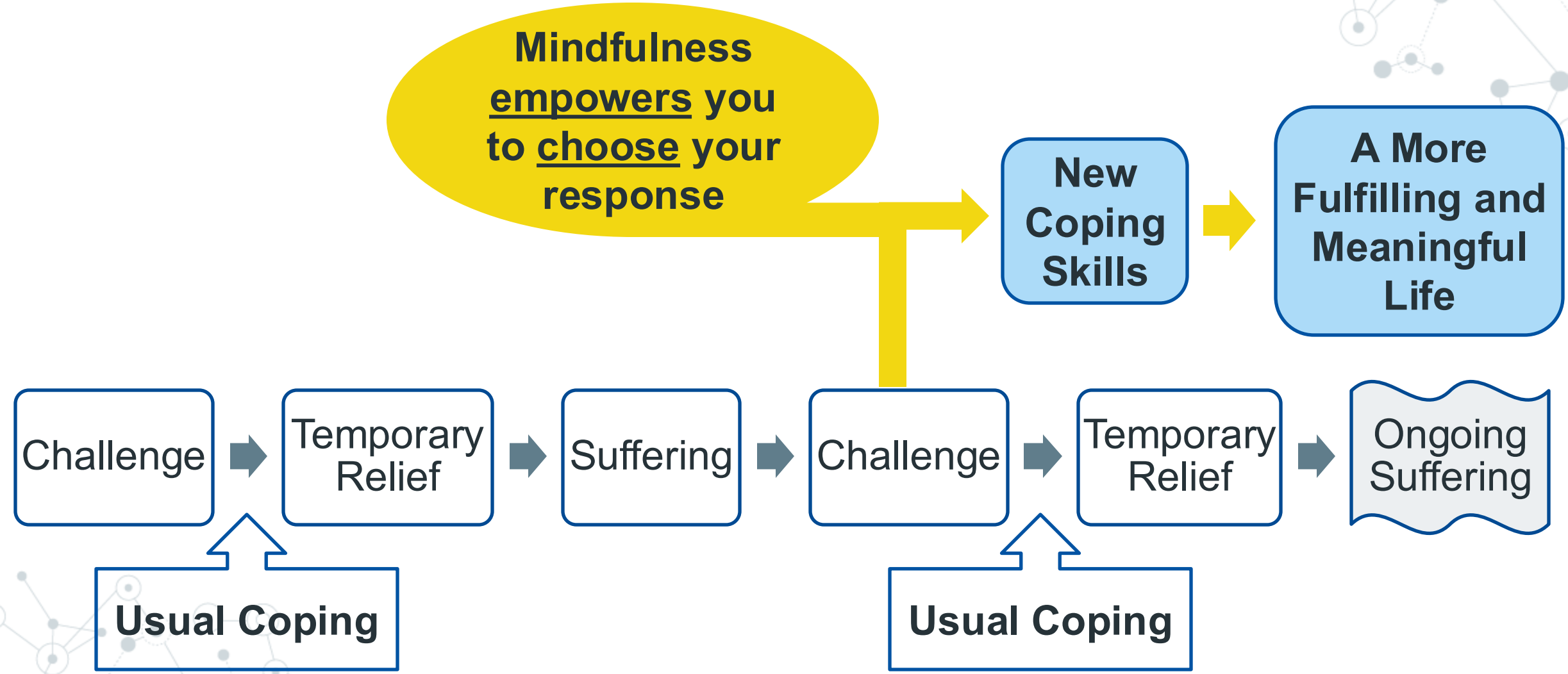
Mindfulness Skills

- Mindfulness skills serve as the foundation for all DBT skills and are typically introduced first
- Mindfulness skills teach us how to:
  - **Observe** and experience reality without distortion
  - **Let go of judgment** toward thoughts, feelings, and experiences
  - **Stay present** and respond to life's challenges with greater awareness



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Callback – Visualizing the Goal of DBT

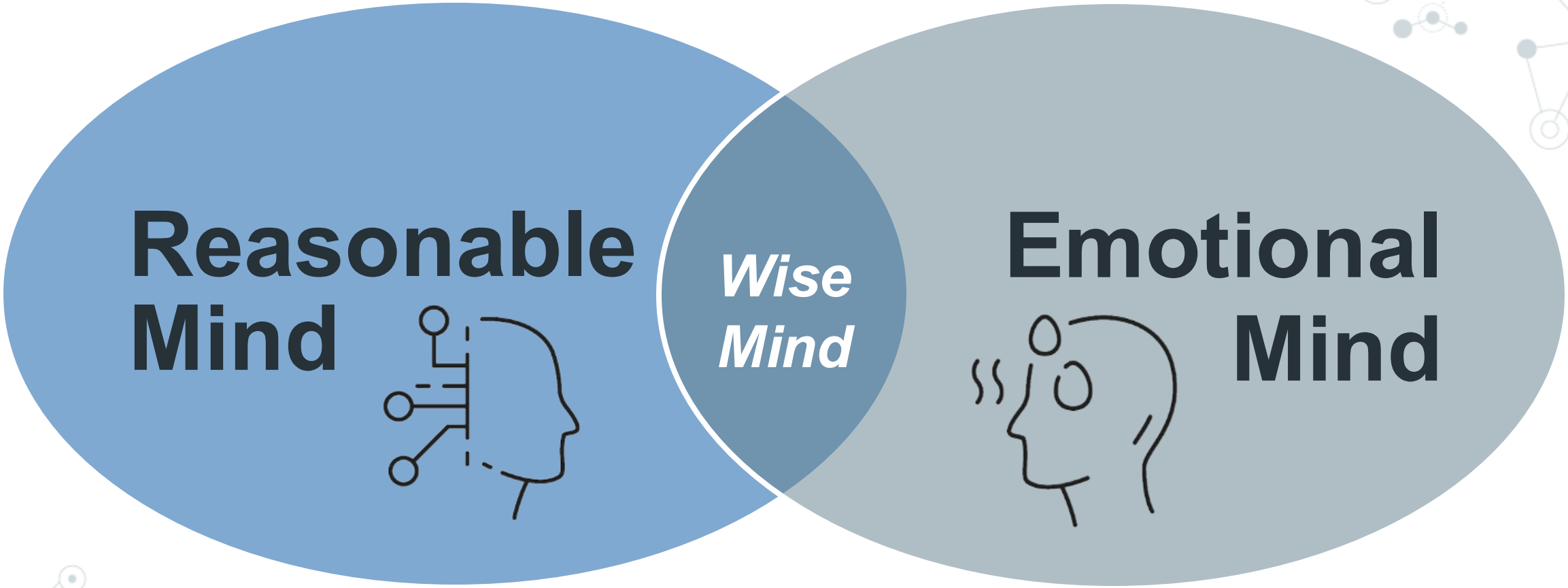


SOURCE: Adapted from https://dbtproviders.com

Core Mindfulness Skills

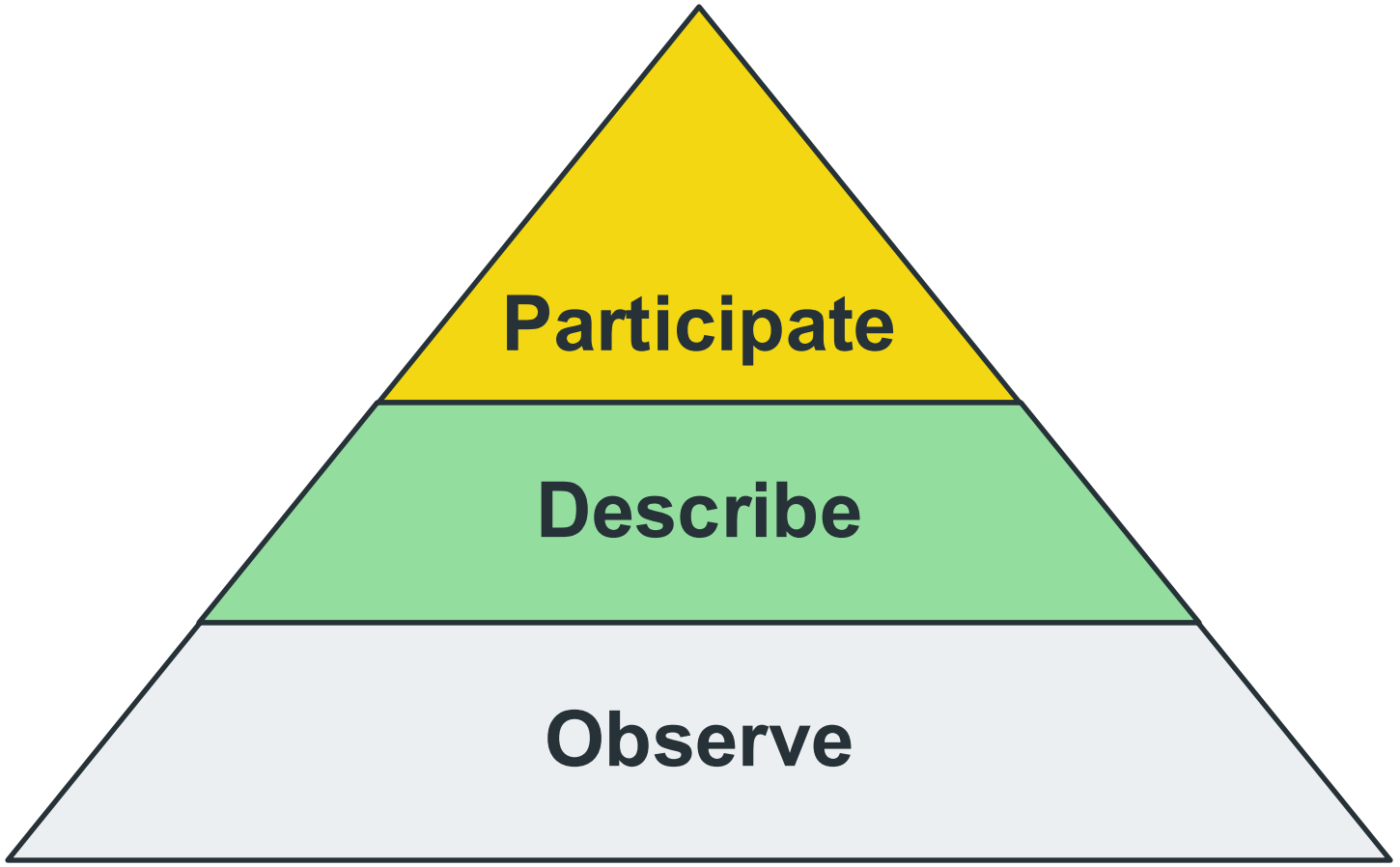
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The States of Mind



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The "What" Skill



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The "How" Skill

Non-Judgmentally

One-Mindfully

Effectively

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Activity – *Wise Mind*

- **Stone flake on the lake.** Imagine that you are by a clear blue lake on a beautiful sunny day. Then imagine that you are a small flake of stone, flat and light. Imagine that you have been tossed out onto the lake and are now gently, slowly, floating through the calm, clear blue water to the lake's smooth, sandy bottom.
- Notice what you see, what you feel as you float down, perhaps in slow circles, floating toward the bottom. As you reach the bottom of the lake, settle your attention there within yourself.
- Notice the serenity of the lake; become aware of the calmness and quiet deep within.
- As you reach the center of your self, settle your attention there.

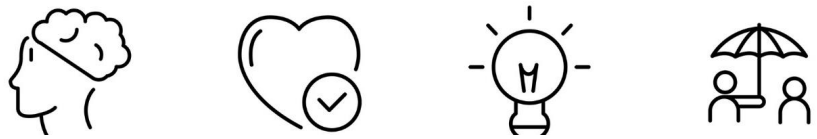
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Wise Mind Activity – Discussion

1. **What did you notice during the activity?**
   - Were there any physical or emotional sensations that stood out?
2. **How could mindfulness activities be helpful for the individuals you work with who struggle with substance use?**
   - What adaptations might be needed to ensure these activities resonate with your specific population?

Practicing Mindfulness

- Mindfulness is the shift from mindlessness (reacting) to mindfulness (responding with awareness); **this transition takes practice and patience**
- When challenges arise:
    1. **Step back** – Pause before reacting
    2. **Notice** – Observe your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment
    3. **Let go** – Release what you cannot control
    4. **Repeat** – Return to the present moment as often as needed



Interpersonal Effectiveness

Interpersonal Effectiveness Overview

- Interpersonal Effectiveness:
  - Fosters healthier and more satisfying connections, helping to reduce distress and conflict in relationships
  - Equips individuals with tools to navigate communication challenges, enhancing their ability to manage social interactions and resolve conflicts
  - Helps individuals clarify their values and objectives, enabling more intentional and meaningful interactions

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

- Interpersonal Effectiveness skills help us clarify our goals in relationships:
  - **What do I want from this interaction?**
  - **How do I maintain this relationship?**
  - **How do I stay true to my values?**

- These skills also teach us how to:
  - Maintain and strengthen positive relationships
  - Set healthy boundaries and communicate limits
  - Identify and end destructive relationships

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Core Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *GIVE* Skill

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Using the *GIVE* Skill

- Use the *GIVE* skill when you want to:
  - Address conflicts positively and respectfully
  - Express thoughts and needs clearly to promote mutual understanding
  - Strengthen relationships through open and empathetic communication
  - Prevent escalation and reduce defensiveness during challenging conversations
  - Build trust and rapport with kindness, patience, and respect

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *GIVE* Skill

G	(Be) **Gentle** – Be kind and respectful; avoid attacks and making threats.
I	(Act) **Interested** – Act interested in the other person's perspective, even if you don't naturally feel that way. Maintain eye contact, nod, and listen actively to show engagement.
V	**Validate** – Acknowledge and reflect the other person's feelings with words and actions.
E	(Use an) **Easy manner** – Stay calm and relaxed.

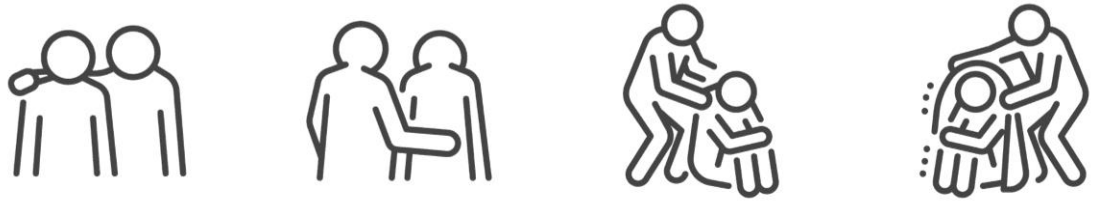
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *FAST* Skill

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Using the *FAST* Skill

- Use the *FAST* skill when you need to:
  - **Communicate assertively** while respecting yourself and the other person
  - **Stay true to your values and priorities**, even in difficult conversations
  - **Avoid unnecessary apologizing,** especially when it's not warranted
  - **Express yourself honestly and clearly** without becoming aggressive or confrontational



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *FAST* Skill

F	(Be) **Fair** – Be fair to both yourself and others. Validate your own feelings and needs as well as the other person's.
A	(No) **Apologies** – Avoid unnecessary apologies. Don't apologize for having an opinion, making a request, or disagreeing respectfully.
S	**Stick to Values** – Stay true to your values and integrity. Don't compromise on things that matter to you.
T	(Be) **Truthful** – Be honest and authentic. Don't exaggerate, lie, or act helpless when you're not.

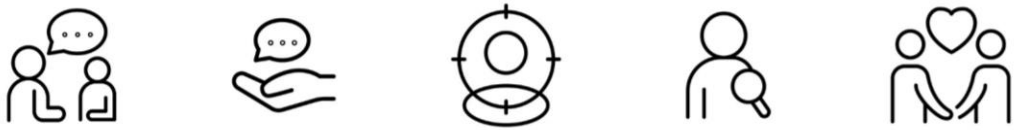
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *DEAR MAN* Skill

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Using the *DEAR MAN* Skill

- *DEAR MAN* is helpful for effectively communicating your needs, especially in situations where you want to:
  - **Set boundaries** clearly and respectfully
  - **Request support or behavioral change** from others
  - **Express feelings and concerns** in a calm and assertive manner
  - **Resolve conflicts** without escalating tension
  - **Foster constructive dialogue** while maintaining mutual respect and openness



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *DEAR MAN* Skill

D	**Describe** – State the situation clearly and objectively.
E	**Express** – Share your feelings and opinions using "I" statements.
A	**Assert** – Clearly ask for what you need or say "no".
R	**Reinforce** – Explain the positive outcomes of meeting your request.

M	**Mindful** – Stay focused on your goal; avoid distractions.
A	**Appear** – Stay calm, confident, and composed.
N	**Negotiate** – Be willing to compromise when necessary.

Available for Reference – Handout #1

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Assumptions & Guidelines of *DEAR MAN*

- **Others cannot read your mind** — Be direct and clear about your needs
- **Effective communication takes practice** — Communicating assertively requires time and effort
- ***DEAR MAN may not always work*** — Even when done well, others might not respond as you hope; stay flexible and focus on what you can control

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Activity – *DEAR MAN* (1)

- **Sam:** *Hey Alex, do you have a minute to chat about something important?*
- **Alex:** *Oh, yeah, sure. What's up?*
- **Sam:** *I've been feeling a bit stressed about the cleanliness of our space lately. Could we talk about coming up with a plan to keep things more organized?*
- **Alex:** *Sure.*
- **Sam:** *What do you think about taking turns with specific chores each week? It'll keep the apartment in check, be fair for both of us, and help prevent future conflicts.*
- **Alex:** *That sounds reasonable.*
- **Sam:** *I also think it's important for us to be open about any concerns. If something isn't working, we can adjust the plan together. How does that sound to you?*

***DEAR MAN* Available for Reference – Handout #1**

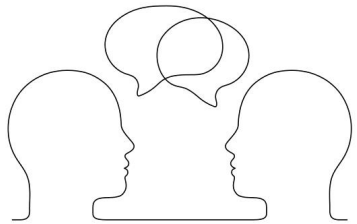
Activity – *DEAR MAN* (2)

- **Alex:** *Yeah, that makes sense.*
- **Sam:** *Maybe we could write down the tasks and rotate them every week to make it easier to track. Does that work for you?*
- **Alex:** *Definitely. That would help keep everything clear.*
- **Sam:** *If something doesn't feel fair or needs adjusting, we can check in and update the plan together. I want this to work for both of us.*
- **Alex:** *That's a good idea. I like the flexibility in that approach.*
- **Sam:** *Thanks for being open to this. Having a clean space is really important to me. I think this plan could make things easier for both of us. What do you think?*
- **Alex:** *I agree. Let's give it a try. Thanks for bringing this up.*

***DEAR MAN* Available for Reference – Handout #1**

DEAR MAN Activity – Discussion

1. **How can teaching Interpersonal Effectiveness skills help the individuals you work with who struggle with substance use?**
2. **What challenges might arise when introducing Interpersonal Effectiveness skills like DEAR MAN?**
   - How can you create a supportive environment to encourage the practice of these skills regularly?



Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) in Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Treatment (Part 2)

Samantha Santamaria, LCSW, C-DBT

Emotion Regulation

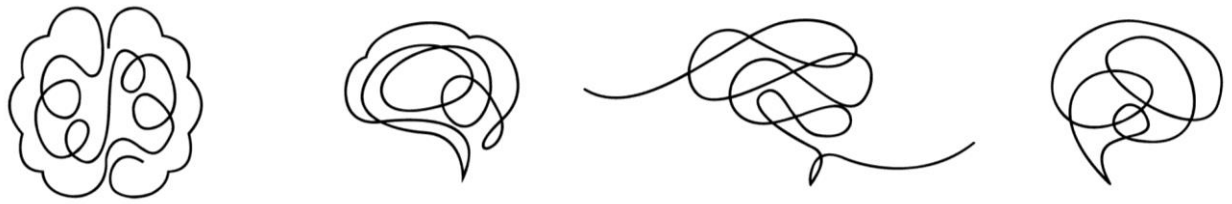
Emotion Regulation Overview

- **Emotion regulation** reduces emotional vulnerability and distress by helping us identify and understand our emotions, and address barriers to changing our emotions
- This involves:
  - **Observing and naming emotions:** Becoming aware of what you are feeling
  - **Understanding the function of emotions:** Recognizing how emotions serve a purpose (e.g., signaling needs, prompting action)
- Through emotion regulation, **we can change our responses to unpleasant and undesired emotions**, fostering healthier coping and greater emotional flexibility

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Emotion Regulation Skills

- Emotion Regulation skills help us:
  - **Manage emotions** in healthy ways
  - **Acknowledge emotions** as part of the human experience
  - **Identify the purpose of emotions** and what they're signaling
  - **Reduce emotional intensity** when needed
  - **Build resilience** and lower vulnerability to *Emotion Mind*



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Core Emotion Regulation Skills

- ABC PLEASE
- Understanding Our Emotional Experiences
- Changing Our Emotional Reponses

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

ABC PLEASE

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *ABC PLEASE* Skill

A	**A**ccumulate positive emotions *(Engage in activities that bring joy and fulfillment)*
B	**B**uild mastery *(Develop skills and confidence through challenges)*
C	**C**ope ahead of time with emotional situations *(Prepare for emotional situations before they arise)*

PLEASE	Treat **P**hysica**L** illness, balance **E**ating, avoid mood-**A**ltering substances, maintain good **S**leep, and **E**xercise regularly

- **Goal:** to empower us to build **emotional resilience**

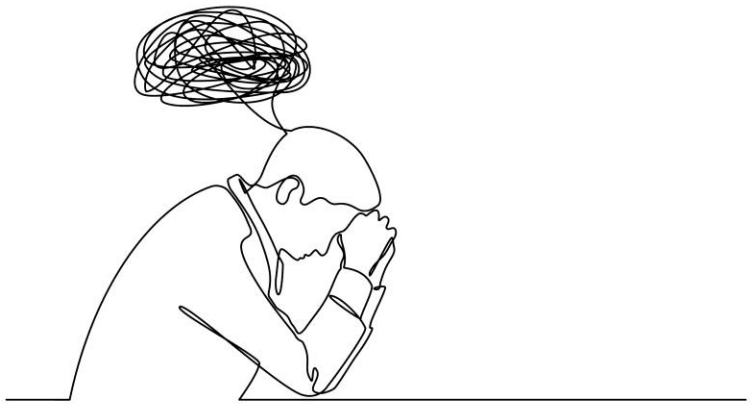
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Understanding Our Emotional Experiences

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Understanding Our Emotional Experiences

- These skills helps us gain a deeper understanding of our emotions, including how to more accurately identify, label, and interpret our emotions
- Understanding our emotional experiences involves:
  - **Identifying Emotions**
  - **Identifying Emotional Triggers**
  - **Validating Emotions**



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Identifying Emotions (1)

- We can enhance our ability to identify (recognize and label) emotions by expanding our emotional intelligence and vocabulary
- Emotions can be categorized as:
  - **Core (primary) emotions** (e.g., joy, fear, sadness), which are fundamental and instinctive
  - **Blended (secondary) emotions** (e.g., pride, shame, jealousy), which arise from combinations of core emotions
  - **Example:** Fear and sadness, both core/primary emotions, can merge to form helplessness, a blended/secondary emotion

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Identifying Emotions (2)

- Emotions serve a purpose beyond just how we feel in the moment
- Understanding the key functions of emotions helps us navigate challenges more effectively and use emotions as tools for growth rather than obstacles
- Key Functions of Emotions
  - **Motivate Action** – Drive us to respond to situations (e.g., fear helps us avoid danger)
  - **Facilitate Communication** – Convey feelings and needs through verbal and nonverbal cues
  - **Enhance Self-Awareness** – Provide insight into personal values, experiences, and needs

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

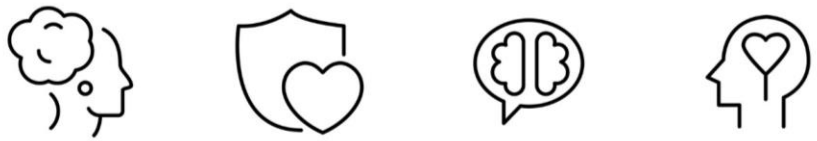
Identifying Emotional Triggers

- Recognizing our emotions helps us reflect on patterns from past experiences and identify triggers for specific feelings
  - This reflection helps us understand why certain situations provoke certain strong reactions
- Becoming aware of **subtle signs** that signal our emotions might flare up allows us to respond more effectively
- Knowing the "**why**" behind our feelings helps us manage our responses thoughtfully and with greater control

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Validating Emotions

- Identifying our emotions and triggers helps us name our feelings and understand why they occur
- Through this process, we can:
  - Affirm (validate) our emotions as **genuine and connected to understandable causes**
  - **Honor our emotions**, recognizing them as both real and meaningful
- This reinforces the legitimacy of our emotional responses and provides **a basis for self-acceptance and understanding**



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Changing Our Emotional Reponses

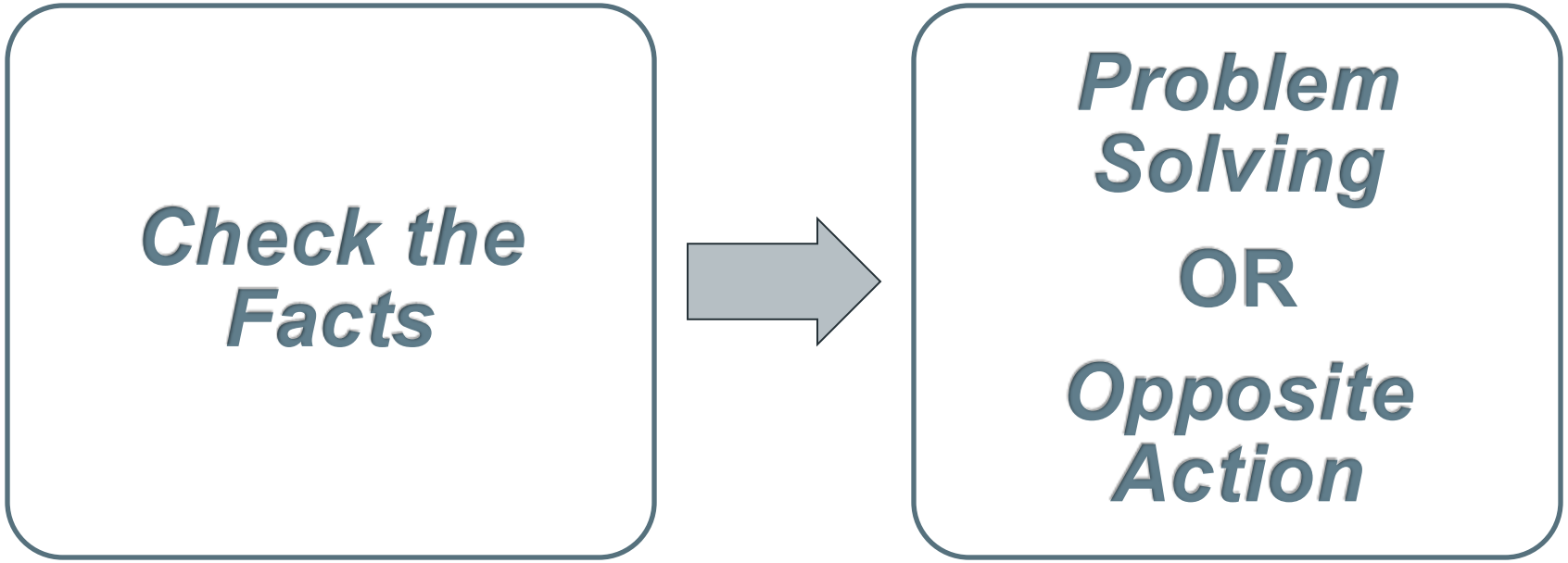
SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Changing Our Emotional Responses (1)

- Designed to help us learn how to more effectively manage and modify our emotional reactions when we experience intense or distressing emotions
- The skills involved in changing our emotional responses include:
  - **Checking the Facts** (*Making Sense of Your Emotions*)
  - **Choosing the Opposite Action** (*Acting Against Emotion-Driven Urges & Behaviors*)
  - **Problem Solving** (*Taking Effective Steps to Address the Situation*)

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Changing Our Emotional Responses (2)

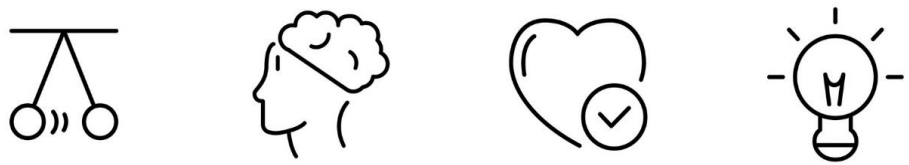


- **Goal:** to empower us to respond to our emotions in ways that are **healthier** and more adaptive

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Check the Facts

- What emotion am I experiencing and want to change?
- What event triggered this emotion?
- What are my thoughts, interpretations, and assumptions about the event?
- Am I perceiving a threat that may not be real?
- What is the worst-case scenario I am imagining?
- Does my emotional reaction match the facts of the situation?



SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Problem Solving vs. Opposite Action

- Use *Problem Solving* when your emotions **accurately reflect the situation** and the problem itself needs to be addressed
- Use *Opposite Action* when your emotions **do not align with the facts** of the situation, and even recognizing the facts doesn't change how you feel

- **Key Distinction:**
  - If the situation **causes** the distress → **Problem Solving**
  - If the emotion **isn't justified** by reality → **Opposite Action**

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Problem Solving

1. **Define the Problem** – Clearly describe the issue and what needs to be addressed
2. **Review the Facts** – Identify objective information about the situation
3. **Set a Goal** – Determine what you want to achieve
4. **Generate Solutions** – Brainstorm possible ways to address the problem
5. **Select the Best Option** – Choose a solution that aligns with your goal and is likely to be effective
6. **Take Action** – Implement the chosen solution
7. **Evaluate & Adjust** – Assess the outcome and modify if needed

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Opposite Action

1. **Identify the Emotion** – Name the feeling you want to change
2. **Review the Facts** – Are your emotions justified? Does the intensity match the reality of the situation?
3. **Recognize Your Urge** – What action does your emotion push you toward?
   - Ask your **Wise Mind**: *Is acting on this urge effective or helpful?*
4. **Consider the Opposite Action** – What action would go against your emotional urge?
5. **Commit to Opposite Action** – Engage in behaviors that counteract the emotion-driven urge
6. **Practice Mindfulness** – Stay present and aware while doing the opposite action
7. **Repeat as Needed** – Continue until the emotion changes

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Activity – *Changing Emotional Responses* (1)

- Meet **Alex**, a 28-year-old who experiences social anxiety and often copes with his social anxiety by drinking alcohol. He has been invited to a networking event for professionals in his industry, but he's feeling extremely anxious about attending and knows that alcohol will be provided at the event. Alex knows that socializing and networking can be beneficial for his career, but his anxiety is making him want to decline the invitation and he is concerned that he won't be able to overcome his urge to drink alcohol to cope with this social anxiety.

"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

Activity – *Change Emotional Responses* (2)

- **Emotional Response:** Alex's initial emotional response is overwhelming anxiety. He's worried about being judged, saying something embarrassing, or not fitting in at the event. He’s also concerned that this anxiety would lead him to drink. He's inclined to decline the invitation and avoid the situation altogether.
- **Checking the Facts:** Alex remembers the emotion regulation skills he learned. He decides to "check the facts" by examining the evidence for and against his anxiety-driven thoughts.

“Meet Alex” Available for Reference – Handout #2

Activity – *Change Emotional Responses* (3)

- **Thought 1:** "People will judge me."
  - **Fact:** Alex has attended similar events before and hasn't faced harsh judgment or negative experiences.
- **Thought 2:** "I'll say something embarrassing."
  - **Fact:** While everyone makes occasional social blunders, most people are forgiving and understanding.
- **Thought 3:** "I won't fit in."
  - **Fact:** Alex has interests and experiences related to his industry, which can provide common ground for conversation.

"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

Activity – *Change Emotional Responses* (4)

- **Opposite Action:** After checking the facts, Alex recognizes that his anxiety-driven thoughts are largely based on cognitive distortions. To change his emotional response, he decides to apply the DBT skill of "opposite action." Instead of avoiding the networking event, he chooses to accept the invitation and actively engage in the experience.

"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

Activity – *Change Emotional Responses* (5)

- Alex decides to plan ahead and identify some strategies to help him navigate his social anxiety and resist drinking while still enjoying social interactions:
  - Alex makes a list of conversation starters related to his industry to help him initiate discussions.
  - He practices deep, calming breaths and positive self-talk to boost his confidence before attending.
  - He decides to bring his own non-alcoholic beverages that he enjoys.
  - He plans to acknowledge his achievement and reward himself with something enjoyable that doesn't involve alcohol after the event.

"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

Activity – *Change Emotional Responses* (6)

- At the event, when Alex feels the urge to withdraw, he makes an effort to approach others, introduce himself, and actively listen to their conversations. When he feels the urge to drink, he practices "opposite action" and other emotion regulation strategies that he's learned to manage and cope with the emotions and triggers that often lead to these urges.

"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

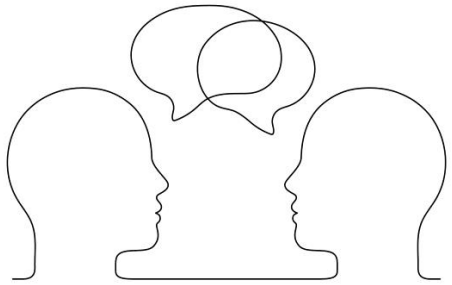
Activity – *Change Emotional Responses* (7)

- **Changed Emotion Response**: As Alex actively participates in the networking event and engages with others, he starts to feel more relaxed and less anxious. His initial anxiety gradually diminishes as he realizes that most people are friendly and open to conversation. By the end of the event, he even feels a sense of accomplishment and connection with some of the professionals he met.

"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

Change an Emotional Response Activity – Discussion

1. **In what ways can Emotion Regulation skills reduce emotional reactivity or impulsive responses in those who struggle with substance use?**
2. **What challenges might individuals face when using these strategies, and how can they address them?**



"Meet Alex" Available for Reference – Handout #2

Distress Tolerance

Distress Tolerance Overview

- Distress tolerance teaches us to handle intense emotions and crises constructively, especially when we can't control the source of distress
  - Unlike emotion regulation, which modifies emotions, distress tolerance helps us endure and manage emotions that **can't be immediately changed**
- Helps us remain calm during crises, **leading to better outcomes** through acceptance
- Strengthens resilience and equips us with adaptive coping strategies, **reducing impulsive reactions**
- Encourages healthier responses to difficult situations by **fostering emotional balance and flexibility**

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Distress Tolerance Skills

- Distress Tolerance skills teach:
  - Strategies to endure emotional and physical pain **without** worsening it
  - Tools to manage distress and **reduce impulsive reactions**
- Useful when problems can't be solved immediately, OR emotions must stabilize before problem-solving can occur
- These skills are helpful when:
  - **Intense physical and/or emotional pain is present**
  - **Emotions feel overwhelming or unmanageable**
  - **Intense urges to act impulsively need to be managed**

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Foundational Distress Tolerance Skills

STOP

ACCEPTS

TIPP

IMPROVE

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *STOP* Skill

S	**Stop** – Immediately stop any impulsive or harmful actions or reactions; hit the "pause" button and interrupt the automatic response to distress.
T	**Take a Step Back** – Take a physical or mental step back from the situation; this can involve physically moving away from the triggering environment or simply mentally distancing themselves from the intensity of the emotions or situation.
O	**Observe** – Observe and describe the situation without judgment; notice the facts of the situation, your own emotional and physical responses, and any thoughts or urges that arise.
P	**Proceed Mindfully** – Proceed with mindfulness and intention; make a deliberate choice about how to respond to the situation rather than reacting impulsively.

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *TIPP* Skill

T	**Temperature** – Using temperature to create a sudden and intense physical sensation can help regulate emotions
I	**Intense Exercise** – Engaging in short bursts of intense physical activity can release endorphins and provide immediate relief from emotional distress
P	**Paced Breathing** – Controlled breathing techniques can help regulate emotions by slowing down the heart rate and calming the nervous system
P	**Paired Muscle Relaxation** – Intentionally tense and then relax different muscle groups in the body to release physical tension

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

The *ACCEPTS* Skill

A	**Activities** – Engage in an absorbing activity that requires focus.
C	**Contributing** – Help or support someone else to shift focus outward.
C	**Comparisons** – Gain perspective by comparing your situation to something more challenging.
E	**Emotions** – Create a new emotion to counter distress (e.g., watch a comedy, or listen to uplifting music).
P	**Push Away** – Mentally set aside distress temporarily using imagery (e.g., picturing the ocean) or redirection (e.g., focusing on a lighthearted video).
T	**Thoughts** – Use mental strategies (e.g., counting, puzzles) to redirect thinking.
S	**Sensations** – Engage your senses with safe physical sensations to disrupt distress.

SOURCES: Linehan, 2014a

The *IMPROVE* Skill

I	**Imagery** – Visualize a calming or peaceful place.
M	**Meaning** – Discover personal growth, insight, or a sense of purpose within the distressing situation.
P	**Prayer or Reflection** – Engage in spiritual practice or meaningful reflection if it aligns with your beliefs.
R	**Relaxation** – Practice deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or guided imagery.
O	**One Thing in the Moment** – Focus on a single task or experience with full attention, staying present without distraction.
V	**Vacation (Brief)** – Take a short mental break from distressing thoughts by intentionally distracting yourself.
E	**Encouragement** – Support yourself with positive self-talk and affirmations to foster resilience and motivation.

SOURCE: Linehan, 2014a

Activity – Distress Tolerance Skills

- **Background:** You are supporting an individual who is justice-involved and struggling with distress tolerance.
- **Triggering Event:** The individual has just received distressing news—perhaps denial of parole, a legal setback, a conflict with staff or peers, or separation from family—which leads to overwhelming anger, anxiety, or hopelessness.
- **Challenge:** The distress is so intense that the individual is at risk of engaging in impulsive or harmful behaviors (e.g., aggression, self-harm, verbal outbursts, noncompliance with programming, or substance use relapse).
- **Task:** You have 1 minute to develop a response plan using Distress Tolerance skills (**STOP**, **TIPP**, **ACCEPTS**, **IMPROVE**). Consider how you would coach or model these skills in this moment.

Distress Tolerance Skills for Reference – Handout #3

Distress Tolerance Skills Activity – Discussion

1. **Which distress tolerance skills did you choose to use during the simulation, and why did you select them?**
2. **What barriers exist in forensic settings when teaching these skills?**

Radical Acceptance (1)

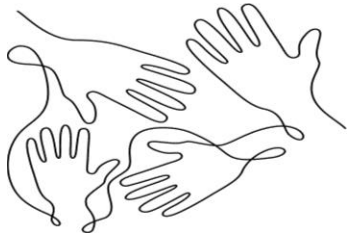
- When faced with a challenge, we have four options:
  - (1) Solve the problem,
  - (2) Change how we feel about it,
  - (3) Resist acceptance and prolong suffering, or
  - (4) **Practice Radical Acceptance**
- Radical Acceptance means **fully acknowledging reality as it is**, without judgment, even when it is painful or unfair
  - It is ***not*** the same as approval, agreement, or resignation
  - It does **not mean accepting abuse, mistreatment, or injustice**
  - It does **not require staying in harmful situations or tolerating harm**

SOURCES: Linehan, 2014a

Radical Acceptance (2)

*Suffering often arises from **resisting pain** and how we interpret it, whereas pain itself is an inevitable part of life that **cannot be avoided or chosen**.*

- Radical acceptance means embracing reality as it stands—**not as we wish it were or believe it should be**—but as it exists in the present, imperfections and all
- It is "**radical**" because it demands a deep and deliberate commitment to stop fighting reality, even when it feels unjust
- Without acceptance, we remain trapped in suffering, unable to move forward



SOURCES: Linehan, 2014a

Group Activity

Group Activity Instructions

- You will be divided into small groups of approximately 4-6 people (take note of which breakout group you're in)
- Take a moment to introduce yourselves to each other
- Groups will address a list of discussion questions on the following slide

Group Activity Discussion Questions

1. **How can DBT skills be adapted to meet the needs of the individuals you work with or the populations you serve (particularly those who struggle with substance use)?**
2. **What are potential barriers to integrating DBT into your existing treatment setting, and how might they be addressed?**

Resources for Continued Learning

- Linehan, M. M. (2014a). *DBT (R) Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets, Second Edition* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Publications.
- Linehan, M. M. (2014b). *DBT (R) Skills Training Manual, Second Edition* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Publications.
- Dimeff, & Linehan, M. M. (2008). *Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Substance Abusers*. Addiction Science & Clinical Practice, 4(2), 39–47. https://doi.org/10.1151/ascp084239

Closing Mindfulness Exercise

Mini Guided Mindfulness Meditation

Source: MedBridge, 2020

THANK YOU!

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