



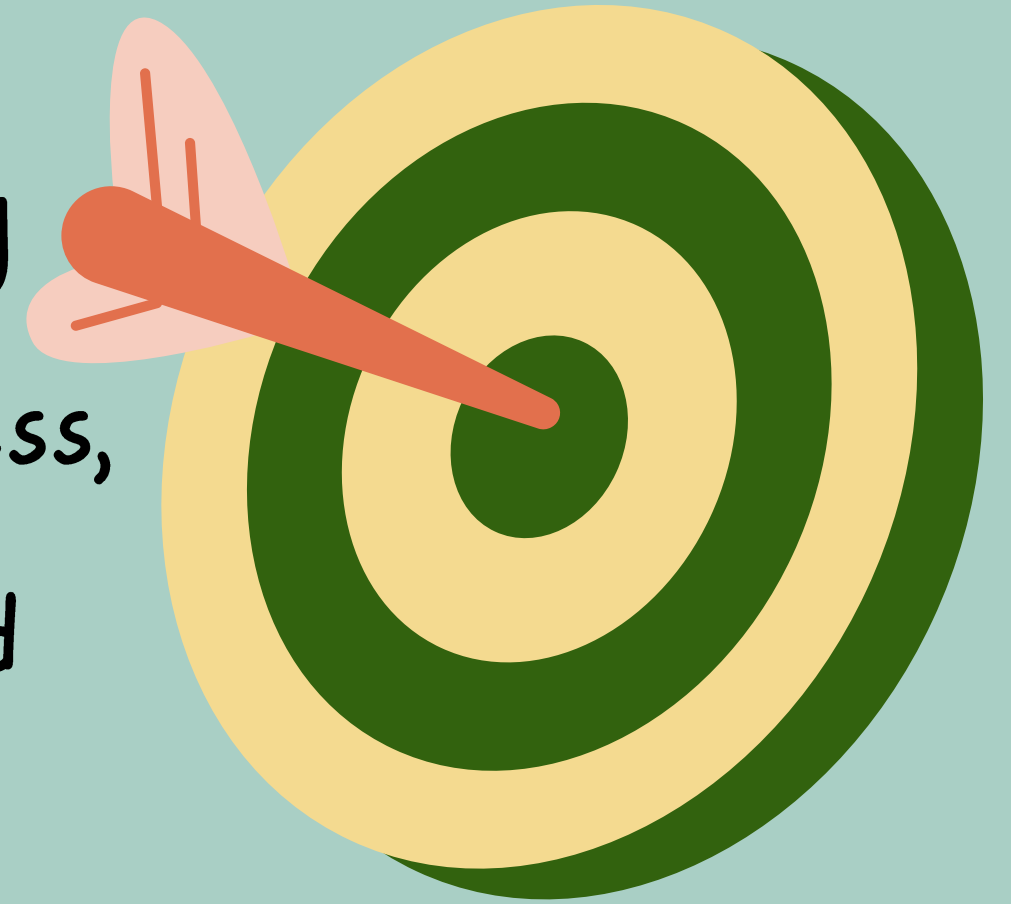
# BEYOND THE URGE: DBT TOOLS FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO SELF HARM

Presented by Amber Satwalekar

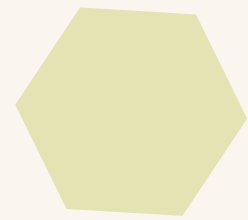
# Goals & objectives

"Participants will learn how to apply core DBT skills—including distress tolerance, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and mindfulness—to support teens in reducing self-injury and developing long-term emotional resilience.

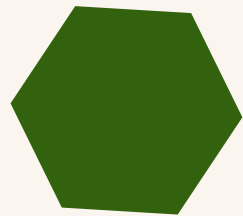
this training will equip clinicians with the tools needed to foster meaningful change in adolescents struggling with self-harm."



# Agenda



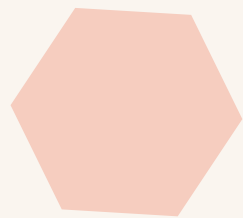
Introduction to DBT principles



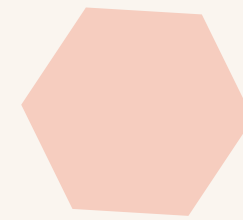
Understanding Adolescent  
Development & Self-Harm



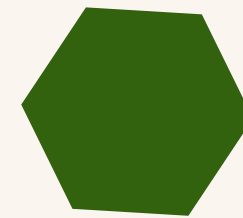
Building a Therapeutic  
Relationship



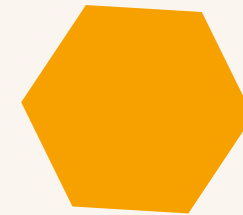
teaching DBT Skills for  
Self-Harm Prevention



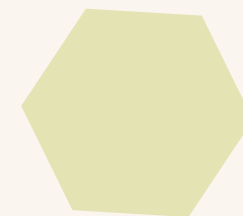
Managing Crisis Situations



Family Involvement



Addressing Treatment Barriers



Ethical Consideratiions



Evaluating Progress

# Introduction to DBT theory



# *Introduction to Dialectical Behavioral Therapy- AKA DBT*

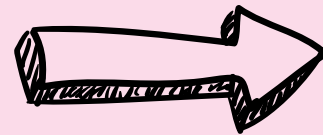
- Developed by Marsha Linehan in the 1980s for chronic suicidality
- Broken VS. Stuck
- “Suffering is not a pathology; it is a part of life. The problem is not the suffering itself, but how we relate to it.”
- "The goal of DBT is to help individuals create a life worth living."
- Integrates CBT, mindfulness, and acceptance
- Core Modules: Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance, Emotional Regulation, Interpersonal effectiveness



# Principles of DBT

## Core Principles of DBT

Dialectical  
Thinking



Holding two contradicting truths — acceptance and change.  
• Wise Mind- Logic and Emotion

Validation



Acknowledging the adolescent's inner  
experience

Radical Acceptance



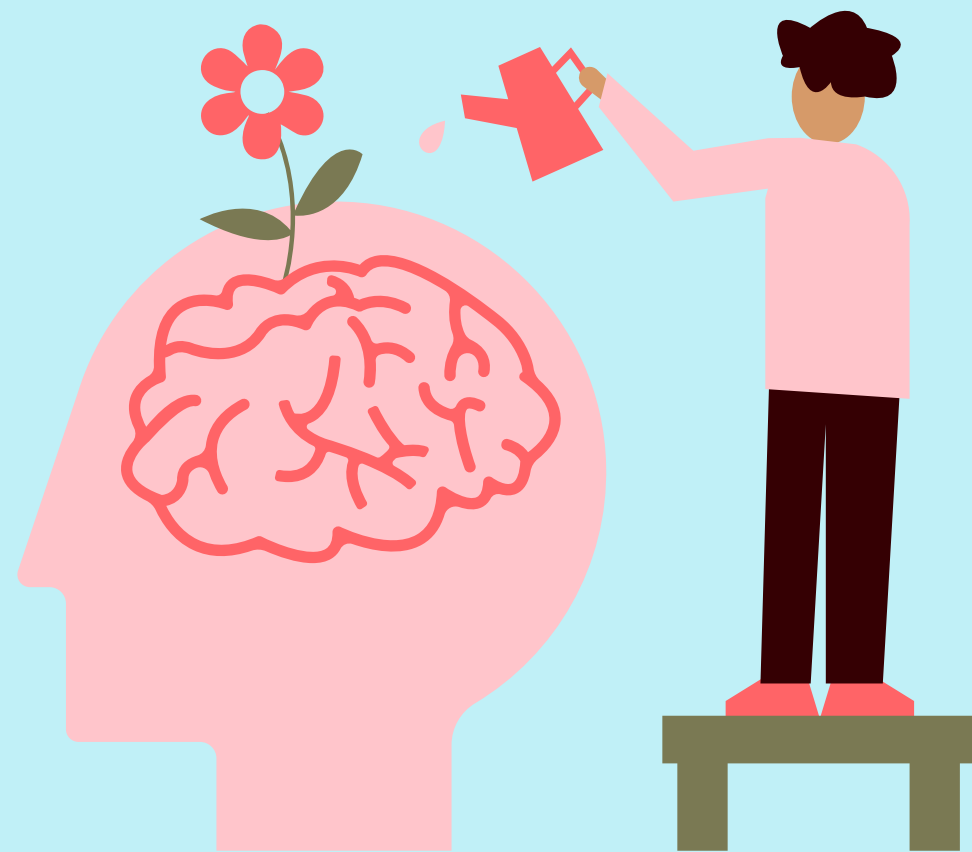
Accepting reality fully and completely, without judgment, resistance, or trying to change it—even when reality is painful.

Behavioral Change



Teaching concrete, skill-based  
solutions

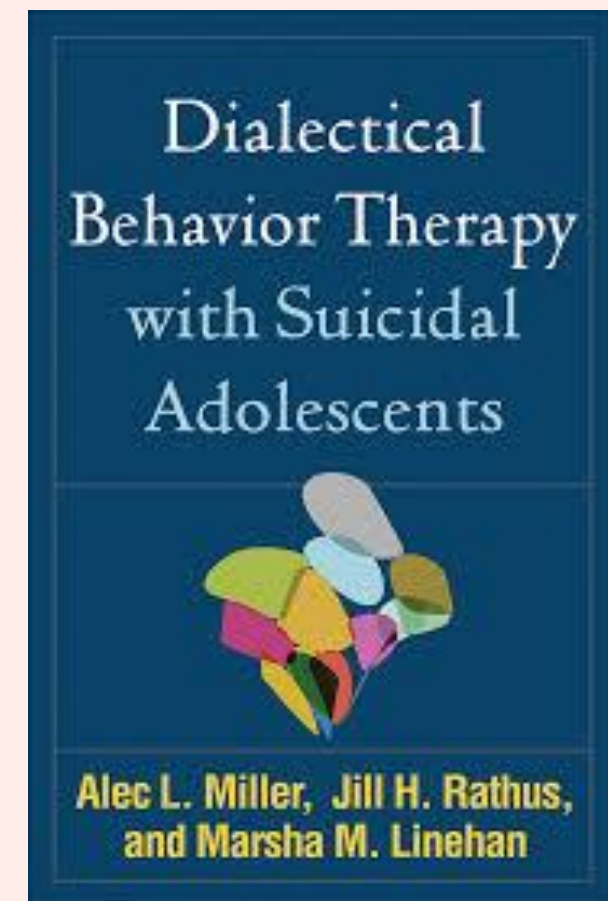
# Utilizing DBT with Adolescents that self harm





# Adapting DBT to Adolescents

- This adolescent-focused DBT model retains the core DBT principles but includes key adaptations to better fit teens:
  - Developmentally appropriate language and examples
  - Emphasis on emotional regulation in the context of adolescent identity formation. Restructuring Vs. Structuring.
  - Greater family involvement (including parent coaching and family skills sessions)
  - Adjusted diary cards and shorter skill modules for attention and engagement
- Personality Disorder Vs. Normal adolescent Development





# Adolescent Development and self harm

## Biological impacts on self harm

- Hormonal Shifts
- Prefrontal cortex still developing
- Impulsivity



# Why Do adolescents Self Harm?

- Coping with trauma, anxiety, or depression
- Self-punishment, emotional release, or control
- Emotional dysregulation & identity formation
- Peer pressure & online influences



It took me a long time to realize the dialectic inherent in planning a suicide and engaging in self-harm. Both make you feel better, and both can make you feel worse. Both sides are true. -Marsha Linehan

# Building a Strong Therapeutic Relationship

- Trust-building: Use empathy, Consistency, warmth, non-judgmental stance.
- Validation: Show empathy and attunement. Validate emotions, not behavior.
- Collaboration: Prioritize collaboration and trust. Include adolescents in treatment planning.
- Co-create therapy goals (e.g., reduce harm, increase skill use)
- Boundaries: Establish clear expectations and mutual respect
- Engagement: Use of humor and creativity to engage



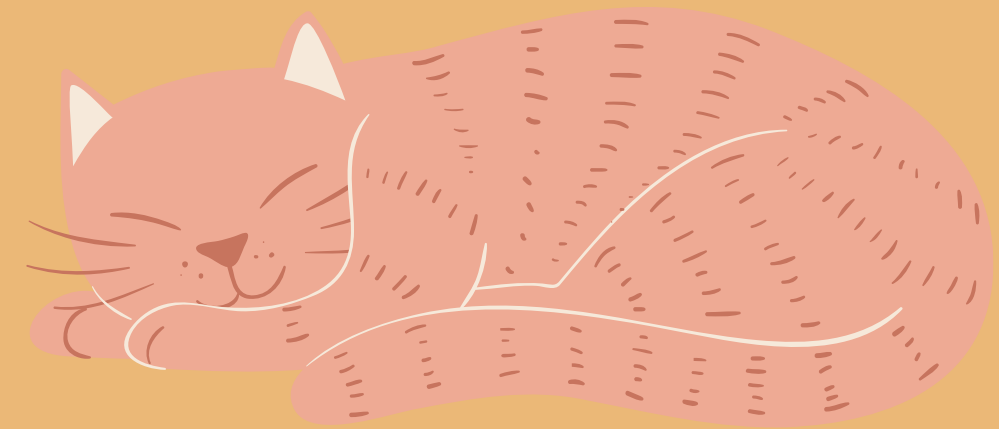
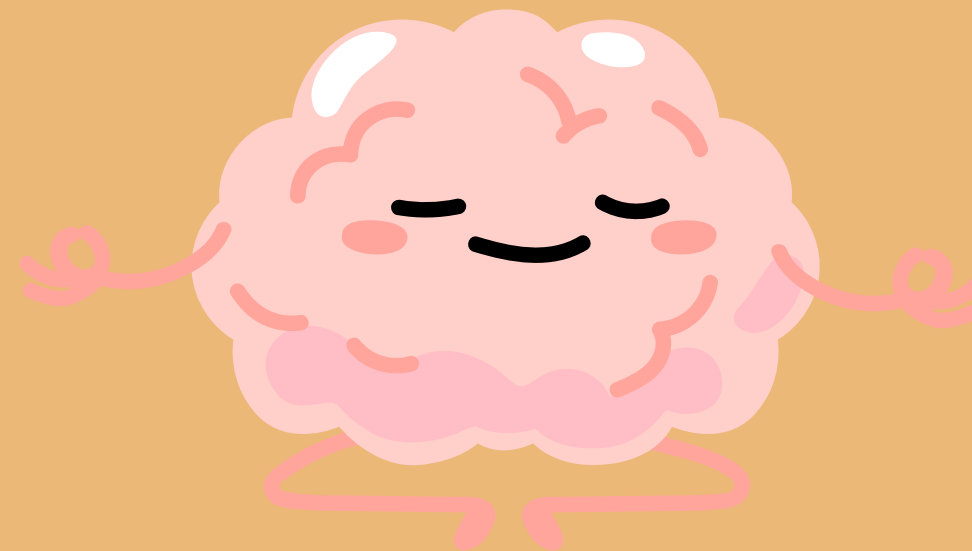
# DBT Skills for Self-Harm Prevention

- Mindfulness: Stay present and observe without judgment
- Distress Tolerance: Crisis survival without making things worse
- Emotion Regulation: Label feelings, reduce vulnerability, increase positive emotions
- Interpersonal Effectiveness: Build and maintain healthy relationships



# DBT Skills for Self-Harm Prevention: Mindfulness Skills

- Mindful Breathing and Body Scan
- 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique
- "What" and "How" skills (Observe, Describe, Participate; Non-judgmentally, One-Mindfully, Effectively)
- Creative practices: Journaling, music, art-based mindfulness, mindfulness walks





# DBT Skills for Self-Harm Prevention: Distress Tolerance

- TIPP
  - Temperature
  - Intense Exercise
  - Paced Breathing
  - Paired Muscle Relaxation
- Self-soothing and distraction
  - Using 5 senses creating a self sooth box
  - Using ACCEPTS- create distraction plan
    - Activities, contributing, comparing, emotions( opposite), pushing away, thoughts, sensation
- Radical Acceptance
  - Resistance: "This isn't fair. They don't understand me. I hate them."
  - Radical Acceptance: "It really sucks, and I feel disappointed. But this is the reality right now. I don't have to like it to accept it."

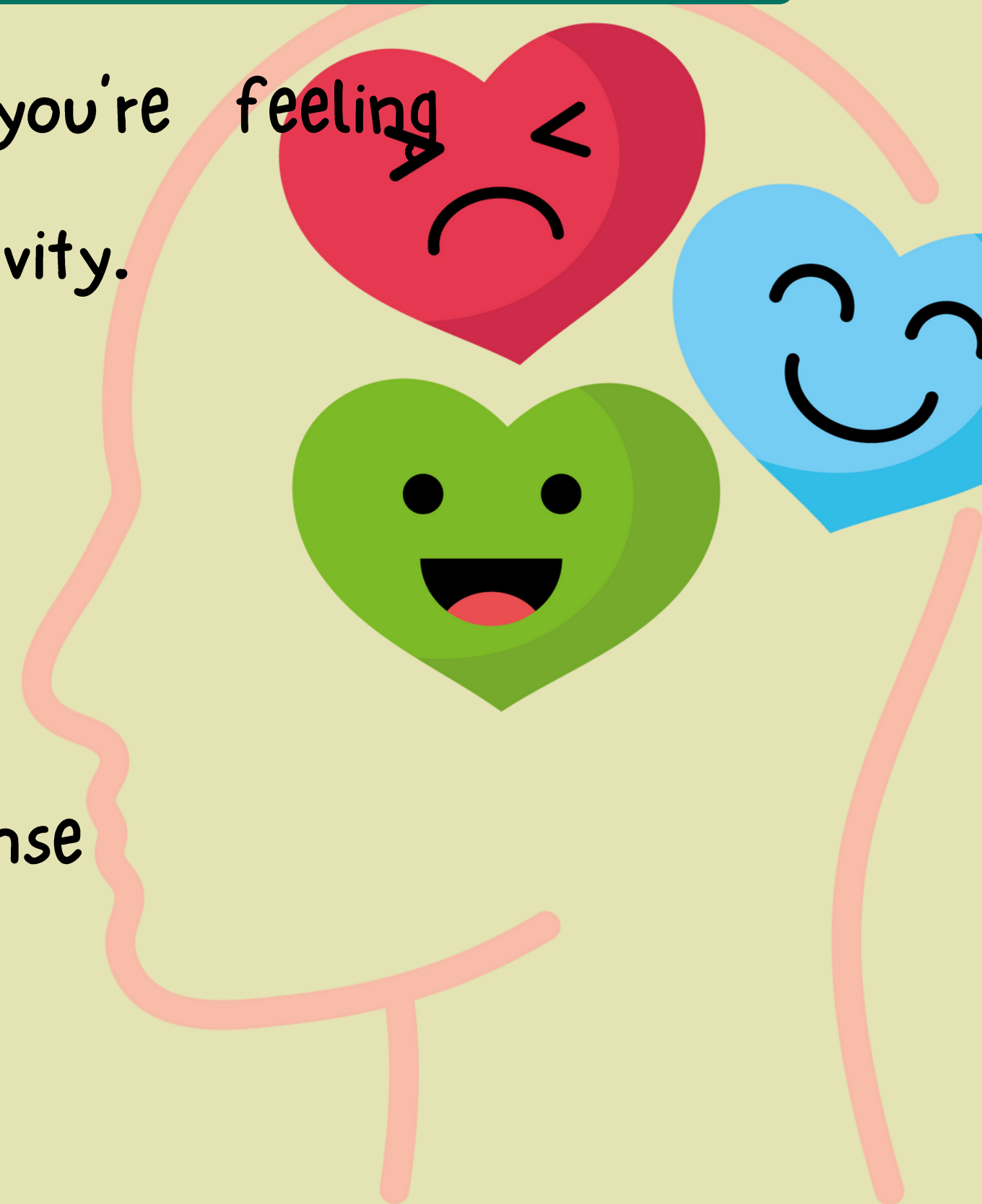




<u>Tipp Skill</u>	<u>What it means</u>	<u>How to use it</u>	<u>Why it Works</u>
T – Temperature	Use cold to shift your body's state	Submerge face in Bowl of ice cold water, Splash cold water on your face, hold ice cubes, or use a cold compress	<i>Activates the dive reflex, slowing heart rate and calming the nervous system</i>
I – Intense Exercise	Engage in short, high-energy movement	<i>Run, jump rope, do jumping jacks, or dance for 5–15 minutes</i>	Burns off adrenaline and reduces overwhelming physical sensations tied to intense emotions
P – Paced Breathing	Slow and steady your breath	<i>Inhale for 4 counts, exhale for 6 (or 5/7, etc.)</i>	Activates the calming parasympathetic nervous system and reduces panic-like symptoms
P – Paired Muscle Relaxation	tense and relax muscles one group at a time	Clench fists for 5 seconds, then release; repeat with other muscle groups	<i>Grounds you in the body and releases tension</i>

# DBT Skills for Self-Harm Prevention: Emotional Regulation

- Identifying and labeling emotions- Name what you're feeling accurately (e.g., sadness vs. shame) to reduce confusion and reactivity.
- Increasing positive experiences- Build joy through small, meaningful activities every day.
- Opposite Action-Do the opposite of what the emotion urges (e.g., connect with others when feeling shame).
- Check the Facts- Evaluate whether your emotional response fits the situation-or is based on assumptions.



# *Skills for Self-Harm Prevention: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills*

*teach assertiveness: DEAR MAN (Describe, Express, Assert, Reinforce, Mindful, Appear Confident, Negotiate)*

*Relationship skills: GIVE (Gentle, Interested, Validate, Easy manner)*

*Self-respect: FAST (Fair, Apologies, Stick to values, Truthful)  
Practice role-plays to reinforce*

## Using FAST:



### F – Fair:

*Be fair to yourself and the other person. Avoid blame or manipulation.*

- *"I get that you want to hang out and take a break, and I've felt that way too."*

### A – Apology (No unnecessary ones):

*Don't apologize for existing, having feelings, or making a reasonable request.*

- *You don't say "sorry" for having boundaries.*

### S – Stick to Your Values:

*"But I've been trying really hard to stay on track, and skipping doesn't feel right for me."*

### T – Truthful:

*"Honestly, if I skip again, I'll feel anxious and fall behind. I don't want to do that to myself."*

# DBT Skills for Self-Harm Prevention: Managing Self-Harm Crises

## Key Components of a Crisis Survival Plan:

### 1. Coping Skills Toolbox

A written or visual list of effective DBT skills (TIPP, ACCEPTS, Self-Soothing, Radical Acceptance)  
Include concrete, real-life examples

### 2. Personal Reasons for Living

List of motivations, goals, people they care about- Photos, quotes, drawings, or meaningful affirmations

### 3. Safe Environment Plan

Identify and remove harmful objects when overwhelmed. Designate safe spaces (room, trusted adult's home)

### 4. Emergency Contact List

Friends, family, therapist, crisis line Include names, phone numbers, and preferred ways to reach out

### 5. Grounding and Safety Strategies

Favorite grounding exercises (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 senses, body scan) Sensory objects (stress ball, scented lotion, fidget)

### 6. Commitment Statement

A short personal commitment to use the plan before acting on urges- "I will try 3 skills for 10 minutes before making any decisions."



Observing Warning Signs:

What are the signs that a crisis may be developing? What body sensations (pit in stomach, heart racing, flushed), specific emotions (sadness, shame, anger), situations (argument with a loved one) etc. should I look out for (e.g., common links on the chain)?

My Life Worth Living Goals:

What goals (short AND long term) can I stay mindful of to help me through this crisis effectively (even when it’s painful)?

Extra Skills:

What are some other skills I can practice?

Using TIP Skills to Change Body Chemistry

See Distress Tolerance HO #6 for add’l instructions. Do not use T and I if you have heart issues.

Temperature:Place bowl of ice water between your knees, take a deep breath and plunge your face in. Hold for at least 15 sec. Repeat as needed.

Intense Exercise: Do jumping jacks, squats, sprint etc. until you can’t anymore.

Paced Breathing: Breathe into your belly. Slow your breathing. Extend the length of your exhale (ex. Inhale for count of 5, exhale for count of 7)

Paired Muscle Relaxation: see DT Handout #6 for instructions

Things I Can Do to ReduceRisk in My Environment

People I Can Contact for Distraction or for Help

Name: Name:

Phone:

Name Clinician

Phone:

Name:

Phone:

Urgent Care

Phone:

Address:

Phone:

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: text or call 988

Check outthe DBT-RU playlist of skills videos if you need help practicing! youtube.com/dbtru

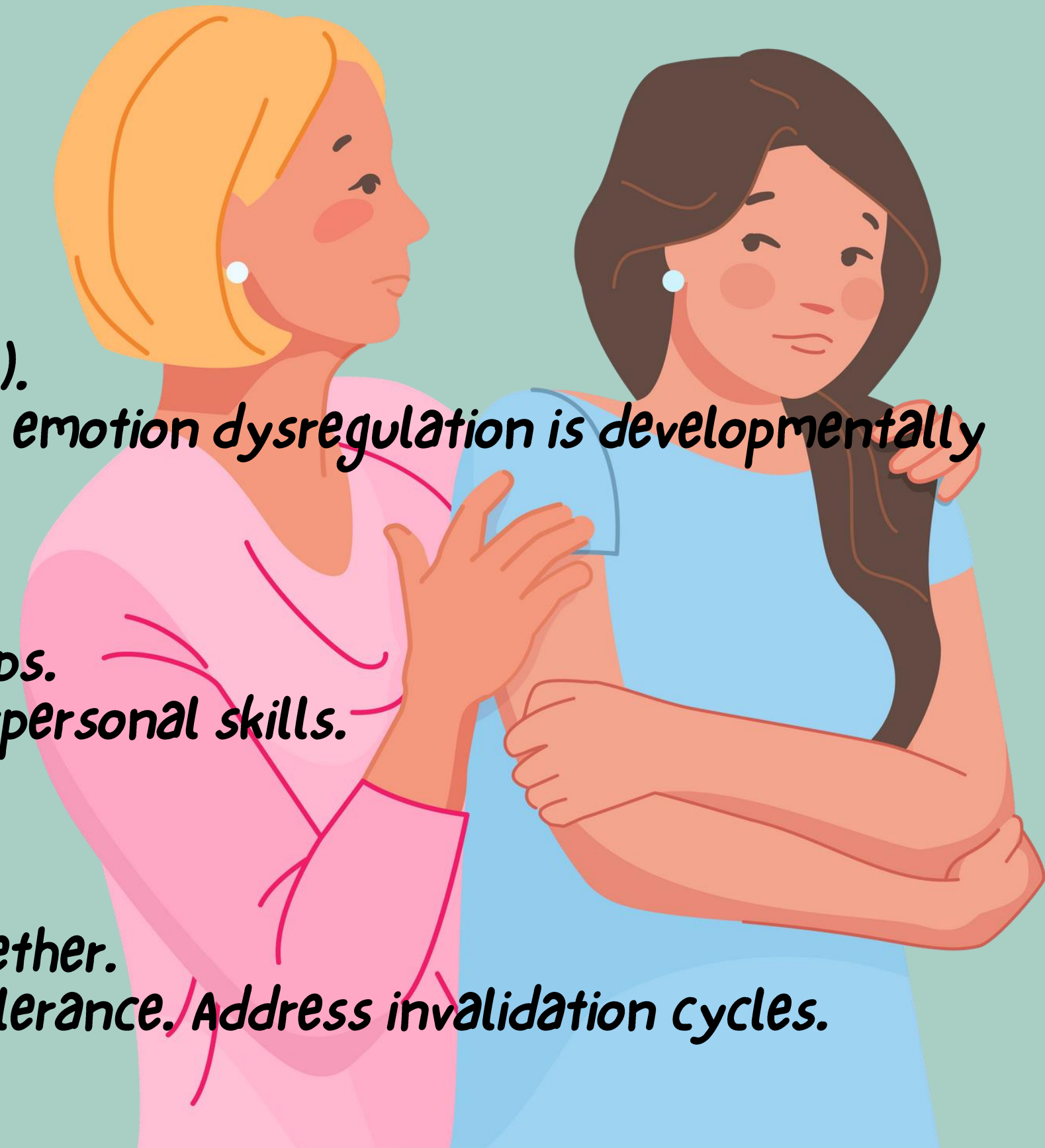
© Ruosk & Kizvi, 2021  
Modeled After Brown & Stanley, 2008



# Engaging Families in DBT Treatment

## Core Strategies for Family Involvement in DBT:

- ✅ Psychoeducation:  
teach caregivers the basics of DBT (skills, principles, validation).  
Normalize adolescent struggles while encouraging growth (e.g., emotion dysregulation is developmentally common).
- ✅ Skills Training for Parents:  
Offer or recommend parent groups parallel to adolescent groups.  
Focus on validation, mindfulness, emotion regulation, and interpersonal skills.  
Parents model skills and reinforce use at home.
- ✅ Family Sessions:  
Scheduled as needed to address conflicts or practice skills together.  
Use sessions for role-playing DEAR MAN, validation, distress tolerance. Address invalidation cycles.
- ✅ Collaborative Planning:  
Involve family in crisis planning and behavior support strategies.  
Helps teens feel supported, not controlled.



# Addressing Treatment

## Common Barriers in Adolescent Treatment

- ◆ **Lack of Motivation:**  
teens may not see therapy as helpful or may feel forced to attend.  
Use validation + commitment strategies (e.g., connect therapy to their goals).
- ◆ **Invalidating Environments:**  
Family, school, or peer settings may unintentionally reinforce dysregulation.  
Teach validation skills to caregivers and reinforce a nonjudgmental stance.
- ◆ **Therapy Interfering Behaviors (TIBs):**  
Includes missed sessions, refusal to practice skills, or interpersonal conflict.  
Address directly in individual therapy.
- ◆ **Emotional Avoidance:**  
Adolescents may shut down or avoid emotional work.  
Mindfulness and distress tolerance help increase emotional exposure gradually.
- ◆ **Family Resistance or Burnout:**  
Parents may feel blamed or overwhelmed.  
Use psychoeducation, validate their effort, and offer support resources.
- ◆ **Skills Generalization Issues:**  
teens use skills in session but not in real life.  
Incorporate real-life role-plays, coaching calls, and homework with family support



# Evaluating Progress

## What to Look For:

- Increased use of DBT skills in daily life
- Fewer target behaviors (e.g., self-harm, crises)
- Better emotional awareness and regulation
- Improved relationships and communication
- Steady attendance and participation
- Consistent use of diary cards and homework

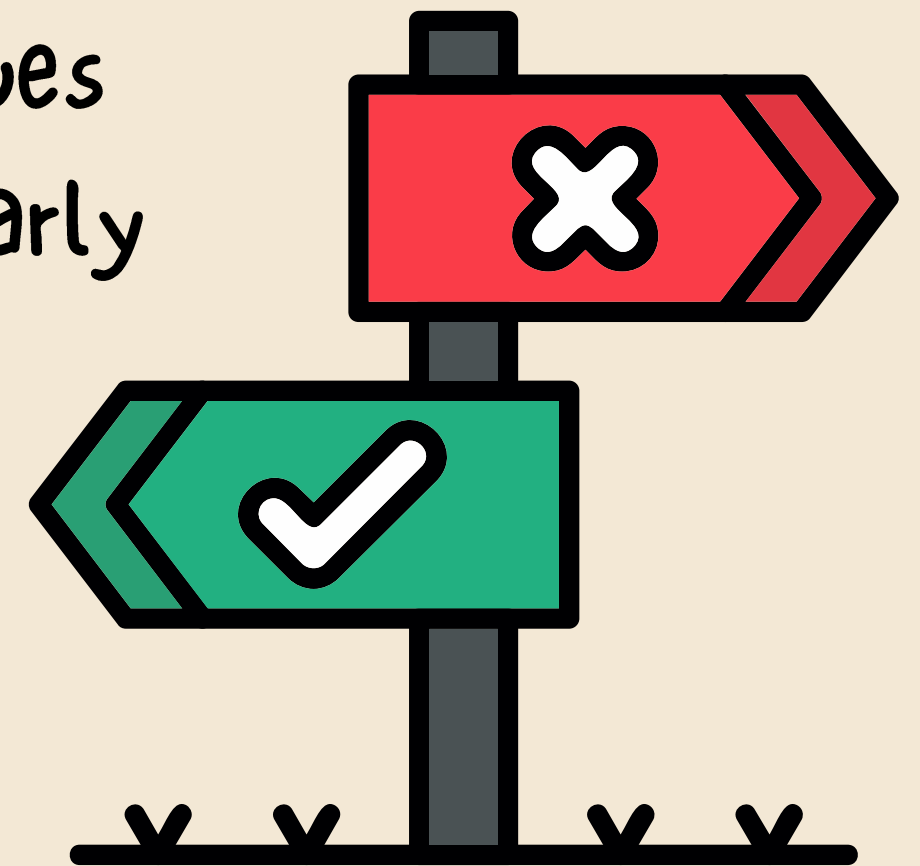
## How We Track It:

- DBT diary cards
- Revisit goals regularly
- Assess skill acquisition and generalization
- Self-reports and therapist observation
- Family feedback (when applicable)
- Involve adolescents in defining success



# Ethical Considerations

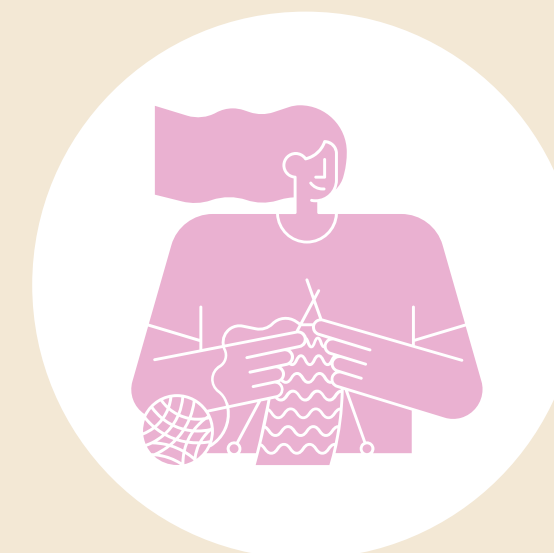
- Confidentiality vs. Safety: Balancing privacy with duty to report
- Informed Consent & Assent: Engaging both adolescent and caregiver
- Developmental Sensitivity: Tailoring treatment to cognitive/emotional maturity
- Boundaries & Dual Roles: Maintaining professional therapeutic boundaries
- Cultural Competence: Respecting diverse backgrounds and values
- Documentation & Supervision: Accurate records, consult regularly





## *Summary & Key Takeaways: Bringing it all together*

- DBT combines validation and change to reduce self-harm
- Core elements: Validation, skills training, structure
- Relationship building and trust are foundational
- teach practical skills: mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness
- Adolescents benefit from creative, flexible adaptations
- Involve families and address resistance compassionately
- Ethical care and progress monitoring are essential



Dimeff, L. A., & Koerner, K. (2007). Dialectical behavior therapy in clinical practice:

Applications across disorders and settings. Guilford Press.

Kazdin, A. E. (2008). Parent management training: Treatment for oppositional,

aggressive, and antisocial behavior in children and adolescents. Oxford University Press.

Linehan, M. M. (1993). Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality

disorder. Guilford Press.

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT skills training manual (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Miller, A. L., Rathus, J. H., & Linehan, M. M. (2007). Dialectical behavior therapy with

suicidal adolescents. Guilford Press.

O'Connell, K. J. M. L. (2007). Dialectical behavior therapy with adolescents: A

practitioner's guide. Routledge.

Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology. (2023, August 3). DBT adult crisis plan [fillable form].

[https://gsapp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2024-02/DBT\\_Adult\\_Crisis\\_Plan%20Fillable\\_8.3.2023.pdf](https://gsapp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2024-02/DBT_Adult_Crisis_Plan%20Fillable_8.3.2023.pdf)

Rathus, J. H., & Miller, A. L. (2015). DBT skills manual for adolescents. Guilford Press.

Siegel, D. J. (2014). Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain.

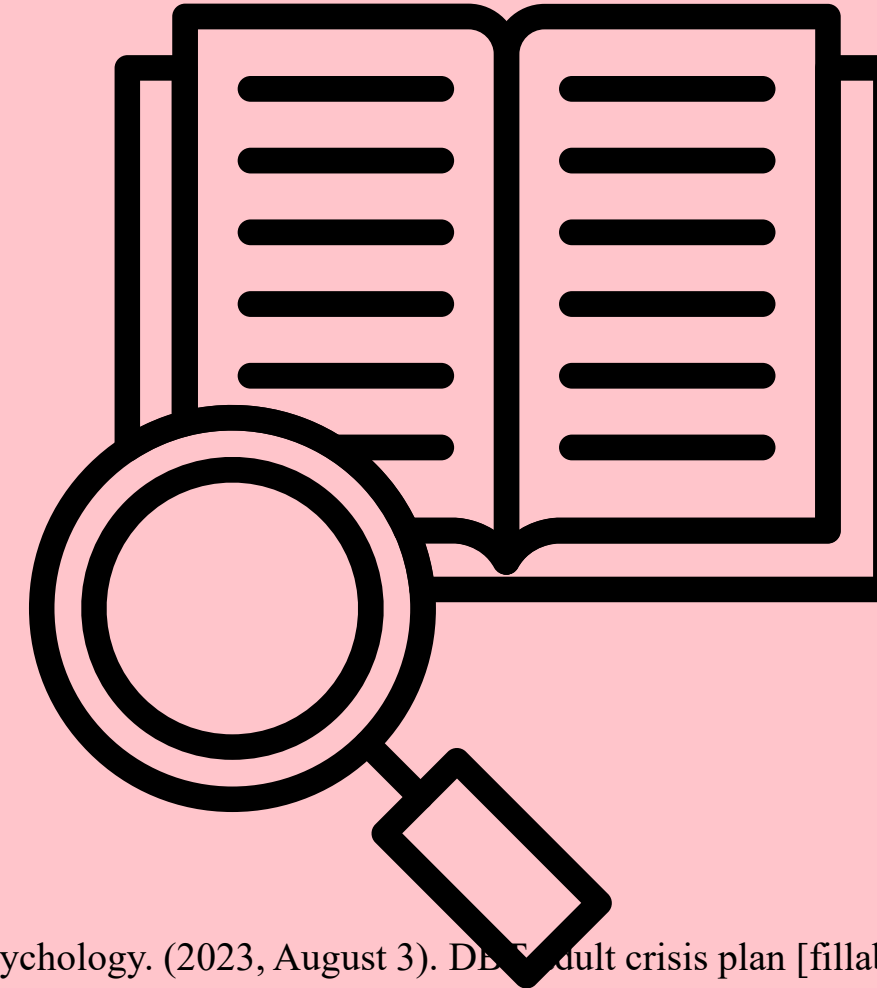
TarcherPerigee.

Swales, M. A. (2009). The cognitive-behavioral therapy workbook for personality

disorders: A step-by-step program. New Harbinger Publications.

Van Dijk, S. (2011). The DBT skills workbook for teens. New Harbinger Publications.

# References





THE  
END