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More Information on DBT Skills Group

In my 10 years of leading DBT groups, I have thoroughly enjoyed witnessing the process of DBT group participants becoming happier, more confident, and more able to solve life's problems. When intense emotional reactions are reduced, the natural intelligence and creativity of participants shines through. Women with a wide range of anxiety problems, adjustment difficulties, mental illnesses, and substance dependencies have benefited from learning these skills. The DBT Coping Skills Group can be a very effective addition to your treatment plan.

What skills are taught in the group?

There are a wide range of skills taught in the group. Overall, these skills serve to increase emotional intelligence, increase self-confidence, and reduce symptoms.

- **Mindfulness:** The mindfulness skills help you to "stay in the here and now" as opposed to ruminating about the past or future. Your mind-body connection is enhanced, and you can recognize more quickly when emotions are becoming unstable. You learn to recognize and decrease negative self-talk.
- **Distress Tolerance:** These skills are aimed at helping you to decrease intense and negative emotional states or dissociative states. You learn to better manage anger, shame, fear/panic, despair, being overwhelmed, and dissociation. Some of these skills are aimed at distraction from negative thoughts. Some of the skills help you to stop "fighting" or otherwise exacerbating negative emotions.
- **Emotional Regulation:** Principles of cognitive behavioral therapy provide insights into how emotions "work" and how people can change emotional responses. In this section, you learn how to verbally express what you are feeling, what functions painful emotions serve, how to increase positive emotions, how to reduce vulnerability to negative emotions, and how to change repetitive negative emotional reactions. You gain increased control over your "emotional brain."
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness:** There is no set formula for assertiveness. For example, you wouldn't talk with your boss the same way you talk to your young child or a good friend. The interpersonal effectiveness skills teach you various assertiveness and validation skills and how to apply them in different situations. You gain self-confidence in talking with others.

What are the Outcomes of DBT group participation?

I am often asked this question, and the answer is complex. Some women get significant relief from going through all of the skills just once. This takes approximately 6 months. Some women need to stay in the group over a year to achieve even moderate relief. There are several indicators of outcomes:

- **Individual therapy:** If your individual therapist supports you in your efforts to learn the skills by reviewing the skills briefly with you and/or discussing with you how you could utilize the skills in your everyday life, outcomes are better. Therapists with a DBT or cognitive behavioral (CBT) orientation are particularly good at supporting clients in learning the DBT skills. However, you can ask your non-DBT/CBT therapist at the outset of your group participation to review the skills with you regularly. Most therapists are happy to do this.

- Skills practice: If you set aside time to practice the skills at home, outcomes are better. The skills should be practiced even when they are not needed. In this way, you will remember them better when you are stressed or upset. It is best to practice several times a week, up to once per day. However, the length of time spent practicing the skills on any given day may be a little as 10 minutes.
- Compliance with other aspects of your treatment: Individual therapy, DBT group, and—for many participants--psychiatric medications all work together to alleviate symptoms. In you keep regular therapy appointments and take your medications as prescribed, it is easier to master the DBT skills and outcomes are better.
- Severity of symptoms: Women with mild to moderate symptoms (such as anxiety, depressed mood, irritability, intermittent and brief suicidal thoughts, mild dissociation, and attention deficit) will experience relief more quickly with the DBT skills. It takes longer to adequately address severe symptoms (such as debilitating flashbacks, chronic suicidal thoughts, and self-harm). However, all symptoms can be decreased with enough skills practice and support from your treatment team.

What are the other group members like?

Potential group participants are sometimes concerned with the atmosphere of the group and severity of members' symptoms. The skills are useful to women with all types of difficulties and diagnoses. Undoubtedly, some participants will have more severe symptoms than you. Likewise, some participants will be experiencing milder difficulties. Some participants share about their symptoms and life difficulties; others do not share or talk as much. I re-focus the group discussion back onto the skills as necessary, so that everyone gets a chance to actively engage in the learning process. Besides tearfulness, there have never been displays of intense emotions the group. Overall, the group feels much like a small informal college course. Joking and laughter are encouraged.