

## Finding Balance and Acceptance in Your Daily Life

Local Psychologist Dr. Rafanello on the benefits of Dialectal Behavioral Therapy.

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**Dr. Nicole Rafanello.**  
Photo courtesy of Dr. Nicole Rafanello

“Know thyself.” “All things in moderation.” “Count to 10 when you’re angry before responding.” “You can’t change what you can’t see.” All of these are age-old axioms but how many of us can actually put them into play in our daily lives? And how?

Dialectical Behavior Therapy, or DBT, is a type of cognitive behavior therapy developed more than 30 years ago by renowned psychologist Marsha Linehan.

In essence, DBT strives for a balance between acceptance and change, or integrating contradictory philosophies (“you are loved the way you are,” however, “you must strive to change.”)

### Shaping Positive Behavior

The therapy includes skills training to help people find balance, control, and success in their life, work and relationships, by avoiding extremes and all or nothing thinking. Today, her methodology is being applied outside clinical settings.

DBT utilizes mindfulness practice, teaches ways to regulate emotions without ignoring them, ways to tolerate distress, and a means to get and improve relationships. It draws from behavioral laws that change and shape behavior, and also Zen practice, which teaches acceptance, balance, non-judgment, and skillful means.

How often do we “burn our motors out” trying to change what we cannot while instead ignoring and refusing to see reality as it is? Of course, we cannot possibly change what we do not see or refuse to see.

How often do we see only one side of a situation, our side, and ignore the antithesis or other side, in arguments, relationships, and ourselves? For example, we may only see our faults, or someone else’s, and refuse to consider strengths and so cannot make best use of them. When we do this, we miss important aspects of a situation that may more thoroughly help us to define a problem and find more creative/skillful solutions.

A dialectical dilemma represents polar opposites or apparent contradictions. To think dialectically is to consider all aspects of situations and find the middle road. It is not unlike the way

our legal system is devised. On either extreme are the adversaries and it is the role of the Judge/jury to find the compromise/truth in the middle. DBT skills address various dialectics, such as the extremes between pure emotional thinking and pure rational thinking devoid of emotion. It posits that wise mind - the perfect marriage of the rational and emotional mind - “the gut instinct,” should be the state of mind from which we should make important decisions.

It suggests we should defer decisions through distraction and self-soothing, until we are in that wise place. This is the opposite of impulsivity. Taking a non-judgmental stance so that we can see reality as it is without delusion or ridicule, and balancing acceptance with change in others and ourselves are the key aspects of DBT.

The skills help people engage in behaviors that are often opposite or counter-intuitive to the situation. For example, the opposite emotion skills ask people to get up, get out and get active when they are sad, approach things they fear, find compassion and understanding when they are angry, and ask themselves if they did anything wrong when they feel guilty.

How often do we mindfully consider or think about these things when we are in our emotional funks? This is the definition of mindfulness.

Thoughts are treated as just that, thoughts, and not facts, mental events that should be challenged with the question: what’s the other side of this and what’s being left out? When one does this, one can truly make an informed decision.

How often do we consider finding the balance between setting a limit/asking for what we want - not compromising our values or self-respect to keep a relationship - and stepping into the other person’s shoes and seeing their side when dealing with relationships and conflict? These are the interpersonal effectiveness skills of DBT. DBT suggests that we use metacognitive skills, or think about how we think.

The benefits of mindfulness practice and DBT skills have been well researched and have implications for workplace training, students, and for people who just want to live more skillfully.

*Dr. Rafanello is a licensed clinical and forensic psychologist with a DBT practice on Maple Avenue in Morristown. She has been providing DBT treatment and training to clients, students, colleagues, professional organizations, and institutions for more than 10 years. Symbolically, Dr. Rafanello’s office is decorated in shades of grey to stress the principle of finding the shades of grey in life. She offers free mindfulness practice on Soundcloud.com - check it out at [soundcloud.com/nrafanello](http://soundcloud.com/nrafanello), or visit [DrRafanello.com](http://DrRafanello.com).*