



The Comprehensive Dialectical Behaviour Therapy Program

An Introduction to Borderline Personality Disorder & Emotional Dysregulation

■ Is this program right for me?

There are five areas of dysregulation listed below that are common for people who suffer from emotional dysregulation or have been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).

Emotional Dysregulation

You may feel overwhelmed by your emotions, that your moods are “out of control” (sudden changes that only last hours or days), or both. You might frequently feel angry or have outbursts (yelling and screaming, throwing or breaking things).

Behavioural Dysregulation

You may participate in self-harm, which is deliberately hurting yourself as a response to emotional suffering. You might demonstrate impulsivity, which is doing something without thinking AND regretting it after (eg. alcohol, drugs, unsafe sex, gambling, eating binges, spending sprees or unsafe driving). You might make suicide attempts and/or threats to communicate how much pain you are in.

Interpersonal Dysregulation

You may alternate between idealising and devaluing close relationships, sometimes hating people who are close to you and wanting distance, but feeling dependent on them at others. These relationships can be stormy with lots of ups and downs. You might also make frantic efforts to avoid abandonment (beyond disliking it or reacting badly). This might include perceiving abandonment when that's not actually what's happening, making efforts to avoid feeling abandoned (eg. calling someone close to you to reassure yourself that he/she still cares) or making efforts to avoid being abandoned (eg. refusing to leave someone's home or office, pleading or clinging to someone).

Cognitive Dysregulation

You may respond to stress by becoming hyper-vigilant or by dissociating. You might feel picked on, distrustful, suspicious or that people are deliberately being mean to you—or you might feel spaced out and emotionally numb, like the people and things around you are unreal.

Dysregulation in Sense of Self

You may feel a sense of emptiness, like there is nothing inside you or you have no feelings. You may also feel an unstable sense of identity where you are unsure of who you are or if you have an identity. You might feel like your identity changes depending on the situation, like you don't even exist, or that you go from feeling OK about yourself to feeling like you are bad.

The main purpose of the Dialectical Behavioural Therapy program (DBT) is to help you self-regulate in the areas that are problematic for you.

■ Why is DBT Important?

DBT biosocial theory views self-harm, impulsive acts and angry outbursts as attempts to reduce intolerable, intense, and painful emotions. In short, they are a way to try to solve life's problems. Often these behaviours provide relief in the short term, but tend to backfire in the long term-- causing even more suffering.



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■ Why do I feel this way?

Although no one knows exactly why some people develop emotional dysregulation, it seems to come out of the interaction between a person's "emotional vulnerability" and an "invalidating environment." People who experience emotional dysregulation tend to be:

- Particularly sensitive to their environment (small event can often trigger emotion)
- Very reactive to certain events (the emotional response is intense)
- Slow to return to baseline (the emotion lasts a long time)

It's possible that some people are born more emotionally vulnerable and are especially sensitive to people and situations around them— but as human beings, we all have a need to know that we are understood by others.

Unfortunately, people around us may not always be able to demonstrate understanding. When this doesn't happen, we may sense that our needs and experiences have been invalidated. Any combination of these factors can lead us to believe that emotions are scary, intolerable or that we are wrong to have them. As a result it may be difficult to learn how to accept and regulate emotional states.

If this cycle keeps happening throughout our lifetime, dysregulated behaviours tend to become our default response to difficult emotions. Eventually, this is called emotional dysregulation.

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