Basic DBT Group: Distress Tolerance

Learning Objectives

- Provide situations where these techniques are applicable
- Understand that reactive and negative emotional actions are not ideal
- List different activities and strategies one can utilize in acute stressful situations

Dialectical Behavior Therapy

- Combines cognitive-behavioral techniques for emotion regulation and reality-testing with concepts of distress tolerance, mindful awareness.
- Group components
  - Core mindfulness
  - Interpersonal effectiveness
  - Emotional regulation
  - Distress tolerance

Distress Tolerance

- Used when: Unable, unwilling, or it would be inappropriate to change a situation
- Accept, in a non-evaluative and non-judgemental fashion, both oneself and the current situation at hand
- Goal
  - Become capable of calmly recognizing negative situations and their impact, rather than becoming overwhelmed or hiding from them
  - Make wise decisions about how to take action, rather than falling into intense, desperate, and destructive emotional reactions

Acute Stress Triggers

- Negative interactions with individuals
- Craving
- Environment
- Financial situations
- Employment

Why to do...?

- Acting out in an acutely stressful situation can lead to negative consequences
  - Fights
  - Damage to relationships
  - Substance abuse and relapse
  - Perception of being “hot headed”
- Sometimes stepping back and emotionally separating from a situation can be useful
  - Helps you reapproach the problem
  - Keeps anger, frustration, and grief at bay so they do not interfere
  - Allows you to make more sound decisions
Two Acronyms to help in distress tolerance...

1. “IMPROVE” the moment

| I | Imagery | Safe place visualisation (go to your “happy place”) |
| M | Meaning | Find meaning in the situation or how you are feeling |
| P | Prayer | Meditation, spirituality, affirmations |
| R | Relaxation | Breathe deeply, meditate, self-soothing actions |
| O | One thing at a time | Break down time and tasks into pieces; keep yourself in the present and pay attention to what you are doing right that instant |
| V | Vacation | Take a time-out, separate yourself from the situation |
| E | Encouragement | Positive and calming self-talk; speak with a mentor |

2. Wise mind “ACCEPTS”

| A | Activities | Hobbies, reading, listing to music, watching TV/movies, writing |
| C | Contributing | Helping others, volunteering, aiding others with their problems, doing chores |
| C | Comparisons | “Things could be worse,” comparing yourself to others who have it worse off |
| E | Emotions | Generate different emotions by watching movies, writing/journaling, listening to music that is happy or upbeat or positive |
| P | Pushing Away | Thinking or putting our attention into something else, walking away from the situation |
| T | Thoughts | Counting things, “playing 10” (counting 10 colors in the room, 10 musical instruments, 10 fruits, 10 Bond films, etc...) |
| S | Sensation | Using senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching) to create meaningful distraction |

**Self-Soothing**

- Behave in a kind, comforting, nurturing way to yourself
- Can be affirmations or an action that allows you to be easy on yourself
- Can use all five senses to self-sooth
  - **Vision**—walk and take in surroundings
  - **Hearing**—listen to soothing music and/or ambient sounds
  - **Smell**—take notice of the scents around you, particularly as it pertains to cooking or nature
  - **Taste**—have a comfort food, cook a favorite meal. Give particular attention to how the food tastes
  - **Touch**—Take a bath, play with a pet
Pros and Cons

- Think of the positives and the negatives about acting out and not using distress tolerance
- Make the table seen below for yourself (let the group work on an example using this table)
- This exercise helps you better analyze the situations, re-approach the problem, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tolerating Distress</th>
<th>Not Tolerating Distress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Radical Acceptance

- Let go of fighting reality and accept the situation for what it is
- Experience the situation as it is—not how we want it to be
- Focus not on judging the situation, but being effective in the situation at hand

Ways to make the group interactive

- Have participants from the group provide examples for each point
- Allow group volunteers to write on the a chalk board, if available
- Remind the group that these are new emotional tools that take practice to implement
  - Old coping strategies did not work in the past (using substances, acting out, etc...); this group’s purpose is to provide new strategies for the group to utilize