

Dialectical Thinking Practice

DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

Challenging interpersonal situations present opportunities to practice dialectical thinking. When you are facing a difficult situation, you can use the list on this page to remind yourself how to think dialectically (for more details, see our full [handout](#)), or use the additional pages to describe the situation, apply dialectical thinking, and reflect on how it went.

Reminders for techniques to think and act dialectically

Look for both sides of a situation

- Ask, what am I missing?** Zoom out of emotional tunnel vision. Look for what you're missing.
- See the truth in both perspectives.** Look for the kernel of truth in others' perspectives.
- Avoid extremes,** like black-and-white, all-or-nothing thinking. Avoid swinging between extremes.
- Balance opposites.** Hold two opposites simultaneously; accept reality while working to change it.
- When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.** Look for the silver lining.
- Jump into confusion with both feet.** Practice sitting with the confusion and contradiction.
- Play devil's advocate.** See the other side of the argument for the sake of it.
- Use metaphors and storytelling.** Tackle a complex idea with simple analogies.

Look for oneness

- Treat others the way you want to be treated.** Put out into the world what you want to receive.
- Look for similarities in others, not differences.** Connect with others by finding similarities.
- Notice how everything is physically connected.** The earth connects you with everyone else.

Embrace change

- Be open to change and jump in.** Embrace change with levity, determination, or enthusiasm.
- Radically accept change.** Take the change in (and your feelings about it) 100%.
- Practice embracing change.** Make changes on purpose to build your strength.

See the whole picture

- Notice how you affect others and they affect you.** All moods and behaviors have a cause.
- Practice letting go of blame.** Consider all possible causes.

The next page provides an example of a difficult interpersonal situation and how someone might apply some of the skills above. The final page is blank so you can practice yourself.



In this example, Sarah is having some intense feelings about a disagreement with her partner. Before she goes back to figure things out with him, she tries thinking dialectically, following the steps below. On step 3, she reads the list of skills on the previous page and picks a few that feel right for her situation.

1 Rate your distress from 0 (none) to 10 (max) 7

2 Describe the situation Who, what, where, when

My partner and I are getting into arguments about our holiday plans. I want him to join my family for the first time so he can meet my elderly grandparents. He's scared how his family will react and is hesitating. I can't believe him - he doesn't care about me or my family at all.

3 Use one or more skills Describe how you used one or more skills on the first page to think dialectically

Avoid extremes: I know he *does* care about me and my family. He treats me with kindness and has made an effort with my family.

Treat others: I want him to understand how I feel about this. He probably wants me to understand his hesitation and worry.

Let go of blame: It's not just his preference. Some of his worry is probably due to his family's intense reactions in the past that hurt him.

4 Reflect Did using the skill(s) change how you feel? Your relationship with others? How much?

I feel a little more calm and understanding. I think I'm more ready to discuss this again and listen to his side.

5 Rate your distress again 4

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



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Follow the steps below to apply dialectical thinking to a difficult situation. On step 3, refer to the list on the first page of this worksheet and pick a few skills that seem right for your situation that you are willing to try in this moment. Describe the dialectic thoughts you had as a result of using these skills.

1 Rate your distress from 0 (none) to 10 (max)

2 Describe the situation Who, what, where, when

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3 Use one or more skills Describe how you used one or more skills on the first page to think dialectically

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4 Reflect Did using the skill(s) change how you feel? Your relationship with others? How much?

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5 Rate your distress again

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*





Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://choosingtherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



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