

LEARNING MADE EASY



DBT

WORKBOOK

for
dummies[®]
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Individual exercises to
manage emotions

Expert tips and advice to
overcome stressful moments

Worksheets that bring
DBT to life

Gillian Galen, PsyD
Blaise Aguirre, MD

Authors of bestselling *DBT For Dummies*

Foreword by **Mika Brzezinski**,
co-host MSNBC's *Morning Joe*



DBT Workbook

by Gillian Galen, PsyD and Blaise Aguirre, MD

FOREWORD BY Mika Brzezinski

Co-host MSNBC's *Morning Joe* and founder of *Know Your Value*

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Foreword

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) has changed my life. Dr. Gillian Galen and Dr. Blaise Aguirre are on the forefront of a movement started by Dr. Marsha Linehan, one that had a far greater impact on my life than I would have ever imagined. What I have gained from DBT is almost impossible to condense into this short foreword, but it's worth trying.

Despite being blessed throughout my life in so many ways, chapters of my life have been more difficult than they needed to be because of avoidance, emotional dysregulation, and the inability to move past my own failings. This has led to fractured relationships, mental illness, and suffering for myself and my loved ones. I turned to DBT as the latest of several failed efforts to “fix” my relationships and myself. That journey, which proved to be more life-changing than I could have ever imagined, led me to the doorsteps of Drs. Galen and Aguirre.

As the cohost of “Morning Joe” and the creator of the women’s empowerment platform “KNOW YOUR VALUE,” I’ve had the opportunity to meet world leaders, as well as titans in all areas of business, arts, politics, and foreign policy. I have met people on the front lines of conflict resolution, peacemaking, diplomacy, geo-strategic negotiation, and relations around the world. In every aspect of conflict, discrimination, inequality, and even war, I am certain that DBT could dramatically improve and repair turbulence and upheaval. From peace in the Middle East, to managing NATO and Russian aggression, to the dangerous political divisions within the United States, if DBT were the norm, the question would not be how to solve these struggles, but rather whether these struggles even existed in the first place.

Division, anger, hatred, violence, and intolerance all come from a lack of acceptance, avoidance, and an inability to regulate emotions. DBT addresses all of these struggles. That is why this workbook can effectively be utilized by schools, colleges, businesses, and even governments around the world.

DBT works—in fact, the skills are so effective that one can move from a time in their life where they are diagnosed as “ill” and miserably depressed, to someone who experiences joy and a sense of steadiness and confidence. Fulfilled and *validated*. Through “KNOW YOUR VALUE,” I teach women how to negotiate for raises and how to get “value back” in every relationship. Every tenant of DBT has made my message more effective and easier to teach. Learning skills like validation, radical acceptance, mindfulness, and, most importantly for me, emotion regulation—that’s the value of DBT. Make no mistake: DBT takes consistent work. At the same time, this workbook makes it doable. *DBT Workbook for Dummies* walks you through the skills. With repetition, these skills can become second nature, and your life will start to get better and better every day. For me, the sun came up on all my relationships, and most importantly with the people I love—my family. These skills can save your relationships too, and the world.

—Mika Brzezinski, American talk show host, political commentator, and author

Introduction

If you recall from our first book, *DBT for Dummies*, dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a powerful evidence-based treatment developed by Dr. Marsha M. Linehan to help people navigate lives filled with emotional chaos and turbulent relationships. It combines elements of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and change techniques with mindfulness and acceptance practices. By combining mind and body, DBT offers a more holistic approach to addressing mental health suffering.

This workbook was developed as a companion to *DBT for Dummies* and is designed to be a personal guide as you work toward a life worth living. Your journey will include practices that will reduce your emotional reactivity, increase mindful awareness, help you build more enduring and fulfilling relationships, and create an improved ability to tolerate difficult moments. If you read *DBT for Dummies*, you will be familiar with the therapy, and this book will help you deepen your understanding and practice, but even if you are new to the concepts of DBT, this workbook is here to support you every step of the way.

As you embark on this journey, remember that change is a process, and each small step you take brings you closer to your goals. This workbook is not just about completing exercises; it is about integrating these skills into your daily life, fostering a deeper sense of self-awareness and resilience. The book provides tips, reminders, and cross references as a way to interconnect the various skills into a toolbox of abilities.

About This Book

Within these pages, you will find a series of exercises, activities, and reflections carefully crafted to prompt the practice, strengthening, and generalization of the core DBT skills. From learning effective ways to manage intense emotions to improving effectiveness in relationships, each chapter is designed to build on the last, creating a solid foundation for your personal growth.

This book is meant to be written in; additional worksheets and practices are available online. Because these skills are meant to be practiced and integrated into your life, consider identifying worksheets that you may want to have on hand to help you practice certain skills throughout the day or week. One of the assumptions of DBT skills training is that DBT skills should be learned and generalized in all important contexts of your life. Our hope is that this workbook will be your guide.

You can use this workbook on your own, in individual therapy, and in your DBT skills group. Know that you are not alone; because of the power of DBT, millions of people worldwide are using the approach to create meaningful, fulfilling lives — ones with less suffering and more empowerment and self-agency. We hope this guide will be as helpful to them as it is to you.

Set aside some time for yourself, you deserve it! Take a deep breath, stretch your body, and let us join you on your journey to a more skillful and fulfilled you, with this workbook as your roadmap. You've got this!

Foolish Assumptions

As DBT therapists, we make few assumptions about you! You are reading this book to continue your quest to learn DBT and integrate these skills into your life. You may have some basic understanding of DBT, or this may be the first step to a more skillful life. We will guide you on this journey, and you must make the commitment to practice the skills. If you practice these skills, the way you live and experience your life will begin to change.

We recognize that no book is a substitute for expert therapy, and we assume that anyone who needs help will seek it out. We also assume that readers who are suffering may find these skills challenging and find change overwhelming, and we remain committed to acting as your guide and a place to come back to at any time. Finally, as all DBT therapists do, we assume that at any given moment, we are all doing the best we can, *and* we can always do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins alert you to important types of information:



REMEMBER

This icon marks particularly noteworthy information that you might record or write down so you can refer to it later.



PRACTICE

This icon tells you it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work! It denotes a worksheet, form, or exercise for you to fill out.



EXAMPLE

This icon points to specific examples that show you the way through worksheets or exercises. Examples are fictional composites that represent accurate struggles, but they're not real people.



WARNING

This icon appears when you need to take care; you may need professional help or should be on the lookout for possible trouble.



TIP

This icon alerts you to especially useful insights and explanations.

Beyond the Book

Throughout the book there are worksheets that you may want to complete more than once. Go to www.dummies.com/go/dbtworkbookfd to download blank versions that you can print and use.

In addition, there's a cheat sheet with tips and information about anxiety and depression. To access this online cheat sheet, go to www.dummies.com and then type "Dialectical Behavior Therapy For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the search box.

Where to Go from Here

DBT Workbook For Dummies can help you deal with emotional chaos and turbulent relationships in your life. It's pragmatic, concrete, and goes straight to the point. As such, this workbook doesn't devote a lot of text to lengthy explanations or embellishments of basic concepts, so you may want to find out more about specific types of therapy and alternative treatments elsewhere. For that purpose, consider reading one or both of the companion books: *DBT For Dummies* (Wiley), *Depression For Dummies* (Wiley), and *Anxiety For Dummies* (Wiley).

1

**Getting Started
with DIY DBT**

IN THIS PART . . .

Learning about DBT and its elements and what your journey will look like

Exploring the benefits of DBT

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Overviewing the origins of DBT**
- » **Diving into dialectics**
- » **Focusing on the function of behavior**

Chapter 1

Beginning Your DBT Journey

For people all over the world, these past several years of unrest, divisiveness, fear, and uncertainty have increased stress significantly. Stress often precedes the emergence of emotional disorders, especially anxiety and depression. In the United States, recent surveys suggest that about 40 percent of the adult population suffers from notable symptoms of anxiety or depression. The rates of anxiety and depression among adolescents have also risen dramatically due to disruptions in their lives during these tumultuous times.



TIP

This workbook is designed to help with troubling emotions. It isn't meant to be a comprehensive review of emotional disorders. Many people choose to use this book along with professional counseling or therapy, and some use it on their own. If you want more information and an in-depth discussion of DBT, take a look at *DBT For Dummies*. If you want more about anxiety or depression, take a look at the latest editions of *Anxiety For Dummies* or *Depression For Dummies*.



WARNING

If your symptoms are numerous and severe or your life seems out of control, you should consult your primary care provider or a mental health professional. These worksheets aren't meant to replace trained mental health professionals — they're the only people who can really diagnose your problem.

The Origins of DBT

Dialectical Behavior Theory (DBT) was initially developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan PhD, a psychologist at the University of Washington. Her motivation was to help adult women with a condition known as Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). BPD is characterized by a person having intense and painful mood swings, difficulties in intimate and close relationships, negative ways of thinking about oneself, self-destructive behavior, and suicidal behavior. For many people with BPD, this confluence of symptoms paired with the reality of the risk of suicide makes it one of the most difficult mental health conditions to treat. In fact, before DBT, BPD was considered a uniquely difficult psychiatric condition to treat and contributed to stigma about BPD.

What Dr. Linehan realized was that certain conditions and disorders such as borderline personality disorder (BPD) were characterized primarily by emotion dysregulation. In other words, some people had difficulty controlling their emotions and emotional expressions.

She hypothesized that these difficulties arose from the transaction between an individual's biological and genetic makeup and specific environmental factors, and she called her theory the *biosocial theory*. She noted that people with conditions like BPD had three prominent characteristics:

- » **Sensitivity:** They tended to be emotionally sensitive, which means that they experienced emotions more quickly and with more intensity than the average person in response to events that led to emotional expression.
- » **Reactivity:** Next, she noted that when emotions showed up, emotionally sensitive people had difficulty controlling their emotions and that this led to behavior dictated by their mood state. When emotionally sensitive people were in a good mood, they could get almost anything done, and when they were in a bad mood, they had a difficult time meeting the expectations of the moment. This type of behavior based on mood is termed mood-dependent behavior.
- » **Slow return to baseline:** And finally, she noted that when the emotionally sensitive person experienced these intense and heightened emotions, it took them longer than the average person to get back down to their emotional baseline.



REMEMBER

Don't worry if the worksheets in this chapter reveal that you have a few symptoms of emotional dysregulation. Almost everyone has struggles; that's human. However, you should be concerned when these symptoms significantly interfere with your life. As mentioned in the Introduction, you can find blank versions of these worksheets online (at www.dummies.com/go/dbtworkbookfd) that you can print and use.

Take some time to go through Worksheet 1-1 and identify areas in which you have experienced intense emotional reactions.



PRACTICE

Worksheet 1-1 Emotional Reactivity

Do you recognize these characteristics in yourself? If you do, what are some examples of times when you have experienced this type of emotional response? In other words, give an example when you felt emotions quickly and more intensely, when you stayed emotionally upset for a long period of time, or when your emotional state changed. What did you do in those situations?

Linehan recognized that there were five types of dysregulations that impacted people who had problems with managing their emotions. *Dysregulation* is a term used by therapists, and it means an inability to regulate or to control. Linehan noted that for emotionally sensitive people — and in particular those who did not have the skills to manage difficult situations and relationships in their lives — difficulties regulating the following five areas of daily experience persisted. These types of dysregulation are not one-time events, but rather are patterns of behavior that persist over time.

The five areas of dysregulation and areas for which DBT has been found to be most useful, are as follows:

» **Emotion dysregulation:** Emotion dysregulation is the inability to flexibly respond to and manage emotions in the context of difficult circumstances. Instead of a measured response, for people who struggle with emotion regulation, their responses are highly reactive. Typically, these moments of reactivity are brief, lasting at most a few hours. These emotions nevertheless feel overwhelming and out of control.

» **Interpersonal dysregulation:** Interpersonal dysregulation is the experience of being ineffective in close relationships. This can happen because of fear, whether the fear is real or imagined, that the person will be abandoned by those closest to them. In this context, the person with BPD will then become desperate to prevent the abandonment from occurring and will behave in ways to prevent the abandonment from happening. These desperate ways will often appear to be extreme to others.

Another hallmark of interpersonal dysregulation is that people with BPD tend to develop intense relationships with others, characterized by extremes. Sometimes they idealize the other person and other times they devalue the other person. These fluctuations can happen very quickly and leave the other person feeling bewildered.

- » **Sense-of-self dysregulation:** Sense-of-self-dysregulation is the experience of having very little consistency in one's identity. People with BPD can have a very difficult time defining themselves in terms of who they are as people, what their values are, and what their long-term goals and life-direction is. At times, they look to others and try to copy their behavior in order to fit in, but in many cases, this doesn't feel authentic. Another aspect of self-dysregulation is the experience of emptiness, which is an intense feeling of disconnect-ness, aloneness, and feeling misunderstood.
- » **Cognitive dysregulation:** Cognitive dysregulation is characterized by relatively brief episodes of paranoid thinking or misperceiving reality, and this is particularly true during periods of stress. This means that when the person with BPD has high stress levels, they can begin to imagine that others are intentionally out to get them, even when there is no evi-dence that this is true. Then, at times when emotions are powerful and painful, and this is especially true if the person has experienced significant trauma, people with BPD can have episodes of *dissociation*, which is the feeling or thought that they are not real or that the rest of the world is not real. The physical seems to disconnect from the emotional self.
- » **Behavioral dysregulation:** Behavioral dysregulation is the manifestation of extreme, sometimes impulsive, and at times dangerous behaviors. These behaviors are often used as a way to deal with intense and unbearable emotions, and can include self-injurious behaviors, such as cutting and suicide attempts. Other such behaviors include eating behaviors such as binge eating, substance use as a way to self-medicate, dangerous sexual behaviors as a way to feel connected, and dangerous driving or excessive spending as a way to feel a rush of positive emotions. People often report that they feel out of control in these instances; like they don't have the ability to refrain from engaging in the behavior.

These five areas of dysregulation can often intertwine in very painful ways. For instance, emotional dysregulation can lead to cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal dysregulation. Interpersonal dysregulation can lead to emotional dysregulation, and so on. For many, feel-ing like they don't have a stable sense of who they are can lead to feeling out of control. Use Worksheet 1-2 to reflect on the areas of dysregulation that you've experienced personally.



PRACTICE

Worksheet 1-2 Dysregulation

My experience of:

Emotional dysregulation

- » What are two or three examples of this?
 - » What behaviors typically follow emotional dysregulation?
 - » When does emotional dysregulation tend to occur (time of day, day of week, location)?
 - » What tends to prompt emotional dysregulation (thoughts, other emotions, interactions with certain people?)
-
-

Interpersonal dysregulation

- » What are two or three examples of this?
- » Are there particular people who tend to cause interpersonal dysregulation?
- » What behaviors typically follow interpersonal dysregulation (fights, yelling, avoidance)?
- » What tends to prompt interpersonal dysregulation (abandonment fears, disappointment, feeling judged)?

(continued)

Worksheet 1-2 (continued)

Sense-of-self dysregulation

- »» What are two or three examples of this?
- »» What does sense-of-self dysregulation look like for you (constantly changing values, defining self by what others do, constantly changing aspirations and goals)?
- »» When does sense-of-self dysregulation tend to show up (applying for jobs, deciding on fashion, being asked to give an opinion on a politically charged topic)?

Cognitive dysregulation

- »» What are two or three examples of this (black and white thinking, certainty unsupported by facts, paranoia, dissociation)?
- »» When does cognitive dysregulation tend to occur (under stress, with certain people, by painful memories)?

Behavioral dysregulation

- »» What are two or three examples of this?
- »» In what way are the behaviors potentially dangerous?
- »» When does behavioral dysregulation tend to occur (time of day, day of week, location)?
- »» What tends to prompt behavioral dysregulation (thoughts, interactions with certain people)?

Deconstructing Dialectics

The fundamental principle underlying the practice of DBT is the recognition and emphasis on a dialectical way of thinking. *Dialectics* is at the core of DBT and is the acknowledgment that seemingly opposing experiences — including thoughts, emotions, or behaviors — can coexist. Not only can they coexist, but even though they may seem opposite in perspective, they can both contain truths at their core.



EXAMPLE

Here is a simple example that highlights this. Imagine a game of basketball. One person roots for one team, and another person roots for the other team. At the end of the game, one person is happy and the other is sad. Both of those experiences are true, coexist, and make sense.

This applies to mental health as well. Within the DBT framework, reality consists of opposing forces and experiences in tension, not dissimilar from the two fans of opposing teams in the basketball game. When it comes to therapy, therapists often push their patients to change. However, because it can be difficult, the patient does not easily meet the idea of change. The therapist and the patient often have a common goal, and that is for the patient to be happier and more effective in their life, but one may be pulling and the other may be pushing. It may even feel like a tug-o-war when they seem to be pulling in opposite directions. A practical example of this is, for instance, a therapist pushing a socially anxious client to interact with a co-worker, and yet the client resists because their anxiety causes fear of interacting with others, which they resist out of fear.

Both the experience of wanting to change and of being scared of change — or preferring to stay with the life you know — can coexist, are true experiences, and are understandable from both the therapist's and the patient's points of view. It makes sense that the therapist wants the patient to change and that the patient is either resistant or afraid of change. For people with conditions like BPD, the prospect of facing the emotional turmoil and suffering that they often feel during therapy feels more painful than they are willing to bear.

DBT therapists have realized that it was by moving into a collaborative and accepting stance rather than one solely focused on trying to get their patients to change, that the possibility of change occurred. So, when the therapist balances and synthesizes both acceptance and change-focused strategies in a compassionate therapy, the patient experiences the freedom they need to heal. In many cases, prior to DBT, they have experienced the opposite. In the previous example, the DBT therapist with the socially anxious client would acknowledge the difficulty and fear and balance it with problem-solving to determine how to take steps toward the shared

goal. They have either noted locking horns with their therapists who insisted that the patient had to change, or they experienced a passive though caring therapist, who simply listened and did not offer ideas that could help. Use Worksheet 1-3 to reflect on times when you've been caught in dialectical thinking.



PRACTICE

Worksheet 1-3 Dialectical Thinking

Have you ever locked horns or had moments in therapy when your therapist wanted you to change your behavior and you did not want to do what they asked?

Describe the situation:

1. What did your therapist want you to do? Can you make sense of why your therapist wanted you to do whatever they were asking?

2. Why did you not want to do it or find it difficult? How would you explain your struggle to make the change your therapist was asking to someone else? Does it make sense to you that it was difficult?

(continued)

Worksheet 1-3 (continued)

Can you see how each of your perspectives make sense and are true in the moment, even though the perspectives are opposite, and you may disagree with each other? If you can, you are understanding the core of dialectics.

In DBT, the therapist lets go of the need to be right and is open to the idea that there are other possibilities in the moment. Finally, in DBT, there is an emphasis on moving away from a rigid style of therapy and there is often a lot of movement, speed, and flow within a therapy session. This is achieved by the therapist using various strategies to increase or decrease the intensity, seriousness, lightness, or energy of the therapeutic interaction, and then assessing what works best for any one particular patient, rather than assuming that a single style works equally well for all patients.

The following sections delve more deeply into the dialectical process.

Searching for multiple truths in any situation

The core dialectic in DBT is that acceptance and change coexist. Here is an example. Imagine that you are stuck in very heavy traffic. You can't get out of the car, there are no nearby exits, and your mobile app tells you that you are at least an hour away from a meeting that you should have been at 30 minutes ago. What can you do? For some people, there could be rage, for others resignation, for others, an attempt to solve the problem a different way, for instance calling in to the meeting.

There are a few realities in the moment:

- » You are stuck in traffic.
- » There are no nearby exits to get out of the traffic.
- » You are 30 minutes late for a meeting.
- » You have a response to this situation.

Of course, more than anything, you would like the situation to change! You have two main options:

- » To accept the reality of the situation in the moment.
- » To reject the reality, or parts of the reality, of the situation in the moment.