



# Dialectical Behavior Therapy Program Contract Patient's Agreement

*Private & Confidential*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to the terms and conditions of this Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) treatment program as follows:

## **I. Basic Principles of Therapy Agreement:**

Therapy is based on three unalterable principles:

1. *Mutual Trust.* My therapist and I are entering into this contract in a trusting manner. I need to trust that my therapist has made a commitment to work with me and will actually be available as per the terms and conditions of this contract. Similarly, my therapist needs to trust that I will maintain my commitment to the terms of this contract. Each party is responsible for maintaining that trust.
2. *Safety.* Therapy cannot proceed until there is clear agreement about maintaining safety. I agree to commit to the goal of safety towards self and others.<sup>1</sup> If there are concerns that this can't happen, my therapist and I need to have in place a clear safety plan that specifies the steps I or others need to take to ensure safety. At the very least, active pursuit of harmful behaviors to self or others robs me of the chance to remain committed to the current therapy goals and to learn helpful ways of dealing with problems in life. By agreeing to do my best to keep myself and others safe I have a better chance of applying the principles of DBT to my life. All participants in DBT therapy are expected to act in a way that does not endanger their therapist, family, or others (e.g., through threats or acts of violence against people or property). Such behavior may result in legal consequences or risk termination of therapy.
3. *Family therapy.* Effective therapy often involves the inclusion of family and significant others. Although I am assured confidentiality, I agree to maintain an open and honest communication with my family in family sessions. Family members agree to learn what they can about my problems and although they can't solve them, they will do what they can to help.

## **II. The Aim of Therapy Agreement:**

DBT Therapy is about learning skills that are likely to increase my ability to have a life that is worth living. Therapy is not about "feeling better" in the first instance. In fact, a good part of DBT is about learning to be "better at feeling" some of my uncomfortable emotions in the service of beginning to live a life that is worth living.

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<sup>1</sup> A distinction is made between suicidal and/or self-harm thoughts (which may be in my mind) and actually developing and carrying out a plan to harm myself (which involve my actions).

### **III. Target Behaviors Agreement:**

These are of vital importance and prioritized in the following order:

1. ***Eliminating behaviors that are harmful to self or others:*** Reducing self/other-harm behaviors is a primary therapy goal. I will work towards solving problems in ways that do not include intentional harm to self, others, attempts to die or suicide.<sup>2</sup>
2. ***Eliminating therapy-interfering behaviors:*** I agree to work on any problems that interfere with the progress of therapy. Therapy is about working together and requires the participation of both my therapist and me. I agree to give feedback to my therapist on how I am finding therapy, especially if I am concerned about anything that occurs in therapy. Similarly, my therapist agrees to provide feedback on how they are finding therapy.
3. ***Reducing quality-of-life interfering behaviors:*** These are unhelpful problems that may block my chances of living a life of reasonable quality. Guidelines for addressing these problems are as follows: Problems linked to higher priority targets established by me or to my own life goals take precedence. Beyond this, immediate problems take priority<sup>3</sup> and easy problems should be solved before hard ones.
4. ***Increasing behavioral skills:***
  - A. Core Mindfulness Skills
  - B. Interpersonal Effectiveness
  - C. Emotion Regulation
  - D. Distress Tolerance

### **IV. Period of Therapy Agreement:**

Therapy will commence on the following date: \_\_\_\_\_ and will end on: \_\_\_\_\_. Throughout this period, my therapist and I will review progress, which may lead to refining targets and goals. At the end of this period, the question of whether a further phase of therapy is needed will be discussed and may be implemented by mutual consent.

### **V. Frequency of Contact Agreement:**

Guidelines for frequency of sessions is weekly for 45 minutes but, from time to time, may be at different intervals depending on circumstances of either party and by mutual arrangement. The frequency needs to be approved by the DBT consultation team (or client's treatment team) and recommendations of frequency will depend on client's clinical needs. When sessions are further apart than two weeks, it may be beneficial to implement a longer session and, if possible or desirable, include working-hours phone contact. Group sessions are 90 minutes on a weekly basis.

### **VI. Therapy Attendance Agreement:**

I agree to attend scheduled therapy sessions. It is not acceptable to miss sessions because I find them too uncomfortable or aversive, am not in the mood for therapy, wish to avoid certain topics or feel hopeless. I understand that 4 absences will result in my dismissal from the DBT program. I understand that if I am not able to meet the requirements of the treatment program, I may request a vacation from DBT treatment until I am more able to comply with the requirements. At that time, I may reapply and be admitted once a space becomes available.

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<sup>2</sup> If this is not one of my goals, then DBT may not be an appropriate therapy for me.

<sup>3</sup> For example, having immediate money or housing problems take precedence over other problems.

**VII. Agreement to Advise When Unable to Keep a Scheduled Session:**

I agree to give at least 24 hours of notice when unable to attend a scheduled individual session to minimize any inconvenience to the therapist. Similarly, my therapist will do their best to give me at least 24 hours of notice if it has become necessary to re-schedule a session. I agree to pay the missed session fee when assigned.

**VIII. Agreement on Homework Assignments and Related Material:**

I agree to take responsibility for ensuring that I bring my personal therapy binder with completed diary card and the latest homework assignments to each session because these will be a vital part of in-session work. If I do not bring my homework, or did not fill out my diary card, the therapist will initiate a functional chain analysis of this behavior and help me complete the diary card and assignment before we discuss any other matters.

**IX. Unilateral Termination of Therapy Agreement:**

If I miss 4 group sessions therapy will be terminated or I will be asked to take a *vacation* from DBT. I cannot return to therapy until the end of the contracted period and then return is a matter of negotiation and based on therapist and group availability.

**X. Skills Training Agreement:**

Skills training is a central part of DBT. During the period of therapy, I will participate in learning DBT skills through either a group, which I can enter when a new module is starting, or in learning skills in individual therapy. **I am responsible for payment of every group session regardless of my attendance in order to keep my place in group** until the contract is over or I have requested to take a vacation from DBT.

**XI. Role of Therapist or other providers:**

This contract neither replaces nor alters the key-working role of others. I understand that DBT makes a distinction between the roles of my other providers and my therapist.<sup>4</sup> I understand my therapist will be seeking consultation through her consultation team on a weekly basis and that my case may be discussed with the team.

**XII. The ultimate goal of having a life worth living:**

I understand that the goal of this therapy is to not need therapy. Therefore, as I become more competent with my skills, and strive towards a life worth living, this will result in a decrease in the need for and dependency on my therapist. Although we will have developed a strong and positive therapeutic relationship, it is meant to be temporary and that is the goal. If this is not happening, there is something wrong with the process and consultation will be sought.

Signature of client \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of guardian (person in charge of payments) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>4</sup> The clinical literature suggests that any blurring of the distinct roles of therapists and other providers may reduce therapeutic effectiveness.

## Therapist's Agreement

### *Private & Confidential*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to make every reasonable effort to conduct the DBT program as competently as possible. This includes my working within the limits of my scope of practice and also abiding by the requirements of my profession's ethical code. Beyond this, my clients can expect me to make my best effort to be helpful, to help them gain insight into themselves and their patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving, and to teach them new skills and behavioral tools they can use to deal more effectively with their current living situation.

I also make it clear that I cannot "save" clients, nor can I solve their problems or force them to cease suicidal or self-defeating behaviors. My clients need to learn to solve their own problems in the here-and-now regardless of what happened in the past.

Although I can help clients develop and practice new behaviors that may help them build a life worth living, I cannot in the final analysis build my clients' life for them. The analogy of therapist as guide is helpful: I can show someone the way, but I cannot walk the path for him or her. My caring is in staying with someone while they are doing their best to walk the path.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_