

Self-Care Skillfulness for ECPs

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While there is general agreement that engagement in self-care represents best practice for psychologists (Maranzan et al., 2018; Practice Research & Policy Staff, 2010; Wise, Hersh, & Gibson, 2012), how best to teach/learn and “habitize” self-care skills remains an open empirical question (see Pakenham, 2015). Moreover, high levels of self-care may be especially important for early career psychologists (ECPs), who experience several heightened risk factors for burnout relative to other career stages (Dorociak, Rupert, & Zahniser, 2017).

There are a lot of self-care domains and skills. To my knowledge, Norcross and VandenBos (2018) offer the most authoritative and comprehensive coverage of the matter to date. In my experience, thinking about self-care within the context of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) skills (Linehan, 2014, 2015) has helped me to remember and more intentionally practice many of the suggestions I earlier came across in references like Norcross and Guy (2007).

While I provide a brief summary of DBT skills below (Linehan, 2014, 2015), and self-care strategies in those terms (Norcross & Guy, 2007; Norcross & VandenBos, 2018), you might also reflect on self-care practices in terms of concepts and skills from your own preferred system(s) of psychotherapy or self-care models. Indeed, alternative systems appear to be effective in facilitating improved self-care among psychologists in training (Pakenham, 2015; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007; see also Colman et al., 2016).

Refer to the cited sources for richer descriptions of self-care and skillfulness. Refer also to resources available at

- <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/self-care>
- <https://www.apa.org/education/grad/self-care.aspx>
- <https://nam.edu/clinicianwellbeing/>
- <https://kspope.com/ethics/self-care.php>

If you would be willing to share self-care practices that you find effective, I would love to hear from you. Drop me a note at kingch@montclair.edu or chriskingjdphd@gmail.com.

Orienting:
What is the basic point of DBT skills?

An ECP may encounter all sorts of problems in working, with links to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, that can give rise to misery and distress. Such problems may include rigidity; interpersonal difficulties and loneliness; judgementalness, mindlessness, limited insight into self or others, and emptiness; mood instability and mood-dependent behavior; and rashness, impulsivity, addiction, willfulness, and difficulty accepting the reality that is. Now, that is not to say that an ECP who experiences such problems is to blame/the cause (the fault may reside entirely in the environment), but an ECP will nevertheless often have to solve these problems anyway. In the face of such problems, one can solve the problem (via interpersonal effectiveness or problem-solving skills), change how one feels about the problem (via emotional regulation), tolerate the problem (via distress tolerance and mindfulness), stay miserable (no skills), or make the situation worse (no skills).

**Learning Principles:
How to understand problem behaviors or missing desired behaviors**

With the **behavioral worldview**, the basic ideas are that we do something because of what happened before (antecedent–response pairings) or after (good or bad consequences) we did it, and/or what we saw others do (observing models). One can understand a repeating problem behavior based on the forward flow from vulnerability factors → prompting event → a sequence (in any order) of actions, bodily sensations, thoughts, events, and/or feelings → the concerning behavior → consequences to oneself and others/things in the short- and long-term (which may make change difficult), including harms that may need to be repaired (**chain analysis**). (*Note: events* refer to situations or what others do. Being a behavioral treatment, there is much to say about DBT’s consideration of environmental influences on behavior, and its numerous strategies for helping to regulate the environment. However, such a summary is beyond the scope of this article.) One can also understand why a desirable behavior did not occur by asking whether the issue was a lack of know-how, a lack of remembering to do it, a lack of willingness to do it, or a chain, and then problem solving whichever was the impediment (**missing links analysis**).

Self-Care Skills	Doing (observe/ describe)	Will Do (willingness/ effectiveness)
<p>Analyzing behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize targeting root causes within systems rather than the peripheral issues. 		
<p>Regulating the environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all self-care is intrinsic to you (non-dialectical/non-behavioral thinking); also target your environment for the promotion of self-care. • Advocate for self-care with administrators (cite to evidence of increased provider productivity, satisfaction, and retention, and improved client outcomes). • Advocate for self-care within the discipline (accreditation, ethics, continuing education, research, conferences). • Collaborate with colleagues to make group support and self-care practice/monitoring part of operations (à la DBT consultation team). • Assess the comfortability and appeal of your work spaces; take steps to improve both. • Practice involves a lot of cognitive and affective awareness; lest we forget about our other functional modalities, incorporate more sensory awareness stimulators in your work spaces. • Appraise violence risk; proactively safeguard yourself and your work spaces. • Schedule gaps between face-to-face services/meetings for relaxation, reflection, family/friend contact, or support tasks. • Explore options for streamlining/delegating support/non-clinical activities like paperwork/business affairs. • Identify how you are negative impacted by managed care/administration; explore ways for increasing freedom/independence/control. 		

**Thinking Flexibly:
Shifting between ever-occurring polarities, including some common ones**

The spirit of the **dialectical worldview** is one of continuously welcoming, noticing, and entering paradoxes. You come to open-mindedly agree that, often, two contradictory ideas are both true (a.k.a. “both-and” thinking), and this can constantly be seen if you look hard enough in any situation. From this perspective, you are no longer threatened by repeated finger traps, because you know the trick to the puzzle no matter the context. Instead of getting stuck by becoming polarized (with an attitude that only one thing can be true, a.k.a. “either-or” thinking), you get flexible and slide back and forth between the two truths, until you happen creatively upon a gestalt. But with this new truth comes a new opposing truth, and on and on go the tides. Such is the pattern of the waves of life.

An important dialectic is acceptance vs. change, as exemplified by the Serenity Prayer: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” That is, the synthesis might be allowing both the intense desire for something other than what you have now *and* totally/holistically accepting what you have in your life right now. Other important dialectics include emotion mind vs. reasonable mind (*synthesis*: acting and deciding based on reason *and* a consideration of values and the experience of the rise and fall of all emotions); doing mind vs. nothing-to-do mind (*synthesis*: doing what is needed, including reviewing the past and planning for the future, *and* experiencing each moment’s uniqueness); and self-indulgence vs. self-denial (*synthesis*: moderation *and* satisfaction). The mindfulness and distress tolerance skills below are generally acceptance-focused, whereas the emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness skills are generally change-oriented.

Self-Care Skills	Doing (observe/ describe)	Will Do (willingness/ effectiveness)
<i>Refer to other sections, including mindfulness—walking the middle path, interpersonal effectiveness—walking the middle path, and emotional regulation—check the facts.</i>		

ACCEPTANCE SKILLS

Mindfulness:

Intentional awareness of just the present moment, without attachment, judgment, or rejection, as a path to more dialectical, balanced, skillful, insightful, and spiritual living

What is **mindfulness**? In DBT, mindfulness is the culmination of several complimentary behaviors that can be practiced in all sorts of ways. These behaviors consist of either observing (attending to using your senses to notice), describing (putting words to only what you observe), or participating (throwing oneself in to, flowing with, being one with, or acting intuitively to the current experience). There is a particular to do these behaviors, however, to do them mindfully. How is this way? First, one ought to observe, describe, or participate one at a time. That is, in any given moment (the “now”), just observe, or just describe, or just participate—letting go of distractions and concentrating. Second, one ought to do just one thing at a time without evaluative judgment (good or bad, like or dislike, should or should not, etc.)—although discerning judgment about what “is” (including acknowledging evaluations as evaluations) is okay. Third, one ought to non-judgmentally do one thing at a time in an effective manner (focusing on goals and doing what is necessary to achieve them, based on what is actually needed/works in the situation, and within the parameters of the rules). In sum, one can think of mindfulness in terms of **what (observe, describe, participate)** and **how (one-mindful, non-judgmental, and effective;** remember them all with **ONE POD**).

Mindfulness is also the approach for walking the middle path between two truths (**wise mind**), such as the important dialectic between the truth of our feelings (**emotion mind**) vs. the truth of our logic (**reasonable mind**). Put another way, we listen to our head and our heart, but come to trust our gut. Thus, an alternative perspective on mindfulness is **walking the middle path** by being always dialectical in attitude and orientation. Yet other takes on mindfulness include **spiritual perspectives** of learning about and cultivating experiences of ultimate reality, wisdom, loving kindness, and non-attachment/freedom. Still another take on mindfulness is using **skillful means** to balance, moment-to-moment, just being curiously present in the moment (**being mind**) vs. actively doing what may be needed toward pursuit of goals in that moment (**doing mind**). In this way, one walks a middle path of being more aware while engaged, being more skillful, and zealously putting in the footwork—while also letting go of having to obtain the desired results. There are an infinite number of mindfulness practices (as the point is to do everything mindfully). Concrete lists of exercises to get you started abound.

Self-Care Skills	Doing (observe/ describe)	Will Do (willingness/ effectiveness)
Observe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track your skills usage. • Ask your clients: how am I helpful, and listen mindfully to their answers. • Assess your self-care via self-report and collateral methods. 		
Describe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recall why you became a psychologist. • Psychoanalyze yourself. 		
Participate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throw your self-care attitude into self-care behaviors. • Respond to challenges. • Contribute to professional organizations. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join interdisciplinary movements to understand and heal worldly distress; further social missions that are important to you through action and activism. 		
<p>One-mindful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routinize temporary separations from practice (e.g., take lunch at the same time every day, and <i>just</i> focus on eating lunch) and ritualize transitions to/from work and non-work (e.g., listening to the radio while commuting). 		
<p>Non-judgment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome challenges. • Let go of perfectionism. 		
<p>Effective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge: self-care is ethically called for. • Practice the diverse skills you teach. • Schedule your skills. • Respond to challenges adaptively. • Diversify your professional schedule, activities, clients, and services. • Limit the amount of client material you share with family/friends. • Reevaluate why you became a psychologist and why you continue to do the work; address unhealthy motivations that you identify. • Value professional reading, study groups, continuing education, and conference-going as lifelong learning/improvement. • Appreciate the evidence that personal therapy is effective and normative among psychologists, and allow yourself personal/couples/family therapy. • Seek out alternative systems of personal development (creative, spiritual, self-help). 		
<p>Wise mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself: do your professional motivations help/hinder self-care? • Embrace your own unique style of helping; capitalize on your innate and learned skills. • Value creativity: practice innovative/novel methods. 		
<p>Walking the middle path:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate: self-awareness, growth, and renewal are always in flux; bouts of discomfort (prompting change) are followed by refreshment (a sense of acceptance), and vice versa. • Employ metaphors/paradoxes/irony. • The antithesis to thoughts interfering with you participating in personal therapy include practicing what you preach and personal therapy as continuing education. • Remember that, in many ways, psychologists are all intrinsically independent contractors, who have much freedom of choice. • Remember, wealth or not, practice is a great way to make a living. • Remember: there are typically many more pros than cons in the work; psychologist career satisfaction \geq other disciplines; and most have enduring, successful careers and would do it all over again. 		

<p>Spiritual perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplate whether you are integrating spirituality and personal growth into your life. • Seek meaning in your personal life such that psychology is not your ultimate meaning. • Identify and return to the spiritual antecedents that called you to the profession. • Engage in contemplative communing with your higher or inner power/wisdom. • Experience your wise mind's path to meaning and transcendence. • Value your interconnectedness with your clients. • Check in with your former mentors/therapists from time to time about your well-being. • Contemplate the awe-inspiring hope/optimism of the human spirit; cultivate a hopeful philosophy of life; believe in change. • If you have lost your perennial concern, caring, and belief in the possibility of change, seek out others to help you rekindle them. 		
<p>Skillful means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the busyness of your schedule. • Balance service provision-related stress reduction vs. acceptance of the stress so that you can instead focus on self/professional-validation/growth. 		

**Tolerating Distress:
Allowing for it to pass, without making it worse; experiencing pain without suffering; and
becoming free of inner demands**

Sometimes difficult experiences—whether they be very unpleasant emotions, or addictive urges, or interpersonal conflict, etc.—cannot be changed right now. Fortunately, the dialectical solution is that time heals all: no difficult experience persists forever. The **distress tolerance skills** help one cope with especially difficult emotions, urges, or realities so as not to make the situation worse while waiting for time to do its thing. The skills are not meant to remove distress, but instead to keep it from worsening—either in the short-term by staving off escalation of the situation, or in the long-term by negating the need for problematic (ineffective and hence unmindful) coping strategies that, while undoubtedly providing relief in the short-term, give rise to more problems in the long run (and hence more distress).

To tolerate distress, one has many options. If one is experiencing a crisis—a transient, acutely stressful time where there is intense pressure to resolve the situation, but when we may be overwhelmed, prompted by our emotions to behave in counterproductive ways, or the problem or pain cannot be quickly lessened—the effective goal may well be to simply not make the situation worse (**crisis survival skills**). This is distinct from skills for tackling everyday problems or enhancing one’s life. To survive a moment of crisis, one can pump the breaks by use of **STOP**: stop, take a step back, observe, and proceed mindfully. Or one can reflect on the **pros and cons** in both the short-term and long-term of acting skillfully, and the pros and cons of acting non-skillfully (impulsively or ineffectively). This skill is most likely to be successful when done proactively (externalize via writing and then rehearsing) before a crisis strikes. During a crisis, the list can then be re-read and the outcomes visualized. Regarding the actual list-making, it can be depicted as a two-by-two matrix, with *short-term* and *long-term* written at the top of the two columns, *skillful* and *non-skillful* heading the two rows, and all consequences written in the four boxes, before circling back around and adding a + next to each positive consequence and a – next to each negative consequence. There is no necessary math involved in then deciding on how to proceed based on the foregoing—the pros/cons process is a mindful practice itself, facilitating access to wise mind for decision-making.

Another skill when in crisis is to engage the body’s rest-and-relax system. One way to do this is by bending over and placing your face in ice-cold water for 30 seconds or else applying a cold pack to your upper face (**temperature**). Another method is **intense exercise** lasting 15 minutes or so. Yet another strategy is **paced breathing** with longer exhales than inhales (for example, 5 seconds in and 8 to 10 seconds out). Still another technique is **progressive muscle relaxation** (essentially a set of certain bodily flexes—Google it, it is easy to do) that one comes to pair with the repeated word “relax” so as to eventually transform the practice into the more efficient **paired muscle relaxation**. There is also a variant of paired muscle relaxation where the word and bodily sensation of “relax” is paired with useful thoughts that will be used to challenge stressful thoughts in situations when one’s cognitions play an instrumental role in undesirable emotional experiences. All of these techniques can be remembered collectively as the **TIPP** skill.

Yet another skill for coping with crisis is to distract in any of several ways, remembered collectively as **ACCEPTS**:

- **activities** (that you can do immediately);
- **contribute** (think about how you feel when someone thanks you for holding the door open for them);
- **compare** (to others who may be worse off, or to times when you were worse off);
- throw yourself all the way into things connected to different **emotions** (for example, if you are worried, listen in a mindful way to yoga studio-type music);

- temporarily **push away** the distressing thoughts (just putting elf on the shelf for a bit);
- throw yourself into thinking different **thoughts** (for example, if sad, think in a mindful way about what you are looking forward to during the upcoming holiday); and
- throw yourself into feeling different **sensations** (for example, if angry, and feeling hot and tight, use a cold press and do some progressive muscle relaxation).

Still another crisis survival skill is to **self-soothe with the senses**, doing calming or pleasing things that you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch, or perhaps doing a body scan-type meditation (Google it for guided audios). Finally, one can dialectically **IMPROVE** the moment while awaiting the relief bestowed by the passage of time, through the use of **imagery**, finding **meaning**, **praying**, doing **relaxing** things, focusing on just **one thing** at a time, taking a brief **vacation** from the experience physically or mentally, or **encouraging** oneself by talking to oneself in the voice of a caring, supportive coach.

While changing the problem or changing how you feel about the problem are often good distress tolerance approaches (and emotional regulation approaches as well, but more on that later), sometimes they do not work (and rejection of this reality will not make them work). At that point, one has three options left: make matters worse, stay miserable, or else **accept the reality** of the situation. The logic of opting for the latter is that pain in life is unavoidable (as it serves a purpose in nature), yet one need not suffer if he or she wholly, or **radically**, **accepts** unavoidable pain. Radical means complete—mind, body, and spirit—and acceptance means acknowledgment and allowance for what is, without judgment. We actually do this quite often: with things that we like or prefer! Nonetheless, the same practice can be cultivated for things that we do not like or prefer.

To further flesh it out, acceptance is the acknowledgment that everything has causes, and so if something occurs, it was caused, and therefore it should have happened, whether we approve of it or not. However, one must only accept the causal nature of the past and up to the fleetingness of the present moment; once you have done so, you are free to try to change the next moment. Thus, acceptance is neither condoning nor being passive. You are a lot more likely to be able to change the next moment toward your preferences when what you try is connected to reality—to what actually has been and what actually is right now (causes and consequences), rather than what you wished it were (which may well not reflect actual causes and consequences). The same logic applies to the future: only realistic limits need to be accepted.

Acceptance is often experienced as a letting go, as a relieving or centering, or as a calmness, with the possibility of or urge to move forward with ordinary pain, even if sadness and grief are also a part of the experience. One concludes that he or she can always find a life that is worth living, even if it is not the life that he or she wants. “This is, and I do not like it or want it to be this way at all, but while that is true, it is also true that this reality is not a catastrophe, as change in myself, others, and the world is constant.” The pros/cons, opposite action, and cope ahead skills can also assist with this practice.

To access a radically accepting state, one must repeatedly **turn the mind** away from non-acceptance (observe for it) and toward choosing acceptance each time anew. A related practice is to repeatedly turn the mind toward **willingness** (a wholehearted posture of responding to life’s challenges readily, voluntarily, wisely, as needed, without grudges, and with awareness of connections) and away from willfulness (an orientation toward ignoring, declining, giving up, resisting, refusing, or responding thoughtlessly, impulsively, forcedly, resentfully, or self-centeredly). Maintaining a Mona Lisa-like wry smirk (**half-smile**), keeping one’s hands open and palms up (**willing hands**), and **progressive muscle relaxation** can all aid these acceptance practices by targeting the bodily component of the radicalness. Finally, one can allow for the brain to do what it does—to busily generate random thoughts—without becoming fused with those thoughts (distinguishing between “you” are your thoughts). All one has to do is mindfully allow the thoughts to just happen (vs. trying to block or suppress them), and just observe them with child- or beginner-like curiosity and nothing more (**mindfulness of current thoughts**). While

distinct skills, all of the reality acceptance skills are deeply intertwined, such that practice of one effectively involves practice of all of the others too.

Lastly is how to cope with, and become free from, distressing, addictive desires and urges, and intense emotions. Addictions are behaviors that you engage in repeatedly in response to urges despite negative consequences. They tend to begin with positive reinforcement (pleasure by doing it) and then, when one’s baseline gets thrown out of whack and becomes uncomfortable, come to be maintained chiefly by negative reinforcement (relief from doing it). Many people think of common addictions like drugs/alcohol, food, sex, gambling, and shopping, but anything can become an addiction—like running or meditating.

The skills for addictions are the **DCBA** skills. There is **dialectical abstinence**—the balancing of, on the one hand, a 100% abstinence approach to your addiction with, on the other hand, a relapse prevention plan that springs into action to reduce the harm of any lapse should it occur (for instance, that stops it from becoming a full-blown relapse). There is **clear mind**—the dialectical synthesis between the willful (in the throes of obsession and compulsion) **addict mind** and the overly-optimistic (it is all behind me) **clean mind**. Clear mind is both abstinent and vigilant. There is **community reinforcement**—finding, if needed, and letting healthy, supportive persons know that you are working on your addiction so that they can encourage you, and participating in alternative, rewarding activities that do not entail your addiction. At least try it out for a week or so. Relatedly, there is **burning bridges**—getting rid of the people, places, and things that trigger your addiction. There is also the **building new bridges** skill—distracting with different images and smells than those tied to your addiction when cravings occur. This can include use of the visualization of urge surfing over a “craving wave” (yes, it is a little unstable/precarious, but that is the thrill of the sport of surfing!), rather than trying to suppress the natural rise and fall of an urge. For if you try to push back a wave in the ocean, you get deluged with a face full of salt water. You are better off turning around and riding on top of the wave until it passes. There is the **alternate rebellion** skill—if you have a rebellious streak and that plays into your addictive behavior, rebel in creative, effective ways rather than giving in to addictive behavior to do so. Finally, there is **adaptive denial**—when an urge hits, adamantly tell yourself that you do not want to engage in the addictive behavior, and that you are not actually going to do it anyway.

Self-Care Skills	Doing (observe/ describe)	Will Do (willingness/ effectiveness)
Crisis survival: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to mindfulness and emotional regulation skills, and reflect on them in terms of distress tolerance potential. 		
Reality acceptance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesize the pros/cons of practice. • Accept that practice may not always be ideal/what you want it to be, and this may well be unfortunate, but it is still not a catastrophe. • Accept the inevitability of some professional life spillage into your personal life. 		
Addiction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honestly assess for unhealthy escapism. • Monitor/address addictive stimuli/behavior. 		

CHANGE SKILLS

Social Skills:

Getting your needs met in relationships

If you wish to be more **interpersonally skilled** (which yields many benefits), you may need to determine **what may be getting in the way** of you being your most effective, be it a lack of skills knowledge, confusion as to your wants, a selective focus on short-term goals, or interfering thoughts, feelings, or people. Consider the **pros and cons** of using skills versus either demanding, attacking, stonewalling, acting passively, or giving in, and **challenge any beliefs** that may impede getting your interpersonal objectives met. Then proceed to the next step in enhancing your competence in this area. **Check the facts** and clarify which of three objectives you have in any given social interaction. Ideally, you will be able to check off all three, but sometimes you cannot, and so you need to **clarify your priorities** ahead of time or as the interaction proceeds. Is your utmost objective to (1) get or maintain a positive relationship (get someone to feel good about you), (2) get what you want from the other person or get them to accept your “no,” or (3) maintain your self-respect?

If you need to meet some people before you can get them to feel positively about you, you will have the best luck finding potential friends by looking for people who are reasonably nearby you (**proximity**) and/or engaged in similar activities (**similarity**). If you need to **join a conversation**, do so skillfully by looking for “open groups” rather than “closed groups,” wait for a gap in the conversation, and ask an approachable-looking group member whether you can join the conversation. **Converse skillfully** via small talk (read, listen, and do interesting things); asking and answering (with a little more detail to deepen the conversation); not interrupting; and mirroring another’s self-disclosure. Also, **express your liking of another genuinely** without being gushy. Then apply the **GIVE** skill to keep the relationship going well by being gentle (dropping threats, attacks, judgments, and contempt); acting interested (e.g., eye contact, head nodding, and “mmm” and “mm-hmm”); validating the other person (described in more detail below); and keeping an easy-going manner (The Dude? Woody Harrelson? Willie Nelson?). Being **mindful of others**, via your ONE POD skills, also fosters closeness.

If your primary objective is instead to get what you want from someone, including for them to accept your “no,” then **DEAR MAN** is the way to go. First **determine how intensely (along a continuum) to request or decline** based on several factors: timing, preparedness, priorities/self-respect, rights/authority, relationship type, recent balance of give and take, and short-term and long-term goals. Then proceed to the ask, or assertion of “no,” by

- describing the situation objectively;
- expressing your feelings and opinions (“I” statements);
- asserting your request/decline clearly;
- reinforcing via explaining the positive consequences that will flow from compliance (and providing those rewards after the fact);
- remaining mindful (repeatedly return to your request and ignore diversions/attacks);
- appearing confident in your demeanor; and
- negotiating (including asking the other person for ideas if stuck, or taking a break with the expressed intention to return to the matter soon to see if a way forward has presented itself).

Your foremost priority may instead be to maintain your self-respect in an interpersonal exchange. The primary skill here is **FAST**: be fair to (and validating of) yourself and the other person, avoid apologizing or over-apologizing, stick to your values, and be truthful. Your self-respect may require **ending an interfering or destructive relationship**, and this task calls for all three of the primary interpersonal effectiveness skills along with some of the mindfulness and emotional regulation skills described above

and below. The decision to end a relationship should come from wise mind rather than emotion mind, after considering first whether an important, non-destructive relationship can be problem solved. Furthermore, the process should involve coping ahead to practice and troubleshoot, being direct with the interpersonal effectiveness skills, acting opposite of love if involved, and applying intimate partner violence safety procedures/accessing supports if indicated.

Besides objective effectiveness, walking the middle path in your relationships involves synthesizing, via dialectics, acceptance (validation) and (behavior) change skills. Useful **dialectical thoughts/attitudes** here include the synthesis of opposing forces, interconnectedness, and the idea that change is constant and interactive. In adolescent DBT, the **THINK** skill is also often taught to counteract rapid negative appraisals of others: think about it from the other person’s point of view, have empathy, generate multiple interpretations for the other person’s behavior, notice how the other person has been trying and/or struggling lately, and practice kindness.

Validation, distinct from condoning or acknowledging non-facts, is acknowledgement of the valid—that all thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are caused and are thus understandable (whether valid/fact-fitting or not). For example, one’s negative emotion may flow from a cognitive distortion. While the irrational thought is invalid (e.g., that one will be ostracized for their behavior or who they are, when not actually the case) and should not be validated, the feeling (i.e., shame) makes sense given the occurrence of the invalid inference. Because the genuine feeling fits the facts of the thinking error, it is the appropriate recipient of validating acknowledgement. There is always a kernel of truth somewhere if you look closely; thus, validation is always a good starting point in interpersonal interactions. **Levels of validation** proceed from shallow to deep: paying attention, reflecting, inferring the unspoken, communicating understanding, acknowledging the valid, and showing equality. These validation skills ought to be applied to ourselves in the same fashion as applied to others. Being invalidated can at times be helpful, but is often painful regardless (oh the joys of supervision!), and calls for interpersonal effectiveness (self-validation, social support) in addition to mindfulness (non-judgmentalness), emotional regulation (checking the facts, opposite action), and distress tolerance (radical acceptance).

Behavior change strategies involve operant conditioning principles. Increase behavior you want with **positive reinforcement** (add a positive) or **negative reinforcement** (remove a negative). Couple reinforcement with **shaping** (build up incrementally) and **generalization** (facilitate similar behavioral learning in different situations). In doing so, consider **timing** (immediacy, every time → intermittently), **context**, **quantity**, **naturalness** (> arbitrariness), and **individualization/observed effect on behavior** (to confirm that the consequence actually functions as a reinforcer). Modeling is also useful here.

Decrease or weaken unwanted behavior via **extinction** (cease reinforcement, and ride out the temporary extinction burst of the behavior) and **satiation** (provide a reward or relief ahead of the behavioral occurrence). Stop or suppress unwanted behavior carefully (consider certainty of enforcement and the risks of driving the behavior underground or producing demoralization/learned helplessness) via **positive punishment** (add a negative) or **negative punishment** (remove a positive). Couple punishment with the reinforcement of alternative desired behaviors.

Self-Care Skills	Doing (observe/ describe)	Will Do (willingness/ effectiveness)
<p>Get/maintain positive relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gently approach (tend, befriend) those with whom you professionally interact, rather than aggressively approaching (fight) or avoiding (flight). 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce isolation; increase contact with colleagues. • Build/maintain assistive collegial relations with other local professionals. • Spend quality time with colleagues. • Within reason (ethics, transference), ensure you have some invigorating clients whom you enjoy. • Value your long-term client relations. • Recall gratifying client relationships and your termination experience. • Contact/spend time with friends/family (including during work hours). • Seek out friendships; monitor for diminishing friendships (number, quality) and work on them. • Tread carefully in using your psychologist powers with your family members. 		
<p>Getting what you want/saying no and behavior change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be effectively assertive with clients, administrators, colleagues, referral sources, and external entities, who/that would compromise your integrity, ethics, or well-being, including by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ appropriately minimizing client emergencies/encroachments on your personal time; ○ insisting on your safety and that of your loved ones (decline certain clients, refuse to disclose, secure your work setting, etc.); ○ being strong in appropriately referring out challenging/non-responsive clients; ○ upon termination, being clear as to the why's and how's for/of post-termination contacts or renewed services; and ○ insisting on a sufficient income. 		
<p>Maintain self-respect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your professional roles, responsibilities, expectations, and limitations so that you can explicitly communicate/establish them with others (professional bill of rights, practice policies, written treatment contract with goals and shared responsibilities). • Tailor treatment, but within reason; monitor for excessive customization, flexibility, or accommodations. • Monitor for boundary crossings. • Monitor for greed. • Neither agree with the opinion of you held by your most idolizing nor most critical client. 		
<p>Walking the middle path:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a balanced caseload (number of clients, proportion of risky clients). • Balance empathy/connection and healthy distance with clients. • Remember that your role is to meet clients' needs; theirs is not to meet yours. • Reflect on clients' transference on to you; manage your countertransference via self-care (including with self-insight, conceptualization, anxiety management, and empathy). 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ardently protect your personal time/life; synthesize commitments to self and clients. • Utilize family/friends (non-psychologists) to help you remain grounded/humble. • Be irreverent (humor, absurdity). 		
<p>Validation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-validate; unconditionally accept yourself as a professional and a person; remember that self-compassion enhances understanding/compassion for others. • Balance (based on how much is restorative) and be intentional with solitary time vs. socializing. • Arrange for professional support to balance the provision and receipt of nurturance (peer support, colleague assistance, supervision, mentorship, consultation, treatment teams, co-therapy, personal therapy). • Arrange for personal support from nurturing people in your private life. 		
<p>Behavior change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recall your significant mentor(s) and their assets. • <i>Refer also to behavior change elements in other skills.</i> 		

Regulating Emotions:

Understanding your feelings, and decreasing the frequency and intensity of unwanted emotions

The **emotional regulation** skills concern affective insight and intentional modification of current or potential future emotional states. Simply **understanding and naming emotions** can help to regulate difficult emotional experiences through self-validation (refer back to the levels of validation as to how). Emotions are engrained in us for their adaptive utility. Each emotion has an associated urge or urges that promptly motivate us for actions to overcome common life challenges (although this function can often miss the mark for one reason or another); they also communicate to and influence others (we are social creatures, after all) as well as ourselves (an alert to pay attention to the moment).

There are many **ways (models) to describe emotions**. One that I have anecdotally found to be efficient and effective is a seven-factor model of basic emotions—two “positive” (happiness and interest) and five “negative” (anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and guilt/shame). These basic emotions can vary in degree and be combined to produce complex emotions (e.g., annoyance vs. anger vs. rage; intense interest + intense joy = love). A secondary emotion is an aftereffect, such as when one channels anger to mask preceding, actually prompted fear. DBT especially attends to the aforementioned seven basic emotions plus envy, jealousy, and love (guilt and shame are also distinguished). Gradations/variants of dissatisfaction, distress, shy, cautious, surprise, courage, powerful, doubtful, and boredom might also be addressed.

One can visualize an emotion as a central box containing internal components or sub-boxes (biological changes in the brain and nervous system, biological experiences of body sensations and action urges) and external components or sub-boxes (what you look like, what you say, and what you do). This central box is surrounded by several other relevant boxes: preexisting vulnerability factors; prompting events and attentional awareness thereof; thoughts about the prompting event; awareness of the current emotion; and aftereffects, including secondary emotions. The direction of many interconnections among the boxes within this model are variable. For example, sometimes a prompting event leads to a thought which leads to an emotion. This is illustrated well by the tumbleweed metaphor. Two people encounter a large tumbleweed in the road while driving out West, appraise the risk it poses differently based on their differential experience with tumbleweeds (prior vs. none), and have two very different emotional reactions (e.g., calm vs. panic). However, sometimes a prompting event leads to an emotion which leads to a thought. For example, stubbing your toe immediately produces pain and anger, which then gives rise to the thought, “[insert your favorite expletive]!” All affective experiences can be understood via the constituent elements of this model, which in turn can help one to identify and label an emotion that he or she is experiencing. This identification/labeling is also important for application of the check the facts and opposite action skills (described below). Moreover, the remainder of the emotional regulation skills offer several options for addressing the different elements of this model as might be indicated (e.g., problem solving for prompting events, checking the facts for intervening cognitions, acting opposite for unwanted emotions).

To change unwanted emotional responses, the first step is to **check the facts**. This skill involves considering (potentially involving mindfulness POD and wise mind skills, dialectical thinking, problem solving, coping ahead, and radical acceptance) which specific emotion you want to change; the objective prompting event; and your thoughts about said event (assumptions and interpretations, including about the likelihood of an outcome and the magnitude/importance of the outcome). You then decide whether your emotion or its intensity or duration fits the facts. For instance,

- fear fits the fact of a real danger;
- anger fits the fact of a blocked goal or intense pain;
- sadness fits the fact of a loss of something valued;
- disgust fits the fact of exposure to something potentially poisonous or contaminating;

- guilt fits the fact of your violation of your own internal standards;
- shame fits the fact of your violation of other’s standards such that you may be rejected;
- envy fits the fact of others having something you want or need;
- jealousy fits the fact of a danger that something important or valued of yours will be taken away or lost; and
- love fits the fact of something enhancing your quality of life or chance of attainment of your goals.

Thus, all of these emotional responses are justified/valid. The intensity and duration of your emotions, in turn, are justified based on the probability of an outcome, its magnitude for your life, and how effective the emotion is for you currently. Invalid emotions are those that do not fit the prompting events, or that are excessively intense or long-lasting given the degree of potential threat or catastrophe. Such emotions still have causes, though, and thus are understandable; they are just not justified.

Even when an emotion fits the facts, one still has to ask whether acting on the emotion’s urge(s) will be effective. Anger is a good example here, as it is often a justified emotional reaction (e.g., many things interfere with our assorted goals each day), but its experience is often unwanted or its expression ineffective (e.g., too difficult to modulate and gets out of control). When an emotion is unjustified, or when it is valid but acting on it would be ineffective, the **opposite action** skill is often a good one to apply. The skill involves all of the foregoing (understand and name the emotion, check the facts, identify the action urge(s)) and then identifying the opposite actions/behaviors, which you then do, all the way (mind, body, and action), repeatedly, until the unwanted emotion goes down.

Emotion	Action urges	Opposite actions
Fear	run/avoid	approach
Anger	attack/insult	gently avoid/be a little kind
Sadness	withdraw/isolate	activate
Disgust	keep distance/contempt	get closer/be kind
Guilt/Shame	hide/apologize	tell others who will accept it/repeat it if warranted, go public/apologize/repair/accept consequences/refrain if warranted, hide/be interpersonally effective/change others’ values/join new group/repeat
Envy	take/destroy/be ungrateful	leave be/count blessings
Jealousy	control/hoard	let go/share
Love	spend time with/think about what is loved	avoid/distract/remind why unjustified

One can also seek to change a prompting event for an unwanted, justified emotion via **problem solving** (changing the problem event or avoiding it). The steps of planful problem solving are to

- identify and describe the problematic situation, including checking the facts;
- identify your goal as to outcome;
- brainstorm lots of alternatives (quantity over quality here);
- choose a solution strategy (best pros/cons ratio of the different alternatives, or else wise-mind decision-making);
- implement the solution; and
- evaluate the outcome (if it does not work, go back to the solution-strategy step and select to the next best alternative on your list).

Finally, if an emotion is justified and likely to be effective, one ought to go ahead and act on the urges.

In addition to decreasing unwanted emotions, one can also reduce vulnerability to such emotions in the first place via the **ABC PLEASE** skills. **Accumulating positive emotions** has short-term and long-term prongs. In the short-term, the skill is to sprinkle your life with immediately pleasant experiences among an extensive menu of options limited only by that of your blisses (e.g., eat a piece of candy, laugh, engage in a hobby). Avoid avoiding and be mindful during these experiences. The long-term variant entails

- identifying values that are important to you,
- prioritizing them (those that are most important right now),
- selecting a prioritized value to work on (do pros/cons if needed),
- identifying goals related to the chosen value,
- choosing a goal to work on (do pros/cons if needed),
- identifying actions steps toward the goal, and
- taking an action step.

Building mastery involves doing something daily that imparts a sense of accomplishment, and doing things that are challenging but surmountable, gradually increasing the difficulty (if too easy, increase some; if too hard, decrease some). **Coping ahead** involves

- anticipating and describing a situation that may prove difficult for you in the future,
- deciding which skills you want to use should that situation come to pass (you might write this plan out),
- vividly imagining the situation with yourself as first-person participant,
- rehearsing effective coping in your mind (exactly what and how you will think and act/speak, including for new problems that might arise and your most feared catastrophe), and then
- winding down with relaxation techniques.

Decreasing vulnerability to unregulated emotion mind is also facilitated by taking care of the body (**PLEASE**). Treat **physical illness** (take care of yourself, see the doctor and take medicine as needed, etc.); **eat in a balanced way** (eat neither too much nor too little and instead regularly and mindfully throughout the day); **avoid illicit drug use and excessive drinking**; get **balanced sleep** (practice good sleep hygiene); and get **adequate exercise** (ideally daily).

Lastly is the management of really difficult or extreme emotions short of, or in transition to, the distress tolerance skills. Because suppression can increase emotional suffering, one ought to instead practice **mindfulness of current emotions**. This can include mindful observations of the emotion, such as noticing that because you can observe your emotion, you are not your emotion; not necessarily acting on the emotion; neither suppressing nor holding onto or amplifying the emotion; and surfing the emotion's "wave." It can include mindfully observing body sensations, including noticing where in the body the emotion is felt and how long those sensations last. And it can include loving your emotion, via respect, non-judgment, willingness, and radical acceptance. When emotional arousal is very high, one can be skillful in **managing extreme emotions**. One can mindfully observe and describe whether he or she has reached a skills breakdown point, such that he or she is distressingly overwhelmed, ruminating on the emotion, and no longer able to fully utilize executive functioning to process information, problem solve, or apply complex skills. After checking the facts (and using skills if you find that you are not really falling apart or out of control), one can reduce arousal with the distress tolerance crisis survival skills before returning to mindfulness of current emotions, and then proceeding to other emotional regulation skills as needed.

Finally, regulating emotions can be difficult because of the biological contributions to emotional experiences, environmental reinforcement of emotional behavior, irrational beliefs or attitudes about emotions and their expression, a lack of skillful know-how, and mood-dependent behavior and emotional

overload. Some **troubleshooting** can be helpful here. For biological sensitivity, the PLEASE skills can be applied. If your environment is reinforcing poorly regulated emotionality, in light of the function of emotions, one can do a pros/cons, seek new reinforces, and utilize interpersonal effectiveness skills—including self-validation. When the interference comes from thoughts, one can check the facts, dialectically challenge myths, and practice mindful non-judgment. For a lack of skill knowledge, you can review skills or else get assistance from someone with such knowledge. If moodiness is interfering with application of emotional regulation skills, one can do pros/cons and practice reality acceptance and certain mindfulness skills (participation, effectiveness). If you feel emotionally overwhelmed, you can use mindfulness of current emotions, TIPP skills, and problem solving as needed.

Self-Care Skills	Doing (observe/ describe)	Will Do (willingness/ effectiveness)
<p>Understand and name emotions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe bodily sensations. 		
<p>Check the facts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate what truly maintains your overworking/impedes you engaging in self-care escapes. • Use observation, disclosure to social supports, and discipline-specific self-report measures of irrational thinking to monitor your work-related thinking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Counteract catastrophizing: ask whether something really occurred, what are the probabilities, and what is the worst that could happen? ○ Counteract judgmental thinking (e.g., “I must . . .,” “I should . . .”), including that good psychologists must be liked by all of their clients; clients should work as hard as you; you should be able to be effective with all clients; and you should not experience emotional difficulties because you are a psychologist. ○ Counteract non-dialectical thinking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider alternative possibilities/ explanations to assumed personal causality for client events. ▪ Recast success as a process and along a continuum; there are instrumental successes (e.g., psychologist effort, clients’ partial progress), not just ultimate success (complete symptom remission). ▪ Reflect on failures/successes in a balanced fashion, distinguish failed cases from personal failure, and accept your inevitable professional limitations. ▪ Counteract unrelenting standards: that you are expected or need to take on more work than you do, that you must be perfect (compare yourself to similarly situated peers, not authorities), or that your self-care regimen need be unrealistic. ▪ Recall the dialectic of caring vs. challenging. 		
<p>Act opposite:</p>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the relevance of other skills for this practice, and vice versa (e.g., getting what you want interpersonally, checking the facts, validation). 		
<p>Problem solve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the relevance of this skill for other areas (e.g., regulating the environment). 		
<p>Accumulate positive emotions—short term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate activities in your personal and professional schedules as to pleasure. • Regularly engage in a hobby (reading, crafts, gardening, watchmaking, etc.). • Be humorous/seek humor. • Schedule gratitude exercises. • Stress-relax your muscles (progressive muscle relaxation, massage, etc.). • Relax or contact friends/family during breaks. • Get together with colleagues at work (and at breaks/escapes). • At work, arrange for contact/touch with comforting object. • In your personal life, seek comforting human contact/touch, including sexual gratification. • Recall successful therapy cases. • Vary your daily professional and personal activities. • Keep a weekly day of respite. • Regularly play away from work (renewed or new exciting adventures). • Limit exposure to upsetting imagery/media. 		
<p>Accumulate positive emotions—long term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate activities in your personal and professional schedules as to meaningfulness. • Visualize your valued possible future professional selves; take actions steps toward them. • Identify/generate and return to your personal/life mission (what it will say on your tombstone) for prioritization/focus. • Take trips, vacations, personal retreats, sabbaticals (be “off the grid”). 		
<p>Build mastery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate activities in your personal and professional schedules as to mastery. • Include some “rosy prognoses” or “errorless learning”/positive psychology activities. 		
<p>Cope ahead with emotional situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind yourself of reality: practice is frequently demanding/tiring. • Work near but under your max so that a reserve remains for the unexpected (work emergencies, personal demands, self-care needs). • Address your own limitations/needs rather than feigning omnipotence. • Protect against different types of burnout. 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commiserate with colleagues about the universality of practice’s stressors. • Utilize a team approach for high-stress/-risk practice. • Know the data about areas of practice with high risk for ethical complaints or malpractice lawsuits. • Let go of wishful thinking and self-blame about self-care; instead execute a contract with yourself to be action-oriented and chart your progress. 		
<p>Care for the mind via tending to the body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not forget about this self-care modality. • Practice balanced eating/hydration. • Monitor/get balanced sleep. • Balance the heavily mental work: get adequate (regular) exercise; move around more; engage in physical activities with clear outcomes (e.g., yard work). 		
<p>Mindfulness of current emotions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refer to mindfulness and understanding and naming emotions suggestions.</i> 		
<p>Managing extreme emotions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refer to mindfulness, check the facts, and distress tolerance suggestions.</i> 		
<p>Troubleshooting emotional regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor self-care skills to an analysis of the different personal, environmental, and contextual/interactive stressors that you encounter. • Reflect on the culmination of all of your client terminations. • Handle significant stressful life events, including by soliciting advice from more senior colleagues. • Discuss your professional/personal commitments with social supports. • Identify negative effects on you and your loved ones by discussing work stressors and soliciting feedback. • Solicit friends/family to prompt you when you are too much in rational mind without enough irreverence (spontaneous, genuine). 		

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