



Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

An evidence-based group
therapy for emotional and
behavioural regulation



What is dialectical behaviour therapy?

Dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) is a psychological therapy for those who experience intense emotions which can lead to impulsive behaviours. While these impulsive behaviours can provide short-term relief, they can cause life to become painful and challenging. The goal of DBT is to help participants build a life worth living. The group aims to provide members with skills to manage urges associated with impulsive behaviours and/or to tolerate, regulate or change the intensity of strong emotions.

What is the structure of the SPMHS DBT programme?

There are two different groups within the SPMHS DBT programme.

- 1. DBT Comprehensive** incorporates a skills-focused group that teaches group members DBT skills and eight one-to-one sessions, to support group members to put the skills into practice in their lives. DBT Comprehensive is for people who experience emotional and behavioural dysregulation and have a recent history of self-harming or suicidal behaviours.
- 2. DBT Skills Group** is an exclusively group-based DBT skills training. The skills group is for people who experience emotional and behavioural dysregulation but don't have a recent, or any, history of self-harming or suicidal behaviours.

Both groups run twice weekly, for 24 sessions over three months.

The group is a stage one DBT programme, which means it focuses on reducing self-destructive behaviours and/or dysregulated emotions.

What happens in skills class?

Sessions take place in the morning. The session begins with a brief mindfulness practice. The group then engages in skills coaching, in which they receive coaching on their skills use since the previous session. Following a short break, a new skill is taught, and a skills practice activity will be set for feedback in the next session.



What happens in one-to-one sessions?

If you are attending the DBT Comprehensive programme you will attend one-to-one sessions as well as the skills group. In one-to-one sessions, the focus is on maintaining motivation to develop new skills in your life. In between one-to-one sessions, you will use a diary card to track the behaviours you are trying to reduce in your life, as well as the new skills you are trying to increase. You will review this with your one-to-one therapist, and work on anything getting in the way of this in the session.

What skills will I learn?

People who engage in the programme report challenges in the following areas:

- Inability to control thoughts and attention
- Difficulty regulating emotion
- Difficulty managing distress
- Difficulty communicating effectively.

In DBT, we teach skills to address these areas of difficulty.

Mindfulness skills support group members to develop more control of their attention so that they can choose where their mind goes. This is particularly helpful for people who struggle with managing distressing thoughts and feelings.

Emotion regulation skills focus on how emotions are experienced and expressed. The skills are related to understanding emotions, decreasing the frequency of unwanted emotions, decreasing emotional vulnerability and suffering, and changing the intensity of an emotion.

Distress tolerance skills help to manage and tolerate the experience of unpleasant emotions or thoughts. Crisis survival skills help get through a crisis in the short-term. Reality acceptance skills help to accept painful aspects of life that we wish were different.

Interpersonal effectiveness skills relate to building and strengthening relationships, learning to ask for what we want assertively or saying 'no' while maintaining self-respect and good-quality relationships.

Who is the programme for?

If you experience your emotions as overly intense or 'out of control' and/or feel the urge to engage in behaviours that are potentially self-destructive to try to manage these emotions, DBT may be a programme that can help you. Participants must be outpatients to be eligible for attendance at the programme. The DBT programme places a strong emphasis on the teaching, practising and learning of new skills and behaviours.

Skills coaching and feedback on practice is therefore a primary focus. The programme is suitable for people who are willing to make a commitment to regularly practice new skills to reduce emotional and behavioural dysregulation in their lives.

Who runs the group?

Each programme is facilitated by two or three psychologists and an assistant psychologist.

How are referrals made?

Referrals are accepted for service users under the care of a consultant-led team in St Patrick's University Hospital. If interested in attending, you can contact your team directly. Your team psychologist can assess whether the group will be a good fit for your needs. Prior to starting on the programme, you will be scheduled to attend pre-treatment sessions to work to decide if the programme is suitable for you right now.

For more information on DBT please contact the assistant psychologist for the programme (01 249 3411) or contact your team psychologist.

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