

Radical acceptance is a very important skill in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). This handout introduces the concept, answers common questions about radical acceptance, and presents reasons for practicing radical acceptance in your life.

What is acceptance?

- Acknowledging reality, truth, the facts
- Recognizing the pain and emotions that may come with the reality
- Letting go of “yes, *but*” or “should”s

What is *radical* acceptance?

- 100%, total, “all the way” acceptance
- Accepting in your mind, heart, and body
- When you stop fighting reality
- Accepting without resentment or shame

Radical acceptance is saying to yourself: “This really happened to me.” “Before, I wished it had never happened, or I tried to ignore my thoughts about it. Then I focused on how unfair it was that it happened to me. But it did. And now I can admit to myself that it hurt.”

Wait a second!

If I radically accept reality, does that mean...

| Meaning | Answer | Example |
|--|---|---|
| ...I approve or agree with the situation? | No - radical acceptance of terrible things means that you acknowledge reality (rather than ignore or deny it). | If I radically accept that terrible things happen in the world, does that mean I think those things are okay or acceptable? No. |
| ...I like the situation? | No - you can think something is awful or unfair, feel the pain and anger that comes with it, <i>and</i> radically accept that it really happened. | If I radically accept that I was fired unfairly, does that mean I have to pretend I’m happy about that, or that it’s a “blessing in disguise”? No. |
| ...I forgive , forget , or ignore when someone has hurt me? | No - you radically accept that someone hurt you by acknowledging it fully and feeling your own pain. | If I radically accept that someone really hurt me, does that mean I have to forgive them or pretend it never happened? No. |
| ...I give up and stop trying to make the situation better? | No - it’s actually easier to make things better after radical acceptance. Refusing to acknowledge the truth makes change harder. | If I radically accept that I hurt my friend, does that mean I’ll always be a bad friend, even if I try to do right in the future? Should I give up? No. |

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



According to Dr. Marsha Linehan, the creator of DBT, here are some things we have to radically accept:

The facts are the facts. We can't change the reality of the past.

- We must accept the facts of the past.
- Be careful - don't confuse facts with interpretations, distortions, or assumptions (e.g., "My mother *never* loved me," "The breakup ruined my *entire* life").

No one's future is completely unlimited.

- The likelihood* of certain things happening can be affected by some facts of our lives, like health and genetics, one's upbringing, one's identities, and one's past behavior.
- However, *fears* about the future are not *facts* about the future.**

Everything has a cause.

- Everything is an outcome of a cause.
- That means, for example, that someone fell (*outcome*) because they stepped on ice and lost their balance (*cause*).
- This doesn't mean that the fall was "meant to be" or that the person "deserved it." Just that the cause had an effect.

Life is worth living (even if it includes painful events).

- The risk of pain or discomfort comes with everything that makes life worth living. We may lose people we dearly love. Growth and making a difference take hard work.
- Imagine a life dedicated to avoiding *all* pain and discomfort. What would that look like?

*Likelihood just means the chances of something happening. The facts of our lives are not guarantees of our future.

**What we fear is not always realistic or likely. One may fear that no one will ever love them, but having this thought doesn't make it true - for most of us, this is highly unlikely.

Here are Dr. Linehan's thoughts on *why* radically accepting reality is a good idea:

Reasons to work on accepting



Denying or
fighting reality
→
getting stuck

- Ignoring, fighting, or denying reality does not change it.
- You can only change reality once you've accepted it.
- Pain is part of life; it tells us when something is wrong.
- *Suffering* happens when we are in pain and refuse to accept reality (getting stuck in denial, bargaining, or wishing things had gone differently).
- You can't convince reality that it made a mistake.
- Acceptance is not always pleasant; it can lead to sadness or grief - but also freedom and calm.
- Misery is the path out of hell; the only way out is through.
- You can't change the past, but you can change the future.



Facing and
accepting reality
→
change

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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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