Overview of DBT Skills Training for Suicidal Adolescents

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Main References

• 3) [DBT 911](#): A great application for smartphones with built-in exercises
OUTLINE

• Theoretical Background and Origin of DBT

• DBT Structure

• Skills Groups

• Individual Therapy

• Phone Coaching

• Family Therapy

• Consultation Group
Theoretical Background and Origin

• Definition of “Dialectic”: Two opposing truths in any given situation

• DBT helps people to “walk the middle path” between these dialectics by seeing the truth in both sides

• Overarching philosophy is that deficiencies in emotional regulation and invalidating environments contribute to impulsive aggression
Examples of Common Dialectics in Adolescence

• Active Passivity vs. Apparent Competence

• Excessive Leniency vs. Authoritarian Control

• Pathologizing Normal Behaviors vs. Normalizing Pathological Behaviors

• Fostering Dependence vs. Forcing Autonomy
Four Stages of Treatment

• Stage I: Behavioral Dyscontrol to Behavioral Control
  • Maximize skills so that the patient stays alive and in treatment

• Stage II: Quiet Desperation to Emotional Experiencing Without Trauma
  • Treatment of co-mobid conditions, graduation from skills

• Stage III: Ordinary Happiness and Unhappiness
  • Completes individual therapy, continued supportive groups

• Stage IV: Spiritual Journey/Stage of Joy
  • Takes next step in exploring existential questions
Over-Arching Philosophy

- Encourage Self-Sufficiency
  - Patient should serve as own advocate

- Do Not Reinforce Self-Harming Behaviors!
  - Praise and give lots of attention when patient avoids self-harm and utilizes coping skills
  - When self-harming behavior occurs, limit conversation to specifics about safety only
DBT Structure

- Individual Therapy: One 1 hour session per week
- Phone Coaching
- Skills Group: One 2-2.5 hour group per week
- Family Therapy/Involvement (variable)
- Consultation Group: One 1.5-2 hour group per week
Evidence-Base

• Limited to the entire DBT program, and individual components of DBT on their own have limited evidence

• May be difficult to provide entire program given financial/time constraints

• Funding Strategies
  • May save money down the road for higher utilizers of mental health dollars
  • Helps to keep people out of expensive and often ineffective hospitalizations
## Individual Therapy and Skills Group

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Individual Therapy

• Reduce Life-Threatening Behaviors
  • SI and self-harm

• Reduce Therapy-Interfering Behaviors
  • Compliance issues, active participation

• Reduce Quality of Life Interfering Behaviors
  • Gambling, drugs/alcohol, financial, eating

• Develop and Employ Essential Life Skills
  • Be able to use these life skills in all areas of life, including relationships and work
Individual Therapy Tools

- Diary Card
- Behavioral Chain Analysis
- Suicide Risk Assessment
Diary Card

• Patient is to fill out a Diary Card prior to every session

• Should stick to the most important issues

• Examples of things to include:
  • Actual attempts at SI/self-harm
  • Urges to SI/self-harm
  • Drug/Alcohol Use
  • Emotions
  • Medication Compliance
  • YOU CAN BE CREATIVE!
Behavioral Chain Analysis

• Step-by-step approach to looking objectively at events that led up to self-harm

• First, patient documents in detail the series of events

• Second, patient documents thoughts and feelings that accompanied each event

• Lastly, therapist works with patient to generate alternative solutions/interject places where skills could be used
Suicide Risk Assessment

• Part of every session

• Review of life-threatening behaviors, precipitating events, and circumstances

• Goal is to keep patient in the community by enhancing skills and community supports

• Hospitalize or call 911 if necessary
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Phone Coaching

• Individual therapist is available at a near 24 hour basis for patients

• Patient calls when having urges to self-harm and patient walks patient through skills

• LOTS of PRAISE for using skills and averting self-harm

• Minimal safety assessment if self-harm has actually taken place
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Skills Groups – Major Goals

• First, reduce behaviors that threaten to destroy the group therapy process

• Second, increase individual skills with support from the group

• Third, target subtler therapy-interfering behaviors
Sequence of Skills Groups

- Mindfulness (2 weeks)
- Distress Tolerance (6 weeks)
- Interpersonal Effectiveness (6 weeks)
- Emotion Regulation (6 weeks)
Mindfulness Training

• Overarching Philosophy: help patients be more in touch with themselves and their environments in the moment

• 3 States of the Mind

• What Skills

• How Skills
3 States of the Mind

- Emotional Mind
- Reasonable Mind
- Wise Mind
“What” Skills

• Observe

• Describe

• Participate
“How Skills”

• Non-Judgementally

• One Mindfully

• Effectively
Sequence of Skills Groups

- Mindfulness (2 weeks)
- Distress Tolerance (6 weeks)
- Interpersonal Effectiveness (6 weeks)
- Emotion Regulation (6 weeks)
Distress Tolerance

- Learn Crisis Survival Skills. Core skills include:
  - Self-Soothing Skills
  - Improve the Moment
  - Learn to Evaluate Pros and Cons
  - Distract Yourself with ACCEPTS

- Other Skills Include:
  - Breathing Exercises
  - Half-Smiling Exercises
  - Turning the Mind/Radical Acceptance/Accepting Reality
Distress Tolerance - Distraction

• Activities:
• Contributing:
• Comparisons:
• Emotions:
• Pushing Away:
• Thoughts:
• Sensations:
Sequence of Skills Groups

- Mindfulness (2 weeks)
- Distress Tolerance (6 weeks)
- Interpersonal Effectiveness (6 weeks)
- Emotion Regulation (6 weeks)
Interpersonal Effectiveness

• Keeping Relationships with **GIVE**

• Keeping Self-Respect with **FAST**

• Getting What you Want with **DEAR MAN**

• Factors Reducing Interpersonal Effectiveness

• Self-Affirming Statements for Interpersonal Effectiveness

• Looking into Asking for What You Want/Saying No
GIVE and FAST

- be Gentle
- act Interested
- Validate
- use an Easy manner

- be Fair
- no Apologies
- Stick to your values
- be Truthful
DEAR MAN

• Describe
• Express
• Assert
• Reinforce
• stay Mindful
• Appear confident
• Negotiate
Sequence of Skills Groups

- Mindfulness (2 weeks)
- Distress Tolerance (6 weeks)
- Interpersonal Effectiveness (6 weeks)
- Emotion Regulation (6 weeks)
Emotion Regulation

- Reducing vulnerability to negative emotions via PLEASE MASTER
- Letting go of emotional suffering
- Mindfulness of the current emotion
- Changing emotions by acting opposite to the current emotion
- Steps for increasing positive emotions
PLEASE MASTER

• Physical illness
• balance Eating
• Avoid mood-Altering drugs
• balance Sleep
• get Exercise
• become a MASTER/build MASTERy
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Family Therapy/Involvement

- Can take on many shapes/forms

- Family therapy sessions with the individual therapist OR a separate family therapist

- Multifamily skills groups with families and patients together

- Separate groups for families and patients, where families have to graduate with sense of competency just as the patients do
Main Goals of Family Involvement

- Increase stability of home
- Increase parental understanding of teenager’s emotional vulnerability
- Address parental emotional dysregulation (family behavioral analysis)
- Improve communication between adolescent and family members
- Increase responsiveness/praise during non-crisis periods to decrease positive reinforcement of self-harm
- Keep home and adolescent safe
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Consultation Group

• Troubleshooting difficult cases

• Provide support to one another

• Remind one another to practice DBT skills during group (for example, a non-judgmental tone towards both the clinician and the patient)