

The Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Skills Group Bariatric Surgery Program, University Health Network, Toronto Western Hospital

The purpose of this handout is to provide you with information about DBT and the DBT Skills Group so that you know what to expect.

Overview of DBT

What is DBT?

DBT, or Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, is a program developed by psychologist Dr. Marsha Linehan in the 1990s as a treatment for people with borderline personality disorder (BPD), a mental health condition. People with BPD struggle with intense emotions and often use impulsive, self-destructive behaviours to manage those emotions. Dr. Linehan defines 'dialectics' as "*a synthesis or integration of opposites.*" In practical terms, this means a middle ground or shades of gray in how we think and behave. DBT aims to teach people skills to manage their emotions in more adaptive ways. Research since the 1990s has shown the effectiveness of DBT for BPD, and more recent research shows that it is helpful for people with eating disorders, substance use disorders, and other problems, which is why we are offering it in the Bariatric Surgery Program.

DBT is a nonjudgmental, practical approach that assumes that we are all doing the best we can based on what we've learned and experienced so far in our lives. At the same time, we can all learn more effective ways of responding to ourselves and situations in our lives.

Please note that a comprehensive DBT program involves weekly individual therapy, the skills group, phone coaching, and consultation for the therapists. At the Bariatric Surgery Program, we are offering the skills group only at this time.

What are the DBT skills?

DBT involves 4 types of skills that are overlapping and work together. These skills are comprehensive in that they involve practicing new ways of responding to and managing our thoughts, emotions and behaviours. The 4 skills are as follows:

- **Mindfulness:** being in the present moment and acknowledging thoughts, feelings and behaviours as they happen, without judging or trying to control them.
- **Distress tolerance:** learning to cope during an emotional crisis, especially when it is impossible to change the situation, and accepting the situation as it is, rather than how it should be
- **Interpersonal effectiveness:** the ability to ask for what you need and to say 'no' when necessary, while maintaining self-respect and relationships with others
- **Emotion regulation:** understanding, responding to and managing emotions so that they do not control thoughts and behaviours.

For more information about DBT, please see: <http://depts.washington.edu/uwbrtc/about-us/dialectical-behavior-therapy/>

DBT for Bariatric Surgery Patients

How can the DBT skills group help people who have had bariatric surgery?

DBT skills were specifically developed to help people manage the emotions, impulses and urges that underlie problematic behaviours. For bariatric surgery patients, common examples are emotional eating, grazing, being anxious about weight gain, and other types of eating problems. Several research studies have been published demonstrating the effectiveness of DBT for bariatric surgery patients.

How is the DBT skills group at the Bariatric Surgery Program structured?

We offer the 4 sets of skills in 3 modules that are 5 weeks long each. Instead of teaching the mindfulness skills as a separate module, mindfulness will be taught in the first week of each 5-week module. This is because mindfulness skills are needed before you can effectively use the other skills. You can take each module separately or consecutively.

What happens in each session?

The DBT skills group is an education and practice group taught by 2 leaders, that follows a curriculum. This is different from support groups or other types of therapy groups that involve talking in detail about your personal life, relationships, or childhood. At the same time, the group involves your active participation and works best when everyone shares their experience. This helps the group members learn from each other. The agenda for each session is as follows:

- Brief mindfulness exercise
- Homework review
- New material

What's the difference between the Mindful Eating Group and the DBT group?

The mindful eating group at the Bariatric Surgery Program involves 9 sessions that focus on applying mindfulness skills directly to eating, and most sessions involve eating. While the DBT group includes mindfulness, the emphasis is on how to apply mindfulness skills more generally. DBT is also unique in offering the other 3 types of skills. At the same time, the DBT and mindful eating groups are complementary, in that the skills and information you learn in one group is consistent with what you learn and practice in the other group.

What's the difference between DBT and CBT?

DBT incorporates many skills from CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy), particularly those that involve understanding and changing your thoughts and behaviour. However, DBT focuses more on the emotional and interpersonal aspects of living, and teaches a larger set of skills.

Is there homework?

Yes. Research shows that the more consistently you practice skills, the more quickly you will learn them and benefit from them. It is also true that it is hard to do homework consistently. In this group we will remind you about homework and help you troubleshoot any difficulty completing homework. We estimate that homework will take 10-15 minutes per day.

Group Guidelines

1. It is difficult to learn this information if you are not present in group. At the same time some absences are unavoidable. We ask that you attend a minimum of 4 sessions in each module. If you miss more than 2 sessions in a module, we will assume that you have dropped out.
2. Do not come to sessions under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
3. Information obtained during sessions, including the names of other patients, must remain confidential.
4. Please use respectful language when speaking to other group members and group leaders.
5. For the duration of the group it is recommended that group members hold off forming exclusive relationships or friendships with other group members.
6. The focus of this group is education and skills development. While it is necessary to discuss daily challenges during homework review, it is important to keep this brief to allow all group members a chance to participate.
7. The group will be run virtually. Please ensure you are in a private space where you will not be overheard or interrupted. Please do not use your cell phone, check email, or engage in other tasks while you participate. It is best to use a laptop or desktop computer or a tablet, rather than a cell phone.