

# **An Introduction to DBT Theory and Skills**

**&**

# **How You Can Help Your Patients with BPD**

created by Dawn Olson

# Purpose of the Presentation

- To learn what Dialectical Behaviour Therapy is and how it helps.
- To learn how people with Borderline Personality Disorder/Emotional Dysregulation behave and feel.
- To learn *why* people with BPD behave and feel the way they do, and two key things you can do to support them.
- To experience some of the skills taught in Managing Emotions.

# Dr. Marsha Linehan

- DBT created in the late 1980's by Dr. Marsha Linehan -research psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle
- In her teens Marsha Linehan wrongly diagnosed with schizophrenia.
- More than two years in a psychiatric hospital – medication, seclusion, ECT.
- None of this worked. She continued to experience overwhelming urges to hurt and kill herself.
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/23/health/23lives.html?pagewanted=all>



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# Dr. Linehan's Real Issue

- Dr. Linehan's actual issue was emotional dysregulation
- The accurate diagnosis was Borderline Personality Disorder.
- In 2011 she revealed this to her colleagues and the wider public... a generous offering.

# DBT works for BPD and Other Issues

- A broad-based CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) Treatment that is the first psychotherapy shown through controlled trials to be effective with BPD patients.
- This continues to be first line evidence-based approach for this disorder.
- Use of DBT has expanded to other disorders and problems including alcoholism and victims of domestic abuse.

# Skills Training Alone Works

- Initially the treatment protocol insisted on group skills training sessions combined with individual therapy.
- Following studies support skills training alone as an effective intervention.

# BPD Symptoms

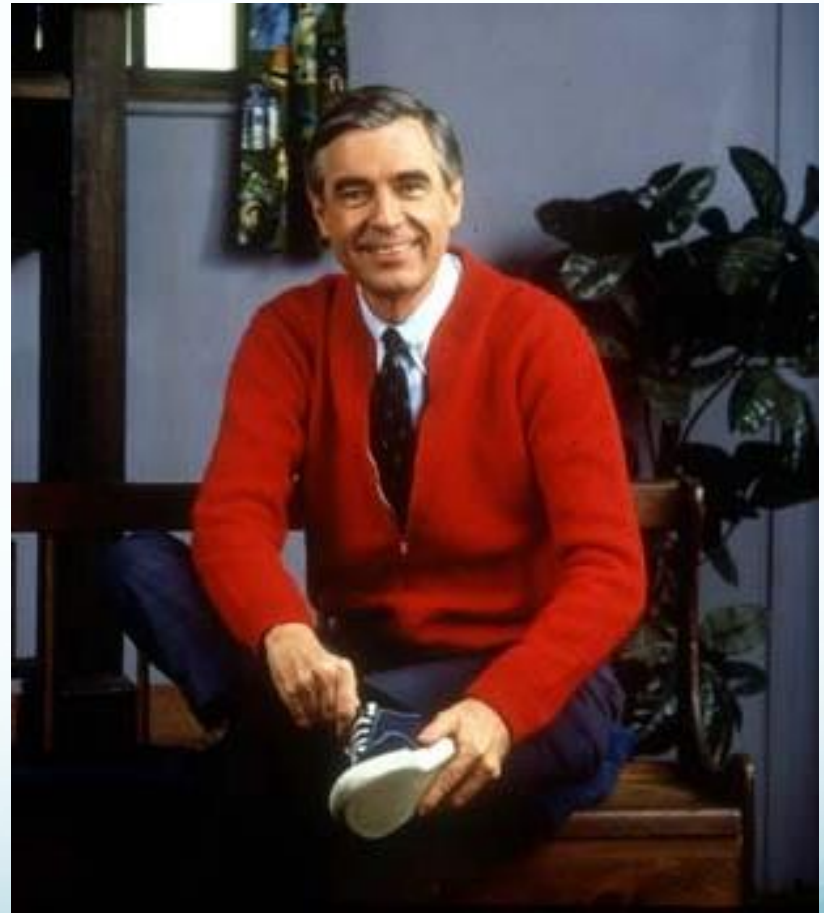
- Intense fear of abandonment
- Unstable relationships. On a pedestal, then demonized. Loved then hated.
- Not knowing who you are or always changing sense of who you are
- Dissociative experiences including pseudo-psychotic experiences
- Impulsive and risky behavior
- Suicidal threats or behavior or self-injury – often in response to fears or threats of being abandoned
- Big mood swings lasting from a few hours to a few days
- Ongoing feelings of emptiness, Inappropriate, intense anger

# The Roots of Emotional Experience

- “I must be an emotional archaeologist because I keep looking for the roots of things, particularly the roots of behavior and why I feel certain ways about certain things.”

- copyright free photo: See <http://www.rewire.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/rewire-rogers.jpg>

- Text:<http://theworldaccordingtomisterrogers.tumblr.com/post/45991472202/i-must-be-an-emotional-archaeologist-because-i>





# Why Do People with BPD Feel/Behave This Way?

- Dr. Marsha Linehan, the creator of DBT, offers a Bio-Social Theory that accounts for the development of BPD
- Her theory is that people develop problems with emotional regulation when they have a biological predisposition toward emotional sensitivity combined with growing up in an emotionally invalidating environment

- See p. 7 in Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY

# Emotional Dysregulation

The inability to change or influence one's emotional experience, emotional actions and emotional communication.

See p. 6 in Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY

# Skills Deficit

Invalidating Environment + Emotional Sensitivity  
= Broad Dysregulation Across All Aspects of  
Emotional Responding  
and  
= Deficit in Emotion Regulation Skills

# Biological Part of DBT Theory

- Inherently more disposed to experience negative emotion (shy, frustrated, sad, can't be soothed), high sensitivity to emotional cues, and impulsivity.
- Also more trouble with effort-required control of emotions and behaviour.
- Vulnerability is biological → heredity, intrauterine, insults to the brain in childhood or adulthood, effect of early learning experiences on the brain

# Social Part of DBT Bio-Social Theory

## **Emotionally invalidating environment**

- 1) Invalidation of child's emotions.
- 2) Failure to model appropriate expressions of emotion.
- 3) An interaction style that reinforces emotional arousal.
- 4) A poor fit between child's temperament and parenting style.

# Patterns Become Cemented

**Emotional invalidation:** If a child's emotions are not validated, the child interprets the communication as not received and increases intensity of emotion. Now caregiver wants to stop the emotion and does this by explicitly invalidating the emotion. The tussle continues until, eventually, parent backs down, giving in to demands of highly emotional child. When this happens a pattern becomes cemented.

- See pp. 7-8 in Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY

# Example of Emotional Validation vs Emotional Invalidation



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<http://www.tc.pbs.org/prodmedia/newshouphotos%2F2012%2F12%2F18%2FMisterRogers.jpg>



Learned in emotionally validating family	Learned in emotionally invalidating family
Can rely on emotions for information about the world and self	Doesn't trust emotions as valid interpretations of events/experience
Can learn about preferences and identity	Can't rely on emotions to learn about self -> empty
Communicate emotions to others to get needs met	Overwhelm others with intensity or withdraw – needs not met
Can identify/label emotions	Confused about emotional experience. Can't label emotions
Can self-soothe	Can't self-soothe
Can inhibit emotions when necessary	Difficulty inhibiting emotions
Mostly experiences primary emotions	Mostly reacts to emotions with another feeling (secondary emotions)

# Our feelings are part of who we are

- “There’s no ‘should’ or ‘should not’ when it comes to having feelings. They’re part of who we are and their origins are beyond our control. When we can believe that, we may find it easier to make constructive choices about what to do with those feelings.” (Mr. Rogers)
- <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/691679-there-s-no-should-or-should-not-when-it-comes-to>

By Mr. Rogers

What do you do with the mad that you feel  
When you feel so mad you could bite?  
When the whole wide world seems oh, so  
wrong...  
And nothing you do seems very right?

What do you do? Do you punch a bag?  
Do you pound some clay or some dough?  
Do you round up friends for a game of tag?  
Or see how fast you go?

It's great to be able to stop  
When you've planned a thing that's wrong,  
And be able to do something else instead  
And think this song:

I can stop when I want to  
Can stop when I wish.  
I can stop, stop, stop any time.  
And what a good feeling to feel like this  
And know that the feeling is really mine.  
Know that there's something deep inside  
That helps us become what we can.

<http://pbskids.org/rogers/songLyricsWhatDoYouDo.html>

# Four Groups of DBT Skills

- Mindfulness
- Emotion Regulation
- Distress Tolerance
- Interpersonal Effectiveness

• Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY

# Mindfulness Skills

- **Slow us down, create space from our feelings and thoughts, create a pause allowing us the opportunity to respond rather than react, allow us to access our Wise Mind**
- **Skill Practice → decentering**

- See pp. 151-153 in Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY
- See p. 64 in CBT Skills Group Program Workbook, 2017, Victoria Division of Family Practice, Victoria BC

# Emotion Regulation Skills

- **Among other things, allow us to identify what we are feeling, to understand what our emotions are communicating to us and others, and to decide what to do about our emotions, if anything.**
- **Skill Practice -> Using the Body to Change Emotion/Opposite Action ‘Super Better’ and ‘Power Poses’**

- Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY
- Amy Cuddy, 2015 *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*; Little, Brown and Company, New York, NY

# Distress Tolerance Skills

- **When emotions are very intense and we might react, these skills use the body to help us get into the workability zone. From there we can use our mindfulness and emotional regulation skills to act effectively**
  - **DIAL skills**
  - **diStract Skills for taking a break from intense emotion/situations. Sensations: scratching a citrus fruit, taking a bubble bath, holding ice, listening to loud upbeat music, tasting Tabasco sauce**

- See pp.431-439 and pp. 439-442 in Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY

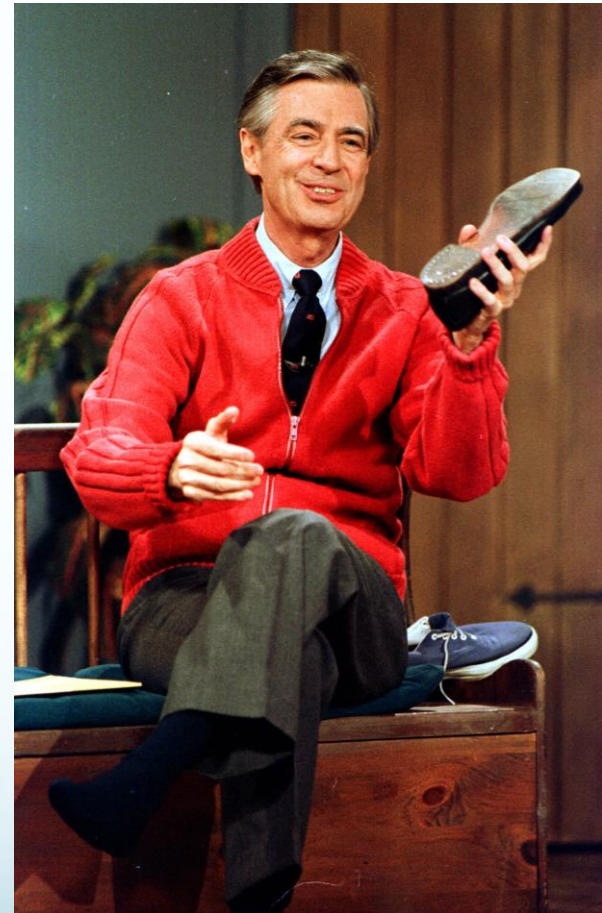
# Case Example: Mariko



# Accepting People Just As They Are

- “When we love a person, we accept him or her exactly as is: the lovely with the unlovely, the strong along with the fearful, the true mixed in with the facade, and of course, the only way we can do this is by accepting ourselves that way.”

- <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/644199-when-we-love-a-person-we-accept-him-or-her>



# Practitioner's Stance with the BPD Client

- Having learned (in their invalidating environment) that what they feel is 'wrong' people with BPD will be very sensitive to criticism.
- Therefore the stance of the practitioner must start with wholly, unconditionally validating the client's experience.

# How You Can Help – Part One

- Validate the client's experience – 'It makes perfect sense that you would feel this way'. Do this with empathy and conviction.

# Validating – Relief and a Novel Experience

- Having their emotions validated is likely to be a novel and very relieving experience, that will move them toward you – building trust
  - Conveys “there’s nothing wrong with you, there are factors that account for you feeling the way you do.”
  - Reduces shame and confusion
  - Increases self-acceptance
  - Reparative to have a figure with some authority say that their feelings are understandable—this can be a kind of re-parenting

# How You Can Help – Part Two

- When patient is ‘with you’ orient toward patient’s new skills
- What skills :
  - did you try?
  - think of trying
  - might you use next time?

# Review

- Marsha Linehan's Biosocial Theory hypothesizes that a person with BPD comes into the world with thinner skin and grows up in an emotionally invalidating environment. These two conditions lead to a skill deficit primarily in the area of emotional regulation

- Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY

# Review

- People with BPD → outbursts of anger, feel empty, have little sense of self, may be impulsive, self-harming, are terrified of being abandoned, ride an emotional rollercoaster, and often idolize then demonize others – resulting in turbulent and unhappy relationships.
- People with BPD → usually have no idea why they are behaving and feeling the way they do. They are confused and ashamed by their behaviour and feel helpless to make it better.

- Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

# Review

- Marsha Linehan's DBT treatment is a broad-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy treatment that teaches clients skills for:
  - Being in the moment
  - Understanding ones emotions
  - Accepting reality
  - Tolerating distress
  - Solving problems that can be solved
  - Acting effectively to live and build a life worth living
- Marsha Linehan, 2015, *DBT Skills Training Manual, Second Edition*; The Guilford Press, New York, NY



# What You Can Do That Will Help

- VALIDATE your patient – ‘It’s perfectly understandable that you would feel this way’  
and, when they are ‘with’ you →
- Orient them toward their use of SKILLS

# Acceptance Before Change

- “I don’t think anyone can grow unless he’s loved exactly as he is now, appreciated for who he is not for who he will be”



# One last skill: SOBER

- Before questions, let's take a moment to practice one more skill.
- pp. 159-160 in Ruth Baer, 2014, *The Practicing Happiness Workbook: How mindfulness can free you from the 4 psychological traps that keep you stressed, anxious and depressed*. New Harbinger Publications, Oakland CA.

Questions?

# Appreciations

- Thank you to Mr. Jim Judkis for permission to use his black and white photo of Mr. Rogers and the young child.
- Thank you to Guilford Press for permission to use the photo of Dr. Linehan.
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