

# Utilizing Emotion Regulation & Distress Tolerance in a School Setting

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# Objectives

- Describe specific DBT modules; Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance.
- Explain to clients the importance of emotion regulation and how being in better control of emotions could be helpful in a school setting.
- Personalize distress tolerance and mindfulness techniques for each client in their academic setting.



# Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

What does Dialectical mean?



# What does Dialectical mean?

- thesis + antithesis → synthesis
- Multiple truths
- No absolute truth
- Opposites exist at the same time
- Balance of acceptance and change

# DBT Origins

- Developed by Marsha Linehan after observing therapists being “burned out” by non-motivated clients
- It grew out of CBT with additions of eastern philosophy
- Has been researched and found to be effective with Borderline Personality Disorder, suicidal patients, adolescents with multiple diagnoses, families, and bipolar disorder

# DBT Modules

- Core Mindfulness
- Emotion Regulation
- Interpersonal Effectiveness
- Distress Tolerance

# Core Mindfulness (overview)

- Basis for all the other modules in DBT
- Teaches accepting and tolerating the intense emotions
- To be attentive to the present moment, to be non-judgmental about this moment
- To be “one-mindfully”, to keep our selves in what is happening instead of sliding into emotion mind



# Distress Tolerance (overview)

- To have the capability to see the event is stressful and to not be taken over by the emotion or avoid it
- Specific skills:
  - Temporarily distract with ACCEPTS
  - Self-soothe
  - IMPROVE the moment
  - Pros and Cons
  - Radical Acceptance
  - Turning the mind
  - Willingness v. willfulness

# Emotion Regulation (overview)

- Taking control of our emotions and not letting them take control of us
- To be better able to “name” the emotion and not being overwhelmed by it
- Learning how to take good care of ourselves

# Interpersonal Effectiveness (overview)

- How to make and keep friends
- Having balanced and healthy relationships
- How we get what we need and want from others
- Skills include
  - DEAR MAN
  - GIVE
  - FAST



Why DBT in schools?

# Why try DBT in schools?

- Teachers, guidance counselors, and nurses are often the first to know there is a problem
- It may be more cost effective
- Teaches children to regulate in their actual environment
- Decrease in problem behaviors that result in children being sent to the ER

# Why try DBT in schools?

- Mason, Catucci, Lusk, and Johnson (2011) have preliminary results from an open trial at high school showing
  - ~less referrals to assistant principal
  - ~decreased class cutting
  - ~less detentions and suspensions
  - ~anecdotal reduction in depression, anxiety and self-injury

# DBT in schools

- It is the most effective if guidance counselors, teachers, and administrators are trained
- Schools will need to change their thinking about how to manage problem behavior



# Emotional Regulation



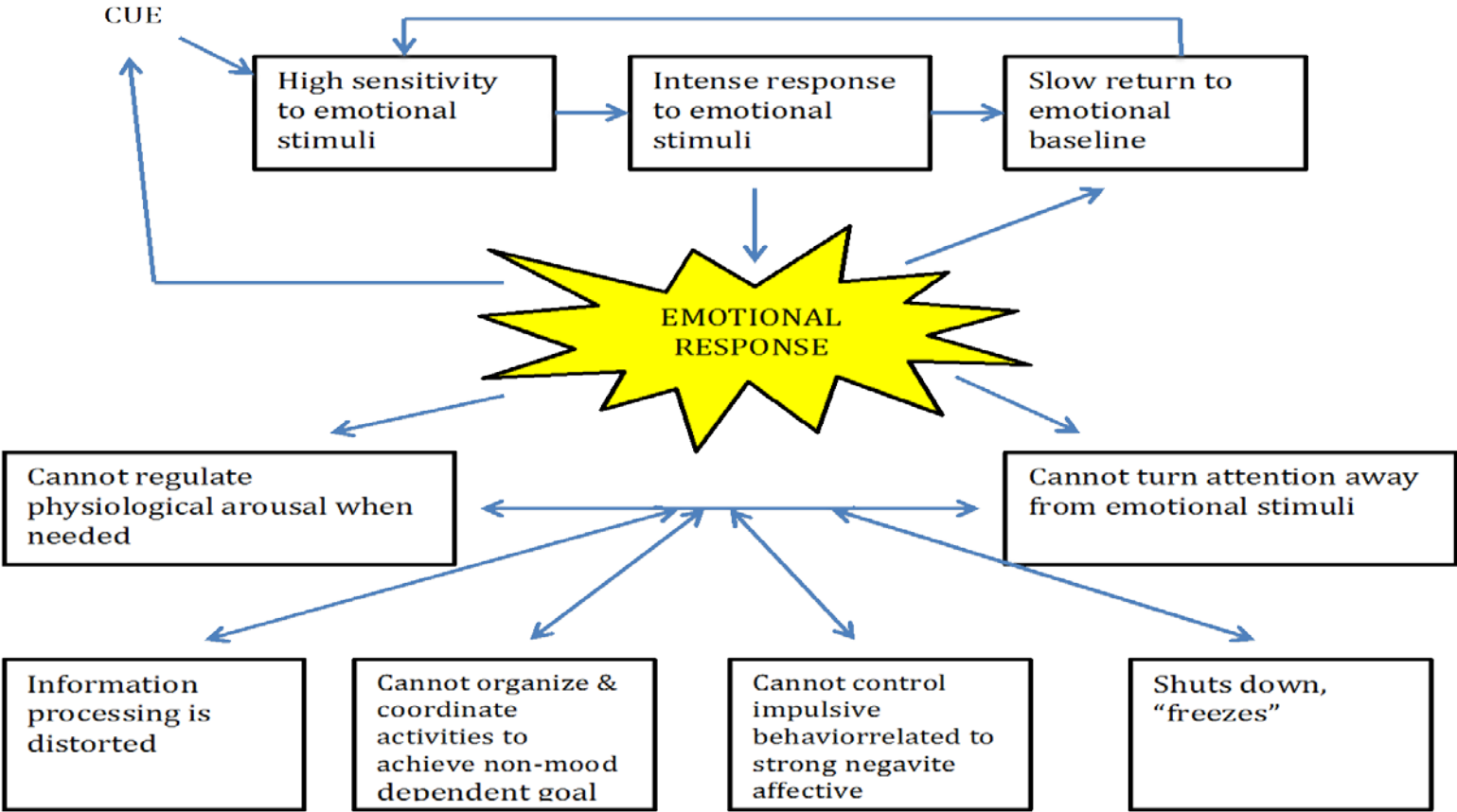
# Emotional Vulnerability

- Most of the clients we are working with have been identified based on exhibiting a strong emotional reaction often to seemingly inconsequential events
- It is our job to help validate the emotion as well as help them manage the behavioral response
- Mood dysregulation is often a part of depression and anxiety
  - high and quick response to situations as well as slow to bring emotions back to baseline
- Mood dysregulation is not the same as Bipolar Disorder

# Emotional Vulnerability

MOOD DISORDER  
VS.  
BEHAVIORAL DISORDER  
VS.  
ANXIETY DISORDER  
=  
Common Thread  
Of  
MOOD DYSREGULATION

# Emotion dysregulation





Emotional Vulnerability...what  
do we do?

# What do we do?

- We explain this to the client
- Gain additional information
  - Emotion Thermometer
- Apply DBT skills



# Emotion Thermometer

# Emotions Thermometer

- Goal: Increase awareness of “emotional temperature”
- Steps for teaching the Emotions Thermometer
  1. What do you call it when you’re about to lose control?  
Label one end of the Emotions Thermometer with this term and the opposite end with “feeling in control” or “relaxed”
  2. “What makes you [emotion, e.g., furious]?”  
Ask him/her to remember when he/she last felt [emotion]. Have the teen identify associated: thoughts, physical sensations, action urges, and actions

# Emotions Thermometer

## Steps for teaching the Emotions Thermometer (cont.)

3. What is the highest point at which you are still in control?  
Label just above this the “boiling point”  
Identify specific steps for avoiding the boiling point
4. What is the highest point at which you could still use skills to avoid the boiling point?  
Label this the “action point”  
Explain that at the action point, the teen needs to do something to calm down to prevent getting to the boiling point.
5. What could you agree to try at the action point?  
Identify skills



# Distress Tolerance

- Distress tolerance skills and mindfulness go hand-in-hand...it asks us to nonjudgementally accept one's current situation.
- This module focuses on accepting and finding meaning for distress and crises. It is less focused on problem solving or changing the environment (something we usually aim for as mental health providers).
- Distress tolerance emphasizes how to bear pain skillfully.
- Pain in life is inevitable. If we always try to avoid it, we will suffer and engage in destructive/impulsive behavior.

# Distress Tolerance

- This module has two main components:
  - 1) Crisis survival
    - A. ACCEPT
    - B. IMPROVE THE MOMENT
    - C. SELF-SOOTHE
  - 2) Acceptance
    - A. Radical acceptance
    - B. Turning the mind
    - C. Willingness vs. Willfullness

# Distress Tolerance

- ACCEPTS-these methods have to do with reducing contact to emotional stimuli; forms of distraction

HANDOUT

# Distress Tolerance

- IMPROVE the MOMENT-Cognitive techniques for improving the moment

HANDOUT

# Distress Tolerance

- Self-soothe-techniques to sooth oneself; grounding

HANDOUT

# Using in the School Setting

- Working with outpatient therapist to use similar techniques
- Having distress tolerance boxes for specific child in the guidance office or classroom
- Having a list of ACCEPTS or IMPROVE to call from
- Have the teacher know of these techniques and keep them handy
- Have child have items with them to calm...they need to be empowered



Questions...

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