

Hi, my name is Abby Hutchinson and I work for Northwestern Counseling and Support Services as a job coach where I support clients with developmental disabilities at their place of employment. I am very passionate about mental health both professionally and personally. Prior to my position as a job coach, I supported clients with mental health diagnoses in residential facilities. Through my work in residential I learned that it is important to have treatment facilities both inpatient and outpatient to keep clients safe and help them manage their symptoms in a way that allows them to live as high quality a life as they can. Going forward I hope to fill a position where I become an advocate for those with mental health struggles and continue to normalize seeking treatment at the most appropriate level of care. I have my masters in mental health counseling and am figuring out how I would like to use that degree.

I am here today to talk about Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which is a type of therapy I have benefitted from and one that I would love to see used more with children. DBT was initially created for adults with borderline personality disorder, however its skills have been modified for children (Vallejo, 2023). DBT is comprised of skills divided into four categories: Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness, Emotion Regulation, and Distress Tolerance. I will talk about some skills from each category that I believe are tangible and adaptable to any age. With the rise of depression and anxiety amongst children, I believe that finding ways to incorporate DBT and its skills into Vermont school curriculums and designated agencies would be a positive step. As someone who does not work in schools or with children, I would be interested in talking with school counselors, therapists, and committee members that have this experience and discuss what the implementation of DBT might look like as well as ways that it is already utilized. My interest in using DBT with children comes from my memories of being a painfully

shy, anxious, and stressed-out child, particularly in the school setting. I believe that learning how to breathe and be in the present moment, developing assertiveness in social interactions, and managing my emotions would have been incredibly helpful.

As someone who has participated in DBT groups, I have found mindfulness skills, such as breathing, paying attention to my five senses, and gratitude journaling to be helpful in decreasing racing and ruminating thoughts associated with my anxiety. A breathing exercise that I like to practice, and I think kids might as well is breathing in and saying in my mind “inhale 1” and breathing out and saying in my mind “exhale 1.” I do this until I reach ten and repeat it until I feel less anxious (Linehan, 2015 p. 36). Another breathing exercise that I enjoy that I think kids would find fun is Star Breathing where you inhale and exhale while tracing the outline of a star (Learning Tree Yoga, 2020, 1:15:00). Our minds can be a chaotic busy place and developing a regular mindfulness practice can help manage symptoms of stress and anxiety and decrease negative thinking (Sinclair 2021).

The skills outlined in the Interpersonal Effectiveness category of DBT involve finding ways to improve communication. I have been working on finding ways to communicate my wants and needs more effectively and it has made me feel freer and less tense in some of my personal relationships. There is an acronym in DBT called DEAR MAN that allows someone to express their wants and needs in an assertive and respectful way. Another acronym called GIVE allows people to build relationships with one another by validating how the other is feeling (Linehan, 2015 pg. 57-60). I think developing those skills at an early age would allow children to learn how to manage conflict in a healthy way that doesn't involve confrontation or extreme repression of feelings.

Emotion Regulation is important for decreasing vulnerability to depression and anxiety. One of the DBT Emotion Regulation Skills is the PLEASE skill (also an acronym), which involves making sure all basic needs are met, such as tending to physical illnesses, eating a balanced diet, sleeping well, and exercising (Linehan, 2015 pg. 142). When I think about these needs and notice when one or more is not being met, I try to address them. For example, I might realize that my negative mood is attributed to a bad night's sleep or not exercising. It is important for kids to address the Please Skills for their mental health and success in school/other areas of their life.

Distress Tolerance also goes hand and hand with Emotion Regulation. The TIPP skill is one that I want to incorporate more into my life when I am feeling overwhelmed and can be used by adults and kids alike. It stands for Temperature, Intense Exercise, Paced Breathing, and Progressive Muscle Relaxation (Vallejo, 2023). Cold Water has been shown to slow down heart rate and increase blood flow to the heart and brain. Cold water can be utilized by splashing it on your face or putting an ice pack or bag of frozen veggies on your eyes (Linehan, 2015 pg. 160). Intense exercise involves running, doing jumping jacks etc. until you are tired. Paced breathing is counting your breath in and out much like the mindfulness activity I listed above. Progressive Muscle Relaxation involves tensing and relaxing muscles and usually goes from head to toe (Linehan, 2015 pg. 159). There are many guided recordings of Progressive Muscle Relaxations on the app Insight Timer. The TIPP skill is an effective tool in slowing down the mind and decreasing the urge to engage in self-harming behaviors.

I am very enthusiastic about DBT and the numerous skills it encompasses. I think implementing it in schools and designated agencies would be helpful in the decrease of

depression and anxiety amongst kids. The skills I listed above are not all the DBT skills, but some of the ones that resonate with me the most. Below are some of the resources I used to research and write this testimony. Thank you very much for your time and for listening to my testimony.

Resources:

[Learning Tree Yoga]. (2020, March 27). *Calm Breathing: Star Breathing* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmrZRBepRS0>

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT Skills Training Manual* (2nd ed., pp. 36 Mindfulness Handout 4B, 57 60 Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 5, 5A & 6, 142, Emotion Regulation Handout 20, 142, Distress Tolerance Handout 6- 6A, 159-160). The Guilford Press.

Sinclair, J. (2021, July 21). *How mindful breathing can change your day (and your life)*. BetterUp. Retrieved January 28, 2024, from <https://www.betterup.com/blog/mindful-breathing>

Vallejo, M. (2023, September 26). *DBT for children: How it works, effectiveness, and examples*. Choosing Therapy. Retrieved December 10, 2023, from <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/dbt-for-kids/>