

**S E C O N D   E D I T I O N**



**DBT<sup>®</sup> Skills  
Training  
Handouts and  
Worksheets**

**MARSHA M. LINEHAN**



ebook

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# DBT<sup>®</sup> Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets

SECOND EDITION

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**Marsha M. Linehan**



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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**, is the developer of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Professor of Psychology and of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and Director of the Behavioral Research and Therapy Clinics at the University of Washington. Her primary research interest is in the development and evaluation of evidence-based treatments for populations with high suicide risk and multiple, severe mental disorders.

Dr. Linehan's contributions to suicide research and clinical psychology research have been recognized with numerous awards, including 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.

She is a Zen master and teaches mindfulness and contemplative practices via workshops and retreats for health care providers.

# Preface

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 manual 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 manual 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 and listed on page ii of this manual. 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.

# 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, Thomas Lynch, and Suzanne Witterholt, as well as the Linehan Institute scientific advisory committee (Martin Bohus, Alan Fruzzetti, André Ivanoff, Kathryn Korslund, and Shelley McMain). 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 manual 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 my copy editor, Marie Sprayberry, Senior Editor Barbara Watkins, Executive Editor Kathryn Moore, and the staff at The Guilford Press. In getting this manual 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.

# Contents

Introduction to This Book	1
---------------------------	---

## **General Skills: Orientation and Analyzing Behavior**

### **General Handouts**

#### ***Orientation Handouts***

General Handout 1: Goals of Skills Training (General Worksheet 1)	9
General Handout 1a: Options for Solving Any Problem	10
General Handout 2: Overview—Introduction to Skills Training	11
General Handout 3: Guidelines for Skills Training	12
General Handout 4: Skills Training Assumptions	13
General Handout 5: Biosocial Theory	14

#### ***Handouts for Analyzing Behavior***

General Handout 6: Overview—Analyzing Behavior (General Worksheets 2, 3)	19
General Handout 7: Chain Analysis (General Worksheets 2, 2a)	20
General Handout 7a: Chain Analysis, Step by Step (General Worksheets 2, 2a)	21
General Handout 8: Missing-Links Analysis (General Worksheet 3)	23

### **General Worksheets**

#### ***Orientation Worksheet***

General Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Skills (General Handout 1)	27
--	----

#### ***Worksheets for Analyzing Behavior***

General Worksheet 2: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior (General Handouts 7, 7a)	31
General Worksheet 2a: Example—Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior (General Handouts 7, 7a)	35
General Worksheet 3: Missing-Links Analysis (General Handout 8)	38

## Mindfulness Skills

### Mindfulness Handouts

#### *Handouts for Goals and Definitions*

Mindfulness Handout 1: Goals of Mindfulness Practice (Mindfulness Worksheet 1)	45
Mindfulness Handout 1a: Mindfulness Definitions	46

#### *Handouts for Core Mindfulness Skills*

Mindfulness Handout 2: Overview—Core Mindfulness Skills (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 3)	49
Mindfulness Handout 3: Wise Mind—States of Mind (Mindfulness Worksheet 3)	50
Mindfulness Handout 3a: Ideas for Practicing Wise Mind (Mindfulness Worksheet 3)	51
Mindfulness Handout 4: Taking Hold of Your Mind—“What” Skills (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 4–4b)	53
Mindfulness Handout 4a: Ideas for Practicing Observing (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 4–4b)	54
Mindfulness Handout 4b: Ideas for Practicing Describing (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 4–4b)	58
Mindfulness Handout 4c: Ideas for Practicing Participating (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 4–4b)	59
Mindfulness Handout 5: Taking Hold of Your Mind—“How” Skills (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 5–5c)	60
Mindfulness Handout 5a: Ideas for Practicing Nonjudgmentalness (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 5–5c)	61
Mindfulness Handout 5b: Ideas for Practicing One-Mindfulness (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 5–5c)	62
Mindfulness Handout 5c: Ideas for Practicing Effectiveness (Mindfulness Worksheets 2–2c, 5–5c)	63

#### *Handouts for Other Perspectives on Mindfulness Skills*

Mindfulness Handout 6: Overview—Other Perspectives on Mindfulness (Mindfulness Worksheets 6–10b)	67
Mindfulness Handout 7: Goals of Mindfulness Practice—A Spiritual Perspective (Mindfulness Worksheet 1)	68
Mindfulness Handout 7a: Wise Mind from a Spiritual Perspective	69
Mindfulness Handout 8: Practicing Loving Kindness to Increase Love and Compassion (Mindfulness Worksheet 6)	70
Mindfulness Handout 9: Skillful Means—Balancing Doing Mind and Being Mind (Mindfulness Worksheets 7–9)	71
Mindfulness Handout 9a: Ideas for Practicing Balancing Doing Mind and Being Mind (Mindfulness Worksheets 7–9)	72
Mindfulness Handout 10: Walking the Middle Path—Finding the Synthesis between Opposites (Mindfulness Worksheets 10–10b)	74

## Mindfulness Worksheets

### *Worksheets for Core Mindfulness Skills*

Mindfulness Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Practicing Mindfulness (Mindfulness Handouts 1, 7)	77
Mindfulness Worksheet 2: Mindfulness Core Skills Practice (Mindfulness Handouts 2–5c)	78
Mindfulness Worksheet 2a: Mindfulness Core Skills Practice (Mindfulness Handouts 2–5c)	79
Mindfulness Worksheet 2b: Mindfulness Core Skills Practice (Mindfulness Handouts 2–5c)	80
Mindfulness Worksheet 2c: Mindfulness Core Skills Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 2–5c)	81
Mindfulness Worksheet 3: Wise Mind Practice (Mindfulness Handouts 3, 3a)	83
Mindfulness Worksheet 4: Mindfulness “What” Skills— Observing, Describing, Participating (Mindfulness Handouts 4–4c)	84
Mindfulness Worksheet 4a: Observing, Describing, Participating Checklist (Mindfulness Handouts 4–4c)	85
Mindfulness Worksheet 4b: Observing, Describing, Participating Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 4–4c)	86
Mindfulness Worksheet 5: Mindfulness “How” Skills— Nonjudgmentalness, One-Mindfulness, Effectiveness (Mindfulness Handouts 5–5c)	88
Mindfulness Worksheet 5a: Nonjudgmentalness, One-Mindfulness, Effectiveness Checklist (Mindfulness Handouts 5–5c)	89
Mindfulness Worksheet 5b: Nonjudgmentalness, One-Mindfulness, Effectiveness Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 5–5c)	90
Mindfulness Worksheet 5c: Nonjudgmentalness Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 5–5c)	92

### *Worksheets for Other Perspectives on Mindfulness Skills*

Mindfulness Worksheet 6: Loving Kindness (Mindfulness Handout 8)	97
Mindfulness Worksheet 7: Balancing Being Mind with Doing Mind (Mindfulness Handouts 9, 9a)	98
Mindfulness Worksheet 7a: Mindfulness of Being and Doing Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 9, 9a)	99
Mindfulness Worksheet 8: Mindfulness of Pleasant Events Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 9, 9a)	101
Mindfulness Worksheet 9: Mindfulness of Unpleasant Events Calendar (Mindfulness Handouts 9, 9a)	103
Mindfulness Worksheet 10: Walking the Middle Path to Wise Mind (Mindfulness Handouts 3, 10)	105
Mindfulness Worksheet 10a: Analyzing Yourself on the Middle Path (Mindfulness Handout 10)	106
Mindfulness Worksheet 10b: Walking the Middle Path Calendar (Mindfulness Handout 10)	107

## **Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills**

### **Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts**

#### ***Handouts for Goals and Factors That Interfere***

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 1: Goals of Interpersonal Effectiveness (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 1)	117
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2: Factors in the Way of Interpersonal Effectiveness	118
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2a: Myths in the Way of Interpersonal Effectiveness (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 2)	119

#### ***Handouts for Obtaining Objectives Skillfully***

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 3: Overview—Obtaining Objectives Skillfully	123
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 4: Clarifying Goals in Interpersonal Situations (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 3)	124
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 5: Guidelines for Objectives Effectiveness—Getting What You Want (DEAR MAN) (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 4, 5)	125
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 5a: Applying DEAR MAN Skills to a Difficult Current Interaction	127
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6: Guidelines for Relationship Effectiveness—Keeping the Relationship (GIVE) (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 4, 5)	128
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a: Expanding the V in GIVE—Levels of Validation	129
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 7: Guidelines for Self-Respect Effectiveness—Keeping Respect for Yourself (FAST) (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 4, 5)	130
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 8: Evaluating Options for Whether or How Intensely to Ask for Something or Say No (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 6)	131
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 9: Troubleshooting—When What You Are Doing Isn't Working (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 7)	134

#### ***Handouts for Building Relationships and Ending Destructive Ones***

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 10: Overview—Building Relationships and Ending Destructive Ones	139
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11: Finding and Getting People to Like You (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 8)	140
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11a: Identifying Skills to Find People and Get Them to Like You	142
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12: Mindfulness of Others (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 9)	143
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12a: Identifying Mindfulness of Others	144

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13: Ending Relationships (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 10)	145
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13a: Identifying How to End Relationships	146
<b><i>Handouts for Walking the Middle Path</i></b>	
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 14: Overview—Walking the Middle Path (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 11–15c)	149
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 15: Dialectics (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 11–11b)	150
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16: How to Think and Act Dialectically (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 11–11b)	151
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16a: Examples of Opposite Sides That Can Both Be True	152
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16b: Important Opposites to Balance	153
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16c: Identifying Dialectics	154
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 17: Validation (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 12)	155
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18: A “How To” Guide to Validation (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 12)	156
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18a: Identifying Validation	157
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19: Recovering from Invalidation (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 13)	158
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19a: Identifying Self-Validation	160
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 20: Strategies for Increasing the Probability of Behaviors You Want (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 14)	161
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 21: Strategies for Decreasing or Stopping Unwanted Behaviors (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 15)	162
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22: Tips for Using Behavior Change Strategies Effectively (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets 14, 15)	163
Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22a: Identifying Effective Behavior Change Strategies	164

## **Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheets**

### ***Worksheets for Goals and Factors That Interfere***

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 1)	167
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 2: Challenging Myths in the Way of Obtaining Objectives (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2a)	168

### ***Worksheets for Obtaining Objectives Skillfully***

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 3: Clarifying Priorities in Interpersonal Situations (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 4)	173
---	-----

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 4: Writing Out Interpersonal Effectiveness Scripts (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 5, 6, 7)	174
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 5: Tracking Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills Use (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 5, 6, 7)	175
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 6: The Dime Game—Figuring Out How Strongly to Ask or Say No (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 8)	176
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 7: Troubleshooting Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 9)	178
<b><i>Worksheets for Building Relationships and Ending Destructive Ones</i></b>	
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 8: Finding and Getting People to Like You (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11)	183
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 9: Mindfulness of Others (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12)	184
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 10: Ending Relationships (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13)	185
<b><i>Worksheets for Walking the Middle Path</i></b>	
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 11: Practicing Dialectics (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 15, 16)	189
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 11a: Dialectics Checklist (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 15, 16)	190
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 11b: Noticing When You're Not Dialectical (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 15, 16)	191
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 12: Validating Others (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 17, 18)	192
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 13: Self-Validation and Self-Respect (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19)	193
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 14: Changing Behavior with Reinforcement (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 20, 22)	194
Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 15: Changing Behavior by Extinguishing or Punishing It (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 21–22)	195

## **Emotion Regulation Skills**

### **Emotion Regulation Handouts**

Emotion Regulation Handout 1: Goals of Emotion Regulation (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 1)	205
--	-----

### ***Handouts for Understanding and Naming Emotions***

Emotion Regulation Handout 2: Overview—Understanding and Naming Emotions (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 2–4a, 16)	209
---	-----

Emotion Regulation Handout 3: What Emotions Do for You (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 2, 2a–c)	210
Emotion Regulation Handout 4: What Makes It Hard to Regulate Your Emotions (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 3, 16)	211
Emotion Regulation Handout 4a: Myths about Emotions (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 3)	212
Emotion Regulation Handout 5: Model for Describing Emotions (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 4, 4a)	213
Emotion Regulation Handout 6: Ways to Describe Emotions (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 4, 4a)	214

### ***Handouts for Changing Emotional Responses***

Emotion Regulation Handout 7: Overview—Changing Emotional Responses (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 5–8)	227
Emotion Regulation Handout 8: Check the Facts (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 5)	228
Emotion Regulation Handout 8a: Examples of Emotions That Fit the Facts (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 5)	229
Emotion Regulation Handout 9: Opposite Action and Problem Solving— Deciding Which to Use (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 6)	230
Emotion Regulation Handout 10: Opposite Action (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 7)	231
Emotion Regulation Handout 11: Figuring Out Opposite Actions (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 7)	232
Emotion Regulation Handout 12: Problem Solving (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 8)	241
Emotion Regulation Handout 13: Reviewing Opposite Action and Problem Solving (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 6–8)	242

### ***Handouts for Reducing Vulnerability to Emotion Mind***

Emotion Regulation Handout 14: Overview—Reducing Vulnerability to Emotion Mind: Building a Life Worth Living (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 9–14b)	247
Emotion Regulation Handout 15: Accumulating Positive Emotions— Short Term (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 9, 10, 13)	248
Emotion Regulation Handout 16: Pleasant Events List (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 9, 10, 13)	249
Emotion Regulation Handout 17: Accumulating Positive Emotions— Long Term (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 9, 11–11b, 13)	252
Emotion Regulation Handout 18: Values and Priorities List (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 10, 12, 13)	253
Emotion Regulation Handout 19: Build Mastery and Cope Ahead (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 12, 13)	256
Emotion Regulation Handout 20: Taking Care of Your Mind by Taking Care of Your Body (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 9, 14)	257

Emotion Regulation Handout 20a: Nightmare Protocol, Step by Step— When Nightmares Keep You from Sleeping (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 14a)	258
Emotion Regulation Handout 20b: Sleep Hygiene Protocol (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 14b)	259

***Handouts for Managing Really Difficult Emotions***

Emotion Regulation Handout 21: Overview—Managing Really Difficult Emotions (Emotion Regulation Worksheets 15–16)	263
Emotion Regulation Handout 22: Mindfulness of Current Emotions— Letting Go of Emotional Suffering (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 15)	264
Emotion Regulation Handout 23: Managing Extreme Emotions	265
Emotion Regulation Handout 24: Troubleshooting Emotion Regulation Skills—When What You Are Doing Isn’t Working (Emotion Regulation Worksheet 16)	266
Emotion Regulation Handout 25: Review of Skills for Emotion Regulation	268

**Emotion Regulation Worksheets**

Emotion Regulation Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Changing Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handout 1)	271
--	-----

***Worksheets for Understanding and Naming Emotions***

Emotion Regulation Worksheet 2: Figuring Out What My Emotions Are Doing for Me (Emotion Regulation Handout 3)	275
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 2a: Example—Figuring Out What My Emotions Are Doing for Me (Emotion Regulation Handout 3)	276
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 2b: Emotion Diary (Emotion Regulation Handout 3)	277
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 2c: Example—Emotion Diary (Emotion Regulation Handout 3)	278
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 3: Myths about Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handout 4a)	279
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 4: Observing and Describing Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handouts 5, 6)	281
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 4a: Observing and Describing Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handouts 5, 6)	282

***Worksheets for Changing Emotional Responses***

Emotion Regulation Worksheet 5: Check the Facts (Emotion Regulation Handouts 8, 8a)	285
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 6: Figuring Out How to Change Unwanted Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handout 9)	287
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 7: Opposite Action to Change Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handouts 10, 11)	288
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 8: Problem Solving to Change Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handout 12)	289

***Worksheets for Reducing Vulnerability to Emotion Mind***

Emotion Regulation Worksheet 9: Steps for Reducing Vulnerability to Emotion Mind (Emotion Regulation Handouts 14–20)	293
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 10: Pleasant Events Diary (Emotion Regulation Handouts 15, 16)	295
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 11: Getting from Values to Specific Action Steps (Emotion Regulation Handouts 17–18)	296
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 11a: Getting from Values to Specific Action Steps (Emotion Regulation Handouts 17–18)	299
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 11b: Diary of Daily Actions on Values and Priorities (Emotion Regulation Handouts 17–18)	300
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 12: Build Mastery and Cope Ahead (Emotion Regulation Handout 19)	301
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 13: Putting ABC Skills Together Day by Day (Emotion Regulation Handout 19)	302
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 14: Practicing PLEASE Skills (Emotion Regulation Handout 20)	303
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 14a: Target Nightmare Experience Form (Emotion Regulation Handout 20a)	304
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 14b: Sleep Hygiene Practice Sheet	307

***Worksheets for Managing Really Difficult Emotions***

Emotion Regulation Worksheet 15: Mindfulness of Current Emotions (Emotion Regulation Handouts 21, 22)	311
Emotion Regulation Worksheet 16: Troubleshooting Emotion Regulation Skills (Emotion Regulation Handout 24)	312

**Distress Tolerance Skills****Distress Tolerance Handouts**

Distress Tolerance Handout 1: Goals of Distress Tolerance	321
---	-----

***Handouts for Crisis Survival Skills***

Distress Tolerance Handout 2: Overview—Crisis Survival Skills (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 1–7b)	325
Distress Tolerance Handout 3: When to Use Crisis Survival Skills	326
Distress Tolerance Handout 4: The STOP Skill (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 2, 2a)	327
Distress Tolerance Handout 5: Pros and Cons (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 3, 3a)	328
Distress Tolerance Handout 6: TIP Skills—Changing Your Body Chemistry (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4)	329
Distress Tolerance Handout 6a: Using Cold Water, Step by Step (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4)	330
Distress Tolerance Handout 6b: Paired Muscle Relaxation, Step by Step (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4a)	331

Distress Tolerance Handout 6c: Effective Rethinking and Paired Relaxation, Step by Step (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4b)	332
Distress Tolerance Handout 7: Distracting (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 5–5b)	333
Distress Tolerance Handout 8: Self-Soothing (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6–6b)	334
Distress Tolerance Handout 8a: Body Scan Meditation Step by Step (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6c)	335
Distress Tolerance Handout 9: Improving the Moment (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 7–7b)	336
Distress Tolerance Handout 9a: Sensory Awareness, Step by Step	337
<b><i>Handouts for Reality Acceptance Skills</i></b>	
Distress Tolerance Handout 10: Overview—Reality Acceptance Skills (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8–15a)	341
Distress Tolerance Handout 11: Radical Acceptance (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8–9a)	342
Distress Tolerance Handout 11a: Radical Acceptance—Factors That Interfere	343
Distress Tolerance Handout 11b: Practicing Radical Acceptance Step by Step (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 9, 9a)	344
Distress Tolerance Handout 12: Turning the Mind (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8, 8a, 10)	345
Distress Tolerance Handout 13: Willingness (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8, 8a, 10)	346
Distress Tolerance Handout 14: Half-Smiling and Willing Hands (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8, 8a, 11)	347
Distress Tolerance Handout 14a: Practicing Half-Smiling and Willing Hands (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 10)	348
Distress Tolerance Handout 15: Mindfulness of Current Thoughts (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8, 8a, 12)	350
Distress Tolerance Handout 15a: Practicing Mindfulness of Thoughts (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 8, 8a, 12)	351
<b><i>Handouts for Skills When the Crisis Is Addiction</i></b>	
Distress Tolerance Handout 16: Overview—When the Crisis Is Addiction (Distress Tolerance Worksheets 13–18)	355
Distress Tolerance Handout 16a: Common Addictions	356
Distress Tolerance Handout 17: Dialectical Abstinence (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 14)	357
Distress Tolerance Handout 17a: Planning for Dialectical Abstinence (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 14)	358
Distress Tolerance Handout 18: Clear Mind (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 15)	359
Distress Tolerance Handout 18a: Behavior Patterns Characteristic of Addict Mind and of Clean Mind (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 16)	360

Distress Tolerance Handout 19: Community Reinforcement (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 16)	361
Distress Tolerance Handout 20: Burning Bridges and Building New Ones (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 17)	362
Distress Tolerance Handout 21: Alternate Rebellion and Adaptive Denial (Distress Tolerance Worksheet 18)	363

## **Distress Tolerance Worksheets**

### ***Worksheets for Crisis Survival Skills***

Distress Tolerance Worksheet 1: Crisis Survival Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 2–9a)	369
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 1a: Crisis Survival Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 2–9a)	370
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 1b: Crisis Survival Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 2–9a)	371
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 2: Practicing the STOP Skill (Distress Tolerance Handout 4)	372
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 2a: Practicing the STOP Skill (Distress Tolerance Handout 4)	373
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 3: Pros and Cons of Acting on Crisis Urges (Distress Tolerance Handout 5)	374
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 3a: Pros and Cons of Acting on Crisis Urges (Distress Tolerance Handout 5)	375
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4: Changing Body Chemistry with TIP Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 6–6b)	376
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4a: Paired Muscle Relaxation (Distress Tolerance Handout 6b)	377
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4b: Effective Rethinking and Paired Relaxation (Distress Tolerance Handouts 6c)	378
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 5: Distracting with Wise Mind ACCEPTS (Distress Tolerance Handout 7)	379
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 5a: Distracting with Wise Mind ACCEPTS (Distress Tolerance Handout 7)	380
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 5b: Distracting with Wise Mind ACCEPTS (Distress Tolerance Handout 7)	381
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6: Self-Soothing (Distress Tolerance Handout 8)	382
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6a: Self-Soothing (Distress Tolerance Handout 8)	383
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6b: Self-Soothing (Distress Tolerance Handout 8)	384
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6c: Body Scan Meditation, Step by Step (Distress Tolerance Handout 8a)	385
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 7: IMPROVE the Moment (Distress Tolerance Handout 9)	386

Distress Tolerance Worksheet 7a: IMPROVE the Moment (Distress Tolerance Handout 9)	387
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 7b: IMPROVE the Moment (Distress Tolerance Handout 9)	388
<b><i>Worksheets for Reality Acceptance Skills</i></b>	
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 8: Reality Acceptance Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 10–15a)	391
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 8a: Reality Acceptance Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 10–15a)	392
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 8b: Reality Acceptance Skills (Distress Tolerance Handouts 10–15a)	393
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 9: Radical Acceptance (Distress Tolerance Handouts 11–11b)	394
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 9a: Practicing Radical Acceptance (Distress Tolerance Handouts 11–11b)	395
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 10: Turning the Mind, Willingness, Willfulness (Distress Tolerance Handouts 12, 13)	396
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 11: Half-Smiling and Willing Hands (Distress Tolerance Handout 14, 14a)	397
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 11a: Practicing Half-Smiling and Willing Hands (Distress Tolerance Handouts 14, 14a)	398
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 12: Mindfulness of Current Thoughts (Distress Tolerance Handouts 15, 15a)	399
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 12a: Practicing Mindfulness of Thoughts (Distress Tolerance Handouts 15, 15a)	400
<b><i>Worksheets for Skills When the Crisis Is Addiction</i></b>	
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 13: Skills When the Crisis Is Addiction (Distress Tolerance Handouts 16–21)	403
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 14: Planning for Dialectical Abstinence (Distress Tolerance Handout 17)	404
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 15: From Clean Mind to Clear Mind (Distress Tolerance Handouts 18, 18a)	407
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 16: Reinforcing Nonaddictive Behaviors (Distress Tolerance Handout 19)	408
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 17: Burning Bridges and Building New Ones (Distress Tolerance Handout 20)	409
Distress Tolerance Worksheet 18: Practicing Alternate Rebellion and Adaptive Denial (Distress Tolerance Handout 21)	410

Purchasers can download and print the worksheets  
from this book at [www.guilford.com/dbt-worksheets](http://www.guilford.com/dbt-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.