

# Welcome & Orientation Packet

Welcome to DBT Informed Skills Group!

The following packet provides information on the group and what to expect on your first day.

## *What is DBT?*

DBT stands for Dialectical Behavior Therapy. It was developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan in the late 1980's to treat individuals who have chronic suicidal thinking and actions, as well as other difficulties with thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that disrupt their lives. Dr. Linehan originally developed and studied DBT for women diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Today, we know that DBT can be used across clinical settings for a variety of symptoms and difficulties. In addition, DBT is used proactively in health and growth models of wellness. DBT emphasizes individual psychotherapy and group skills training classes to help people learn and use skills and strategies to build a meaningful and satisfying life.

## *What is DBT's Approach to Therapy?*

DBT emphasizes an accepting, nonjudgmental, and validating approach to therapy. This approach means that DBT therapists work to understand their clients' world and acknowledge how clients' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors make sense given their unique lived experience. This understanding is balanced with change strategies. DBT draws from a variety of change strategies including traditional psychological techniques, Eastern concepts of mindfulness, and the philosophical underpinnings of dialectics. While validation helps clients to identify and accept their current life situation and what they hope to change or improve, change strategies support clients in taking the steps needed to implement the changes they hope for.

## *Why informed DBT?*

Offering an informed DBT skills group allows us to utilize different skills and draw from multiple treatment modalities to meet the unique needs of our clients. Standard DBT was developed in a research setting. However, in the real world, DBT programs are developed to meet the unique needs of clients seen in the program's setting. Clients can be different in important ways from research subjects (e.g. differences in gender, ethnicity, diagnosis, and level of care needed). Our goal is to customize our approach to our clients. The standard model and other applications of DBT are both valid; the effectiveness of one over another depends on the needs of the clients served.

### *What is the difference between this program and Standard DBT?*

It is important to us to provide a program that is tailored to the individual needs of group members. Please note, this is a skills group with a support/process component and not an Standard DBT program. DBT programs vary based on a client's need and recommended level of care. Our DBT Informed Skills group is a less intensive therapy option compared to Standard DBT. As a general rule, if clients have ongoing safety issues, are chronically unstable, and/or have multiple psychiatric hospitalizations, they will probably benefit the most from a more intensive DBT program. Our DBT Informed Skills Group has the following eligibility requirements based on the level of care the program meets:

- Must be 20 years of age or older.
- No psychiatric hospitalizations or emergency room visits in the past three months. There may be exceptions to this requirement if you were referred to the group by your individual therapist.
- Must see an individual therapist weekly or biweekly (if you do not currently have an individual therapist, you may be eligible to see an individual therapist at RPS).

If you have questions about the differences between our DBT Informed Skills Group at Standard DBT, or our group eligibility requirements, talk with your individual therapist or call us at 763-577-2489.

### *What are DBT skills?*

Teaching skills is essential to DBT. DBT skills are life skills. Many people have said they wish these skills had been taught to them in school. In addition, many people never had the opportunity to learn skills, or did not have parents or anyone else to model a skillful approach to life. If we do not see examples of skills being used, it is more difficult to learn them, and we may adopt ineffective or unhelpful approaches to living. This group teaches core mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness skills. In addition, the facilitator(s) draw on principles of Cognitive Behavioral therapy (CBT), Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT), and other evidence based therapies, to offer a comprehensive psychoeducation skills training program.

Learning these skills requires practice. Learning DBT skills can be like learning a new language. When we learn languages, the words have limited meaning and effect until they are put in sentences and then in conversations. DBT skills work the same way. Keep connecting skills to other skills until they form chains of new behaviors, creating a more satisfying life. We learn a language through speaking it; we need to practice skill use everyday until it is fluent.

To help you practice the skills and successfully implement them into your daily life, you will be asked to create a *Life Vision*, fill out a daily *Diary Card*, complete a *Chain Analysis* as needed, and complete weekly homework assignments. Your *Life Vision* will help guide you through the skills and keep your journey on track. A *Diary Card* is a form that tracks symptoms, feelings,

skills, and progress towards individual group objectives. A *Chain Analysis* is a change strategy that helps you identify and understand the purpose and effectiveness of your behaviors to support skill implementation and progress towards your objectives. Finally, weekly homework assignments support active learning and skill implementation outside of group.

#### *What is the structure of the group?*

The group meets every week for 2 hours. Group will start and end on time. Group sessions consist of both teaching and processing/support time. Each group begins with a 45-minute skills teaching; homework is assigned to be reviewed in the following week's session. The teaching component of group is followed by a brief break. During the second half of group, group members share diary card entries in a structured format. Each group member has the opportunity to receive feedback on their diary card as well as any personal topic they wish to process with the group that day. Processing and support time may revolve around an issue one member of the group is working on for structured feedback and reactions by other members of the group. At times, the group may focus on a general topic that relates to all group members experiences.

#### *How long does the group run for?*

Your length of stay in the group depends on your individual goals and treatment needs. Most clients attend group for 6-12 months. We recommend that you commit to a minimum of 6 months to maximize the benefits of the program. This is an ongoing group, which means that clients may enter the program at any time, pending openings. There is a maximum of eight clients enrolled in the program.

#### *How can I prepare for my first day in group?*

- Please arrive on time for your first day of group. Check-in at our front desk. Your group facilitator will greet you just prior to the start of group.
- Anytime a new member joins the group, the group will begin with introductions and a review of group structure and guidelines.
- If you have not done so, please read and sign the *Group Consent and Guidelines* prior to your first group.
- Please complete the *Self Care Safety Plan* prior to your first group.
- The *Diary Card* will be explained during your first group. You do not need to complete a Diary Card prior to the start of group, however, you will be asked to practice an initial Diary Card entry during your first group.
- If you have any questions about group or what to expect on your first day, please contact us at 763-577-2489.