

**Dialectics is holding two seemingly opposed ideas together at the same time** (to learn more, see our [intro worksheet](#)). But how do we actually think and act dialectically? This handout provides sixteen strategies, explanations, and examples for getting into the dialectical mindset - which helps us balance complex situations, tolerate intense feelings, and make wise decisions.

Ways to think and act dialectically are based on the four pillars of dialectic thought, which are also discussed at the end of our [intro to dialectics worksheet](#):

1. Everything in the universe has an opposite
2. Everything is interconnected
3. Change is the only constant
4. Change is transactional

### 1. Everything has an opposite → look for both sides of the situation



#### Ask, what am I missing?

Strong emotions can give us tunnel vision. Practice “zooming out” and looking for what you’re missing in the larger situation.

*Example: Justine knows she takes constructive criticism hard. When corrected by a coworker at her new job, she paused to remember mistakes are normal when learning something new.*



#### See the truth in both perspectives

Everyone has a different perspective, and no one knows the absolute truth. Practice looking for the truth in other people’s perspectives.

*Pat defines “success” in life as career advancement; Sue defines it as doing what makes you happy. Both perspectives can be true.*



#### Avoid Extremes

Avoid black-and-white or all-or-nothing thinking. Avoid swinging from one extreme to the other. Embrace seeing black, white, and gray at the same time.

*After their teenage son sneaks out at night, Manny wants to ground him for a month, but Julia thinks it’s no big deal. They compromise by setting a curfew and giving him a talk about safety.*



#### Balance opposites

Practice holding two opposites at the same time. Accept reality as it is, while also working to change it. Validate both yourself and others in the same conversation.

*John knows and accepts that his past experiences make it hard for him to discuss his emotions. He also validates that his partner cares about John’s emotions, which is why John works on emotional expression while staying patient with himself.*





### When life gives you lemons, make lemonade

Find the silver lining. When problems come up, embrace the opportunity to practice new skills. But avoid toxic positivity - you don't have to pretend to enjoy a problem.

*Lisa has been working hard on speaking up for herself. A problem arises when her closest friend starts pressuring her to do something. Lisa feels tense and worried, but speaks up anyways.*



### Jump into confusion with both feet

Dialectics are inherently confusing and contradictory. However, just becoming more comfortable "sitting with" the confusion is practicing dialectics.

*Sam has strong social anxiety. He's trying very hard, but he hasn't made a friend in his new town yet. He embraces that he is doing his best and he needs to do better to achieve his goal.*



### Play devil's advocate

Playing devil's advocate is purposely arguing against an idea, just for the sake of it. This is a great mental exercise for seeing the other side and allowing it to coexist.

*Greg has decided he needs to leave his family's business. Playing devil's advocate, he knows this will disappoint his family. This can coexist with the knowledge that leaving is right for him.*



### Use metaphors and storytelling

Metaphors and stories help us make sense of complex ideas. They can efficiently remind us of a goal, mindset, memory, or cultural touchstone when things get difficult.

*Trees stand tall because they are both rigid and flexible; living with grief is like water flowing around a large boulder; habits are like ruts in the earth - hard to form, then hard to get out of.*

## 2. Everything is interconnected → look for oneness



### Treat others the way you want to be treated (the Golden Rule)

If you treat others with kindness, you are more likely to be treated with kindness; if you treat others with harshness, you are more likely to be treated with harshness.

*Cece's new workplace has some difficult coworkers. She sees treating them with patience and kindness as long-term investment that will pay off in the future.*



### Look for similarities in others, not differences

"Birds of a feather flock together" because it's often easier to connect with people who are similar to us. When feeling separate or critical of others, look for similarities.

*Lee just left his small hometown to start college in a large city, and he feels so different from everyone else. He connects with other freshmen by focusing on their shared excitement about starting something new.*





### Notice how everything is physically connected

Our feet connect to the floor, which connects to the the ground, which connects to the earth. Plants create the oxygen we breathe and we create the CO<sub>2</sub> they breathe.

*Jordan feels far away from home and the people he loves. He closes his eyes and feels his physical connection with home, even though it's across miles of hills and mountains.*

## 3. Change is the only constant → embrace it



### Be open to change and jump in

Rather than just tolerating change, embrace it and jump in. This attitude can help with accepting change and bring some levity, determination, or other positive feelings.

*The leadership at Jun's job recently changed and everything feels upside down. Jun acknowledges his stress while also adopting an attitude of, "Okay, what's next, let's go!"*



### Radically accept change

Instead of ignoring change, accept it (and associated feelings) as deeply as possible. Assert what happened, why it happened, and how you feel about it. Relax your body and mind.

*After a breakup, Vic asserts, "It happened because he wants to see other people. I feel anger and grief. I can't pretend this didn't happen. It is painful, and I will get through this."*



### Practice embracing change

Get used to change by practicing on purpose (opposite action). Make small changes in your life. The more you practice, the more you can tolerate the discomfort.

*Emil takes new routes, talks to new people, and tries new things. Just like working out at the gym, with practice, he becomes more nimble and resilient with change over time.*

## 4. Change is transactional → see the whole picture



### Notice how you affect others and they affect you

How do your moods and actions affect others? How do their moods and actions affect you? Remember that everyone's moods and actions have a cause.

*Liam used to think everyone's feelings just come out of nowhere. He began investigating the causes of his own feelings - which helped him understand the causes of others' feelings.*



### Practice letting go of blame

When thinking dialectically, we consider the many transactional causes of behavior over time. Saying something is "all your fault" is not compatible with this mindset.

*Dave is so frustrated with his daughter's attitude. He pauses to consider all possible causes: stress with school and friends, growing pains, his moods and behavior towards her, etc.*

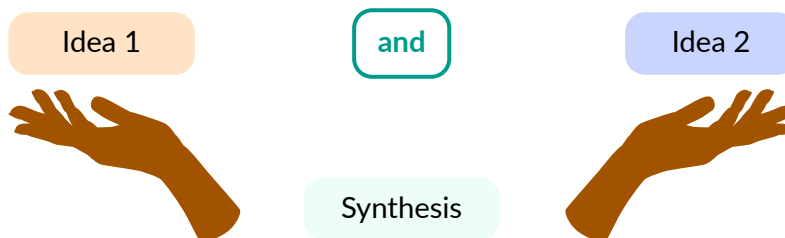
\*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



### Balancing dialectics “physically”

In addition to the above techniques, consider “physically” getting into a dialectic mindset:

- Take a deep breath into your diaphragm.
- Pause. Mentally “step back” from the situation.
- Open your hands in front of you.\*
- Imagine balancing each idea in each hand. “Hold” them together at the same time.
- Ride out the tension. Get curious and compassionate. What might explain this?
- Brainstorm for syntheses: an idea, explanation, or interpretation that allows both ideas to be true at the same time.
- Check in with wise mind to see which synthesis is the right fit.
- Act in line with the synthesis: accept yourself or others, make amends, take action, etc.



*\*This is called “willing hands,” another DBT technique that helps with accepting reality.*



# 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://www.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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