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Revised Edition

MARSHA M. LINEHAN



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DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets

REVISED EDITION

Marsha M. Linehan

Revisions by (alphabetically)

Katherine Anne Comtois, Emily Cooney,
Kathryn Korslund Janice R. Kuo, Jill H. Rathus,
Shireen L. Rizvi, and Jennifer H. R. Sayrs



THE GUILFORD PRESS
New York London

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A Division of Guilford Publications, Inc.
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Printed in the United States of America

For product and safety concerns within the EU, please contact *GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com*, Taylor & Francis Verlag GmbH, Kaufingerstraße 24, 80331 München, Germany.

Last digit is print number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ISBN 978-1-4625-5634-2 (paperback)

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When I am on retreats, each afternoon I walk and wring my hands, saying to all the mental health patients of the world, "You don't have to wring your hands today. I am doing it for you." Often when I dance in the hallway of my house or with groups, I invite all the mental health patients of the world to come dance with me.

This book is dedicated to all the patients of the world who think that no one is thinking of them. I considered telling you that I would practice skills for you so you don't have to practice them. But then I realized that if I did, you would not learn how to be skillful yourself. So, instead, I wish you skillful means, and I wish that you find these skills useful.

About the Author

Marsha M. Linehan, PhD, ABPP, the developer of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), is Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Director Emeritus of the Behavioral Research and Therapy Clinics at the University of Washington. Before retiring in 2019, she devoted her career to developing and evaluating evidence-based treatments for populations with high suicide risk and multiple, severe mental disorders. Dr. Linehan is the 2025 recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Her contributions to suicide research and clinical psychology research have also been recognized with the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Psychology, the Career/Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, the Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in the Application of Psychology from the American Psychological Foundation, and the James McKeen Cattell Award from the Association for Psychological Science. In her honor, the American Association of Suicidology created the Marsha Linehan Award for Outstanding Research in the Treatment of Suicidal Behavior. Dr. Linehan was featured in *TIME Great Scientists: The Geniuses and Visionaries Who Transformed Our World*. She is founder of the Linehan Institute and is a Zen master.

Preface

The purpose of this revised edition of *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets* is to make the text more contemporary and approachable. There have been important shifts in language, technology, and day-to-day life since 2015, when the second edition was published. Accordingly, there was a need to update these materials to ensure their usability and relevance for continuing generations of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) practitioners and clients.

It is important to note that this update is not a new edition of *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets* in the traditional sense: there are no new skills introduced here. Rather, this update focuses on ensuring the language is more relevant and accessible. It also includes a reorganization of the handouts and worksheets. Handouts and worksheets no longer appear in separate sections, but rather each handout is followed immediately by its accompanying worksheet. We have taken this step to increase the accessibility of the handouts and worksheets for all clients and to clarify which items are best used together.

This revision strikes an important dialectical balance. On the one hand, we steadfastly sought to preserve the intent of Dr. Linehan, the principles of DBT, and the skills as they were created. On the other, we modified content and language that were outdated (not so many of us use blackboards anymore). Since this update does not include changes to the skills themselves, we did not change language that might be considered controversial but that we see as integral to how Dr. Linehan conceptualized DBT and defined these skills. Accordingly, while many robust discussions were held among us about their use, we have retained such terms as “mastery” and “justified” in emotion regulation, and “DEAR MAN” in interpersonal effectiveness skills.

The general principles this group used in determining our revisions were whether the proposed modification contributed to updating the language or making examples more relevant, inclusive, and globally accessible. We addressed gendered language and changed “he or she” to “they” throughout.

We encourage the reader to adapt the content and these handouts and worksheets in a way that is responsive to the culture, needs, and experiences of the group members with whom the skills trainer is working, while remaining faithful to the spirit and principles of DBT.

As a working group, we are aware that this revised edition of *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets* is subject to the DBT fallibility agreement. We accept that there will be points of disagreement with this update, and we may well have gotten things wrong or insufficiently caught up to the times in which you are reading this book. Dialectically, the world changed the instant we wrote these words. We hope you will find the changes we have made useful. Along with Dr. Linehan, we wish you skillful means in your teaching.

KATHERINE ANNE COMTOIS, EMILY COONEY,
KATHRYN KORSLUND, JANICE R. KUO, JILL H. RATHUS,
SHIREEN L. RIZVI, AND JENNIFER H. R. SAYRS

Preface to the Second Edition

Since the publication of the original Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills training manual in 1993, there has been an explosion of research on the applications of DBT across disorders. My pilot and first DBT study focused on the treatment of highly suicidal adults. Now, we have research demonstrating the efficacy of DBT skills training with suicidal adolescents, as well as adults with borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, treatment-resistant depression, substance use, and a variety of other disorders. A diagnosis of a mental disorder is not required, however, to benefit from DBT skills. Friends and family members of individuals with difficulties will find these skills helpful; kids in elementary school through high school can gain from these skills. Businesses will find DBT skills useful in creating better work environments. All the DBT therapists I know practice these skills in their own lives on a routine basis. I myself am grateful for the skills because they have made my life a lot easier. As someone once said to me, “Aren’t these skills your mother was supposed to teach you?” I always say yes, but for many people their mother just did not or was not able to get around to it.

I developed many of the skills by reading treatment manuals and treatment literature on evidence-based behavioral interventions. I reviewed what therapists told their patients to do and then repackaged those instructions in skills handouts and worksheets and wrote teaching notes for therapists. For example, the skill “opposite action” is a set of instructions based on exposure-based treatments for anxiety disorders. The major change was to generalize the strategies to fit treatment of emotions other than anxiety. “Check the facts” is a core strategy in cognitive therapy interventions. The mindfulness skills were a product of my 19 years in Catholic schools, my training in contemplative prayer practices through the Shalem Institute’s spiritual guidance program, and my 35 years as a Zen student—and now Zen master. Mindfulness of current thoughts also draws from acceptance and commitment therapy. In general, DBT skills are what behavior therapists tell clients to do across many effective treatments. Some of the skills repurpose entire treatment programs now formulated as a series of steps. The new “nightmare protocol,” an emotion regulation skill, is an example of this. Other skills came from research in cognitive and social psychology. Still others came from colleagues developing new DBT skills

for new populations. As you can see, these skills came from many different sources and disciplines.

I am happy to present this skills training book for clients, which includes all of the handouts and worksheets I have developed so far in DBT. (Stay tuned for more.) You are not likely to need to use all of the skills I have included. Every skill works for someone and no skill works for everyone. The skills in this book have been tested with a huge variety of people: adults, adolescents, parents, friends, and families, both high risk and low. I hope the skills are just what you need. Use your interpersonal skills (see the DEAR MAN, GIVE FAST skills in the Interpersonal Effectiveness skills module) to talk your skills trainer or other teacher into teaching you skills not ordinarily covered in skills training if you want to learn them. If you should decide to venture forth on your own, I must tell you that we have no research on the effectiveness of this skills book as a self-help workbook or self-treatment manual. I am hoping to write a self-help treatment book in the future, so keep your eyes open for that. Meanwhile, you might be interested in the skills videos available through The Guilford Press or The Linehan Institute. They themselves do not constitute treatment, but we know that many people have nonetheless found them useful, even though we have not collected data on them. On your own or with the help of a skills teacher, I wish you skillful means.

MARSHA M. LINEHAN

Acknowledgments

Developing, researching, testing, and organizing the behavioral skills in this book has been a process that has unfolded over many years. Over these years many people made important contributions to what finally became this set of skills and worksheets. Here I want to thank a long line of teachers, colleagues, students, post-doctoral fellows, and clients, who for many years have been in dialogue with me on how to best develop, organize, explain, and disseminate behavioral skills to those in need of skillful means.

I want to acknowledge Rev. Pat Hawk and Rev. Willigis Yaeger, who were my contemplative prayer and Zen teachers, and Anselm Romb, my Franciscan spiritual guide, who taught me to let go of words. Each of them listened to me for hours as I sorted out how to practice and how to teach mindfulness. My mentors, Gerald Davison and Marvin Goldfried, taught me behavior therapy, and through them I was introduced to evidence-based treatments, where I found most of the skillful means that I condensed into the skills in this book. I extend my gratitude to Jon Kabat-Zinn, John Teasdale, Mark Williams, and Zindel Segal for inspiration. I especially want to thank my students and former students (in alphabetical order), Milton Brown, Anita Lungu, Andrada Neacsiu, Shireen Rizvi, Stephanie Thompson, Chelsey Wilks, Brianna Woods; and my fellows and former fellows, Alex Chapman, Eunice Chen, Melanie Harned, Erin Miga, Marivi Navarro, and Nick Salsman. Many others have jumped in when asked, colleagues Seth Axelrod, Kate Comtois and her entire DBT team, Sona Dimidjian, Anthony Dubose, Cedar Koons, Thomas Lynch, and Suzanne Witterholt, as well as the Linehan Institute scientific advisory committee (Martin Bohus, Alan Fruzzetti, André Ivanoff, Kathryn Korslund, and Shelley McMMain). I could not have written this book without the help of Elaine Franks, my fabulous administrative assistant, and Thao Truong, our office and financial manager, who made sure that our research clinic did not fall apart while everyone was waiting for me to finish this book. My family, Geraldine, Nate, Catalina, and Aline, made life easy at every turn no matter the stress—not a minor contribution to getting a book written.

Much of what is in this book I learned from the many clients who participated in skills training groups that I have conducted over the years. I am grateful to all

those who put up with the many versions that did not work or were not useful, and to those among them who gave enough feedback for me to make needed revisions in the skills being taught.

The clients who gave feedback were, for the most part, individuals at high risk for suicide. I thank the University of Washington Human Subjects Division, which has never even once impeded my research treating individuals at extremely high risk for suicide. Their willingness to allow such high-risk research, when other universities often do not, sets an example and made this book possible.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank Copyeditor Marie Sprayberry, Senior Editor Barbara Watkins, Executive Editor Kitty Moore, and the staff at The Guilford Press. In getting this book out in a timely fashion they each had occasion to practice all the distress tolerance skills in this book. Their concern for this book and for this form of treatment was evident at every step.

Alas, it is likely that I have forgotten or accidentally left out one or more individuals who have contributed to this book. If so, please let me know so I can include you in future editions.

MARSHA M. LINEHAN

* * *

The Guilford Press would like to thank the following people for their tremendous work in preparing this vital revision: Katherine Anne Comtois, Emily Cooney, Kathryn Korslund, Janice R. Kuo, Jill H. Rathus, Shireen L. Rizvi, Geraldine Rodriguez, Alejandra Sanchez-Sarmiento, and Jennifer H. R. Sayrs. We could not have asked for a better team to work alongside us on this update, and we are very grateful for their good-natured, enthusiastic participation.

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DBT SKILLS TRAINING HANDOUTS AND WORKSHEETS

Introduction to This Book

This book contains informational handouts and worksheets for people learning Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills. The overall goal of DBT skills training is to help you increase your resilience and build a life experienced as worth living. DBT skills are aimed at teaching a synthesis of how to change what is and how to accept what is. Skills teach you both how to change unwanted behaviors, emotions, thoughts, and events in your life that cause you misery and distress as well as how to live in the moment, accepting what is. There are different sets of DBT skills, and no single training program will include all of the handouts and worksheets in this book. Your skills trainer or individual therapist/case manager will direct you to the appropriate handouts and worksheets for your particular program.

How This Book Is Organized

There are five main sections in this book, and each begins with a brief introduction. Following a first section on General Skills, there is a section of handouts and worksheets for each of the four main DBT skills modules: Mindfulness Skills, Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills, Emotion Regulation Skills, and Distress Tolerance Skills. There are topical subsections of handouts and worksheets within each skills module, as described below. Every skill or set of skills has a corresponding handout with instructions for practicing that skill. Nearly every handout has at least one (often more than one) associated worksheet for recording your practice of the skill. The introductions to each section summarize the handouts, their purposes, and the worksheets that go with them.

General Skills: Orientation and Analyzing Behavior

During **Orientation**, you will be introduced to DBT and the goals of skills training, and will be encouraged to identify your own personal goals. You will also be oriented to the format, rules, and meeting times of your particular skills program. The

handouts and worksheets for this portion of General Skills cover skills training goals, guidelines, assumptions, and DBT's biosocial theory. Biosocial theory is an explanation of why some people find it challenging to manage their emotions and actions. Also included in this section are handouts and worksheets for two skills for **Analyzing Behavior**: chain analysis and missing-links analysis. These skills are often taught in individual DBT, but they may also be taught at any point during skills training.

Mindfulness Skills

Following a brief presentation on **Goals and Definitions**, the handouts and worksheets for the Mindfulness module focus on **Core Mindfulness Skills**. These skills are central in DBT: They teach how to observe and experience reality as it is, to be less judgmental, and to live in the moment with effectiveness. They are the first skills taught, and they support all the other DBT skills. DBT mindfulness skills are translations of meditation practices from Eastern and Western spiritual traditions into specific behaviors that you can practice. No spiritual or religious convictions are expected or necessary for practicing and mastering these skills.

Other Perspectives on Mindfulness includes several subsets of handouts and worksheets. A Spiritual Perspective (including Wise Mind from a Spiritual Perspective and Practicing Loving Kindness) is a set of handouts and worksheets included for those who consider spirituality an important part of their lives. The skills covered here focus on experiencing ultimate reality, sensing our intimate connection with the entire universe, and developing a sense of freedom. The Skillful Means: Balancing Doing Mind and Being Mind set focuses on balancing two seeming polarities: working to achieve goals, while at the same time letting go of attachment to achieving goals. The handouts and worksheets for Wise Mind: Walking the Middle Path* cover skills for finding a synthesis of extremes.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

The handouts and worksheets in the Interpersonal Effectiveness module help you manage interpersonal conflicts effectively and maintain and improve relationships with other people (those you are close to, as well as strangers). After a short introduction on **Goals and Factors That Interfere**, there are three main sets of these forms. The first set is focused on **Obtaining Objectives Skillfully**. These are strategies for asking for what you want, saying no to unwanted requests, and doing this in a way that maintains your self-respect and keeps others liking you. The handouts and worksheets for **Building Relationships and Ending Destructive Ones** help you find potential friends, get people to like you, maintain positive relationships with others, and (when necessary) end destructive relationships. This module's handouts and worksheets for **Walking the Middle Path** are about walking a middle path in

*The author would like to note that the term "middle path" came from a collaborative discussion with Alec L. Miller and Jill H. Rathus.

your relationships, and balancing acceptance with change in yourself and in your relationships with others.

Emotion Regulation Skills

The handouts and worksheets in the Emotion Regulation module help you to manage your emotions, even though complete emotional control cannot be achieved. To a certain extent, we all are who we are, and emotionality is part of us; however, we can learn to have more control. There are four sets of these forms. The first set covers **Understanding and Naming Emotions**. Emotions serve important functions, and it can be hard to change an emotion if you don't understand what it does for you. The second set covers **Changing Emotional Responses**. These handouts and worksheets help you reduce the intensity of painful or unwanted emotions, such as anger, sadness, shame, and so forth. They also tell you how to change situations that cause painful or unwanted emotions. **Reducing Vulnerability to Emotion Mind** is the third set. The strategies covered here increase your emotional resilience and make you less likely to become extremely or painfully emotional. The final set of handouts and worksheets deals with **Managing Really Difficult Emotions**.

Distress Tolerance Skills

The handouts and worksheets in the Distress Tolerance module help you learn to tolerate and survive crisis situations without making things worse. There are two main sets of these forms. The **Crisis Survival Skills** set covers techniques for tolerating painful events, urges, and emotions when you cannot make things better right away. The **Reality Acceptance Skills** set shows you how to reduce suffering by helping you accept and enter fully into a life even when it is not the life you want. This module also includes a set of specialized handouts and worksheets for **When the Crisis Is Addiction**.

Numbering of Handouts and Worksheets

Within each of this book's five main sections, handouts for each module are followed immediately by their associated worksheet.

Every handout has a number; some also have a letter. The latter are supplements to handouts with the same number. For example, Mindfulness Handout 3 is the main handout for the skill of Wise Mind. Mindfulness Handout 3a is supplementary and lists ways that Wise Mind can be practiced. (Worksheets are numbered in a separate sequence, as described below.) Most, but not all, handouts have corresponding worksheets that can be used for recording skills practice. Associated worksheets are listed by number next to the handouts in the table of contents, as well as on the handouts themselves.

There are multiple alternative worksheets associated with many of the handouts. There are worksheets that cover all the skills in a section, as well as worksheets

that cover individual skills. For example, Mindfulness Worksheets 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c all cover the same core mindfulness skills, and so each carries the same number, 2. However, each worksheet is formatted a bit differently, and the worksheets vary as to how many practices they can accommodate. The handouts associated with worksheets are listed by number next to the worksheets in the table of contents, as well as on the worksheets themselves.

Not all DBT skills programs teach all the modules or all the skills in each module. Even those that do cover all the modules will not necessarily use every handout and worksheet. You are, however, likely to use some worksheets multiple times. For this reason, the author and publisher grant you, the book purchaser, permission to make photocopies of handouts and worksheets in this volume for your personal use or (if you are a professional) use with your clients. Fillable versions of the handouts and worksheets are available at the Guilford Digital *for Dialectical Behavior Therapy* app (go to www.guilford-digital-dbt.com).

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GENERAL SKILLS

Orientation and Analyzing Behavior

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Introduction to Handouts and Worksheets

There are two sets of handouts and worksheets in this part of the book. The first covers **Orientation**, which typically takes place during the first session of a new skills group, or when new members join an ongoing skills group. The purpose of orientation is to introduce members to one another and to the skills trainers, and to orient members to the format, rules, and meeting times of the particular skills training program. As described below, General Handouts 1 through 5 cover these issues, along with General Worksheet 1. General Handouts 6 through 8, and their corresponding worksheets, cover two important general skills for **Analyzing Behavior**: chain analysis and missing-links analysis. These are also described below.

Orientation

- **General Handout 1: Goals of Skills Training.** This handout lists the general and the specific goals of DBT skills training. Use this handout to think how you could personally benefit from skills training. Which areas are you most interested in? Use **General Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Skills** any time you aren't sure whether there are benefits to practicing DBT skills. Be sure to fill out the pros and cons for both the option of practicing skills and the option of not practicing.
- **General Handout 1a: Options for Solving Any Problem.** Although there are many, many things that can cause us pain, our options for responding to pain are limited. We can solve the problem that is causing the pain. We can try to feel better by changing our emotional response to the pain. Or we can accept and tolerate the

problem and our response. Each of these options requires use of one or more DBT skills. The final option is to stay miserable (or make things worse) and use no skills.*

- **General Handout 2: Overview: Introduction to Skills Training.** This handout is exactly as its title says—and a placeholder introducing what’s to come next.

- **General Handout 3: Guidelines for Skills Training.** This handout lists the guidelines for most standard DBT skills programs. These are standards of behavior that people in a group skills program are asked to follow. Some programs may have somewhat modified guidelines.

- **General Handout 4: Skills Training Assumptions.** Assumptions are beliefs that cannot be proved. In DBT skills training, all group members and skills trainers are asked to abide by these assumptions.

- **General Handout 5: Biosocial Theory.** Biosocial theory is an explanation of how and why some people find it challenging to manage their emotions and actions. DBT skills are particularly useful for these people.

Analyzing Behavior

- **General Handout 6: Overview: Analyzing Behavior.** This handout previews the two general skills for analyzing behavior—chain analysis and missing-links analysis.

- **General Handout 7: Chain Analysis.** Any behavior can be understood as a series of linked parts. These links are “chained” together because they follow each other—one link in the chain leads to another. Chain analysis is a way of determining what has caused a behavior and what maintains it. This handout provides a series of questions (e.g., “What happened before that? What happened next?”) for unlocking the links in a behavior chain that can feel stuck together. It guides you through figuring out what factors led to a problem behavior and what factors might be making it difficult to change that behavior. Knowing this is important if you want to change the behavior.

- **General Handout 7a: Chain Analysis, Step by Step.** This handout explains in greater detail how to do a chain analysis. **General Worksheet 2: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior** is a worksheet for doing a chain analysis. Use it with General Handouts 7 and 7a, which have the same steps. **General Worksheet 2a: Example: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior** is a completed sample version of General Worksheet 2.

- **General Handout 8: Missing-Links Analysis.** Missing-links analysis is a series of questions to help you figure out what got in the way of behaving effectively. Use it to identify why something did not happen that was needed and that you agreed to do, planned to do, or hoped to do. **General Worksheet 3: Missing-Links Analysis** can be used with this handout.

*This last option was suggested to me in an email. Unfortunately, I simply cannot find the message so that I can properly credit the person here. Nevertheless, it was a fabulous addition.



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