

Three DBT Skills Everyone Can Benefit From From Psych Central

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a highly effective type of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), originally created to treat borderline personality disorder. Today, it's used to treat a variety of conditions, such as bipolar disorder, eating disorders and depression. [DBT](#) teaches clients four sets of behavioral skills: mindfulness; distress tolerance; interpersonal effectiveness; and emotion regulation.

But, whether you have a mental illness or not, you can absolutely benefit from learning these skills and incorporating them into your life. Below, psychotherapist Sheri Van Dijk, MSW, RSW, shares three DBT skills that can help you effectively manage your emotions and lead a healthier and happier life. Van Dijk is the author of several books, including [Calming the Emotional Storm: Using Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to Manage Your Emotions & Balance Your Life](#) and [The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook for Bipolar Disorder](#).

Mindfulness

According to Van Dijk, mindfulness means “living your life more [in the present](#) moment, instead of allowing yourself to be hijacked by the past and the future.” By practicing mindfulness, we become aware of our thoughts, feelings, actions and reactions. We're able to pause, check in, identify our emotions and consciously make healthy decisions.

To practice this skill, Van Dijk suggested going for a walk *mindfully*. “Feel your body as it walks, and notice how it just knows what it needs to do in order to move each complicated set of muscles to achieve the goal of walking.” Pay attention to the color of the sky, the trees you're passing and what the houses look like, she said.

If your mind wanders, redirect it to the present moment. You might choose to refocus on your external experience: what's happening around you. Or you might refocus on your internal experience: your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. Here the key is to notice what you're experiencing *without* getting caught up in it.

For instance, if you're entangled in your thoughts, this looks like: "Susan is really nice. She's such a great person. I wish I were more like her. I should ask her if she wants to go for coffee sometime. I'd like to get to know her better." Instead, observing your thoughts looks like: "There's a thought that Susan is such a nice person..."

To learn more about mindfulness, Van Dijk's favorite book is [The Mindful Way Through Depression](#), which, she said, comes with a great CD of mindfulness exercises.

Reality Acceptance

This skill focuses on accepting our daily experiences and working to accept the more painful events that have happened, Van Dijk said. Because fighting reality only heightens our suffering.

For instance, according to [Van Dijk](#), you're sitting in a work meeting, bored out of your mind. You start thinking about all the other things you could be doing. Instead of telling yourself, "I have so much stuff to do; this is a waste of my time!" you remind yourself: There's nothing I can do. This is something I have to sit through. [It is what it is. Breathe.](#)"

She also shared these additional examples: You need to rush home, but you're catching every red light. Instead of getting frustrated, you take a deep breath and tell yourself: "It is what it is. I'll get home when I get there."

You need to fill up your car, but gas prices have skyrocketed. Again, you breathe deeply, and say to yourself: "There's nothing I can do about it. I need gas. Getting angry isn't going to help."

You have to walk to work because your car is in the shop. It's not far, but it's pouring. You take a deep breath and say: "It's just rain. I'll bring a towel, and I'll dry off when I get to work."

This skill speaks to being less judgmental in general. Van Dijk suggested starting to notice when you judge things as good or bad. Negative judgments tend to boost our emotional pain. So when you're angry, irritated or frustrated, pay attention to what judgment you're making, she said. Then focus on replacing that judgment with a fact and any emotions you're feeling.

Van Dijk shared these examples: Instead of “the weather is awful today,” you say “it’s raining this morning, and I’m irritated because I have to walk to work.” Instead of saying, “you’re an awful friend,” you say: “There have been a few times recently when you’ve canceled plans with me at the last minute to go out with someone else instead. And I feel hurt and angry by this.”

Instead of saying, “My partner is an idiot,” you say: “I’ve been working long hours and when I got home last night my partner asked me what I was making for dinner. I felt really angry about this and disappointed that he’s not making an effort to help out.”

Being less judgmental doesn’t eliminate our pain. But it does help us reduce emotions such as anger. “[A]nd in doing so we’re able to think more clearly and wisely, opening up choices for us [such as] ‘do I want to spend energy being angry at this person?’” It also empowers us to problem solve, and again, make decisions that serve and support us.

For instance, Van Dijk took her laptop to get fixed. After she picked it up, she realized that vital presentations and documents were missing. It turns out that the person didn’t back up her C: drive because he thought she saved everything under “documents.” Understandably, Van Dijk was incredibly upset. But she took a deep breath, and instead of yelling and criticizing him, she asked what they could do.

“It might not get solved. But judging him is only going to amplify my anger, and I just don’t want to spend the energy on that.” She’s also proud of how she handled the situation, which boosted her self-respect. And it didn’t raise her blood pressure or trigger other physical issues.

Again, all of us can benefit from becoming more aware of our thoughts and feelings, accepting what is and being less judgmental of ourselves and others. Undoubtedly, these are skills that lead to a healthier life.