



It Was So Radical, She Accepted It!: Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) is a cognitive behavioral treatment modality developed by Marsha Linehan, PhD. The treatment modality incorporates individual therapy as well as group skills training sessions which occur once a week respectively. The skills are taught in such a manner so as to propel clients towards achieving their “Life Worth Living Goal.” The skill modules taught include: Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance. Click [here](#) to learn more about DBT.

Joanne Francois is a therapist at [Merakey Philadelphia](#) located at Knights Road, an outpatient mental health program which participates in the CBH DBT Initiative with the [Treatment Implementation Collaborative \(TIC\)](#). Michelle, a CBH member, came into treatment seeking services for self-injurious behavior, a history of suicide attempts, multiple psychiatric hospitalizations and poor relationships with others. Joanne began providing DBT treatment to Michelle in September of 2017. Michelle has now completed a 6 month program and is currently participating in a second six month cycle. Michelle has neither engaged in self-injurious behaviors or been hospitalized since she began the DBT program. The following is an interview conducted with Michelle and Joanne to illuminate the benefits of DBT and the “hope” it has brought into Michelle’s life.



EPIC: How did you learn about and get connected with DBT?

Michelle: I had learned about DBT from a psychiatrist who was doing my intake. I didn’t see it then but I am now forever grateful to this provider for not allowing me to do the day program I was interested in and insisting I do DBT.

EPIC: Why did you think Michelle would be a good candidate for DBT?

Joanne: Well, it was actually her evaluating doctor, here at Merakey, who really felt Michelle would be an ideal candidate for DBT. There were therapy interfering behaviors noted almost immediately; emotion dysregulation was evident; and difficulty with change was evident as

well. It helps to know that engaging in DBT is a choice. And that while it was Michelle's doctor's recommendation, it was ultimately Michelle's decision to accept it or not.

EPIC: Were there any challenges related to DBT for you?

Michelle: Yes, definitely! Opening up to strangers or peers. I felt like I couldn't let my guard down. As well as time management. I had trouble getting there on time and was "fashionably late."

EPIC: When did you know it first started working for Michelle?

Joanne: When she really began to be more at peace with herself; having a calmness about herself. She was better able to verbalize her feelings and express herself to others (Interpersonal Effectiveness skill).

EPIC: When did you know it first started working?

Michelle: For me, I would say when I was able to open up and interact with peers. In my family relationships I became, for the first time, a help rather than a burden. It was always about me before. If I called my family they wouldn't answer the phone. With my parents, I could only text them. It was very painful. It's unbelievable that it's not like that now. I'm able to help them and sleep over. It's a really good feeling.

EPIC: What is the biggest change you noticed in Michelle after DBT?

Joanne: I noticed she was stronger emotionally. She had a greater sense of command over how she related to others. Improved emotion regulation and an ability to refrain from behaviors that pushed people away from her.

EPIC: How do you feel DBT helps you manage your emotions and keep yourself safe?

Michelle: I would say DBT taught me that naming my emotions allows me to regulate them. I continue to use skills like, "Check the Facts," and "Opposite Action." Before DBT, I didn't know that my actions were based on my distorted thoughts and emotions. I have to catch myself sometimes and use the skills in order not to react.

EPIC: How do you feel DBT helps Michelle with her relationships?

Joanne: DBT has helped Michelle to renew the strained relationships she has had with her family. Her familial relationships are healthy and more balanced. She has also been able to forge and develop friendships with others that prior to DBT skills training would not have been possible.

EPIC: What would you say to someone who is skeptical about DBT?

Michelle: I would try to sympathize with them, letting them know I felt the same way. I would tell them that they are worth giving DBT a try and to be patient with themselves.

EPIC: How do you think DBT helped Michelle reduce hospitalization?

Joanne: By practicing and applying the DBT skills taught in group and attending her individual therapy sessions, Michelle was able to recognize the behaviors she engaged in that were keeping her from reaching her, "life worth living goal". She is now able to recognize the emotions linked to the behaviors that in the past would lead to hospitalizations. She uses her distress tolerance skills and interpersonal effectiveness skills to communicate to others her needs, when she needs help, or when she feels stuck.

EPIC: Do you feel you are living a life worth living now?

Michelle: Yes! I feel hopeful. I never felt that way before. With DBT skills, my life can get better and better. I see a confidence I never felt before because I've always been intimidated (or insecure) with myself. If something didn't go my way, I would verbally attack somebody or go to the highest person in the staff or just break down and cry. I'm no longer attacking people verbally. My family was distant from me because of my erratic behavior, but they see a change (in me).

Dialectical Behavior Therapy Providers

Special Thanks to Joanne and Michelle for sharing their success story about DBT. Click [here](#) to learn more information about **Merakey**.

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