

# Adolescent DBT Skills Training

*A Different Approach to Helping Adolescents in Grades 8-12*

## For teens who .....

- Are emotionally sensitive
- Have a difficult time calming down once upset
- Anger easily and/or engage in impulsive behavior
- Are paralyzed by anxiety
- Cut themselves or hurt themselves in other ways
- Have difficulty developing and/or maintaining peer relationships
- Are still not doing well despite already being involved in therapy and/or taking medication
- Need more support than individual therapy alone can provide

## What is DBT?

DBT stands for Dialectical Behavioral Therapy. It is a specialized standardized form of behavioral therapy, developed by Marsha Linehan, Ph.D that has been modified for adolescents. DBT Skills Training is designed to teach life-long skills that can lead to an improved ability to cope with stress, better communication skills, greater acceptance of oneself and others, and healthier approaches to dealing with strong emotions. DBT is also effective in reducing self-destructive behavior such as self-harm and suicide attempts, acting out in anger, impulsivity, substance usage, and some eating disordered behavior.

## About this DBT Skills Program

This is an 18 session curriculum, divided into three modules: Distress Tolerance, Interpersonal Effectiveness and Emotional Regulation. The concept of mindfulness is introduced in the first week of every unit and is incorporated into every meeting. Skills related to adolescent/family dynamics through the Walking the Middle Path Module will be integrated throughout the curriculum. Each module consists of four meetings with the teens alone, one meeting with the parents alone, and one combined parent-teen meeting. The parent only meetings are focused on both understanding and developing more skills to cope with the adolescent's problems and also provides a supportive forum to connect with other parents who are dealing with similar problems. The parent-teen meetings consist of the teen and one parent/guardian. The focus is on learning the skills for that unit as well as those related to parent/teen dynamics.

The class meets in person on Thursdays from 4-5:30 in Mason, OH. The parent only meetings are typically scheduled on Tuesday evenings from 5-6. Each of the three modules is \$350, which includes the six meetings, a substantial amount of materials, and time spent in consultation with individual therapists. The class is run continuously, with new families entering at the beginning of each module. Dr Wishnick is an out of network provider for insurance. Documentation will be provided f to submit to insurance for any potential out of network benefit reimbursement Using HSA/Flexible Spending funds is another option.

## What is the referral process?

Talk to your adolescent's individual therapist to determine if this form of treatment might be appropriate. Admission to the program is by application only. Both teens and parents will have forms to complete and the individual therapist must also be supportive of the referral. To find out more about the program and/or to access the application material, call or email Dr. Hillary Wishnick at 513-237-2747 or [drhillarywishnick@drhillarywishnick.com](mailto:drhillarywishnick@drhillarywishnick.com). As space is limited, priority

is given to adolescents with individual therapists who are DBT informed. If it appears that your adolescent may benefit from this type of treatment and space allows it, Dr. Wishnick will schedule a time for a family consultation to provide you with more information about the program, to address any questions you may have and to allow her to get to know your adolescent. This will assist you in making an informed decision about your adolescent's treatment.

### **What will occur during the class meetings?**

Both the adolescent only and the parent/adolescent meetings follow the same format. All meetings will begin with a mindfulness exercises. Sessions will include a teaching component, including hands on, experiential exercises, handouts, and assignments to complete between classes. Sessions will end with another brief mindfulness or relaxation exercise to model calming skills that your adolescent can use at home. Your adolescent will be given homework assignments and self-monitoring worksheets which will be reviewed the following week. These are designed to assist him/her in applying the skills learned to "real world" situations.

### **Why should my adolescent participate in DBT Skills Training when my adolescent already seeing a therapist and/ or psychiatrist?**

DBT skills training offers concrete coping skills that are best taught in a group situation. There is much research to suggest that combined DBT skills training and DBT individual therapy are effective in treating the problem areas previously described. Groups also have the benefit of providing peer support from other individuals who have similar problems, which can be a powerful component of treatment. This program also provides parents with a supportive place to connect with each other.

### **Does my adolescent need to continue with individual therapy while he/she is in DBT Skills?**

It is **required** that all class participants have an individual therapist with whom they are meeting regularly, ideally weekly. Skills Training will not be focused on your adolescent's individual problems and situations and will not provide crisis management. The skills trainer will work in close collaboration with your adolescent's individual therapist to assist in integrating the skills learned in class.

### **Will talking to other teens give my child more ideas about acting out/self harm?**

DBT Skills Training is highly structured around finding more effective ways to cope with problems. When the topics of self-harm and acting out come up, teens are only allowed to speak in generalities to avoid influencing one another in a negative way. The focus is always on how situations could have been handled more effectively. Generally the adolescents quickly become skilled at providing positive suggestions for other members, which, in turn, helps to modify their own behavior.

**Hillary Wishnick, Ph.D** is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Mason, with a specialty in adolescent self-harm behaviors. She has been leading adolescent DBT skills training groups since 2009 and uses DBT often with individual therapy clients. Dr. Wishnick has earned a certificate in the fundamentals of DBT from Behavioral Tech, the leading training organization for DBT, regularly seeks out training opportunities in DBT and participates in a local DBT consultation group with other clinicians trained in this model.

Dr. Wishnick works with advanced psychology doctoral students from area universities who serve as co-skills trainers.

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