



# Beyond the Workbook: Creative Ways to Engage in DBT Skills Groups

Kimberly Applewhite, PsyD  
Rosa Waters, LCSW



# Accuracy, Utility, and Risks Statement

**Accuracy Statement:** This training aligns with evidence-based principles of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and incorporates research-backed teaching strategies from education and psychology to enhance skills group efficacy across developmental levels and learning styles.

**Utility Statement:** This training equips professionals in DBT and DBT-informed settings with interactive, developmentally appropriate strategies to improve client engagement and skills retention in group settings, benefiting both established DBT programs and general psychotherapy practices.

**Risk Statement:** The effectiveness of these strategies may vary based on client factors, group dynamics, and facilitator skill. Misapplication could hinder engagement or comprehension, and participants are encouraged to seek supervision when adapting these techniques to their practice. Participants are encouraged to receive more training in DBT to avoid potential for misapplication of the materials.



# Program Notices

## **Conflicts of Interest:**

None

## **Commercial Support:**

None

## **Use of AI:**

For generation of APA citations.



# Agenda

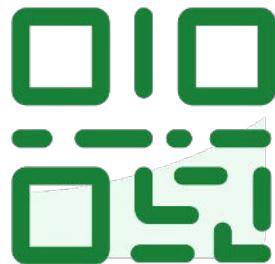
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- Mindfulness
- Group Format Review
- Defining Successful Engagement
- Who's in the room?
  - Considerations for Inclusive Groups
  - Developmental Considerations
  - Learning Considerations
- Strategies
- Final Q&A





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# Mindfulness Activity





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**What thoughts/reflections do  
you have after mindfulness?  
What did you notice?**

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# Mindfulness Reflections

- Does an activity like this count as mindfulness?
  - Open mind or focused mind?
  - Does it embody mindfulness principles?
  - Where is participant attunement in the moment?

“Mindfulness and mindfulness skills can be practiced anytime, anywhere, while doing anything. Intentionally paying attention to the moment, without judging it or holding onto it, is all that is needed.”

Linehan, 2015



# Group Format Review





# Focus Today is on Standard DBT Groups



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# DBT Skills Groups

- Goal: to increase client capacity for change
- Standardized for 2.5 hours
- First half of group
  - Mindfulness activity
  - Homework Review
- Second half of group
  - Skills Lesson
  - Homework Assignment
  - Wind-down
- Standard practice dictates two leaders
- Changes in different DBT formats
  - DBT-A - Adolescents and families
  - DBT-C - Family Sessions





# Defining Successful Engagement





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# What does an engaged DBT skills group feel like?

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# Borrowing from Education Literature...

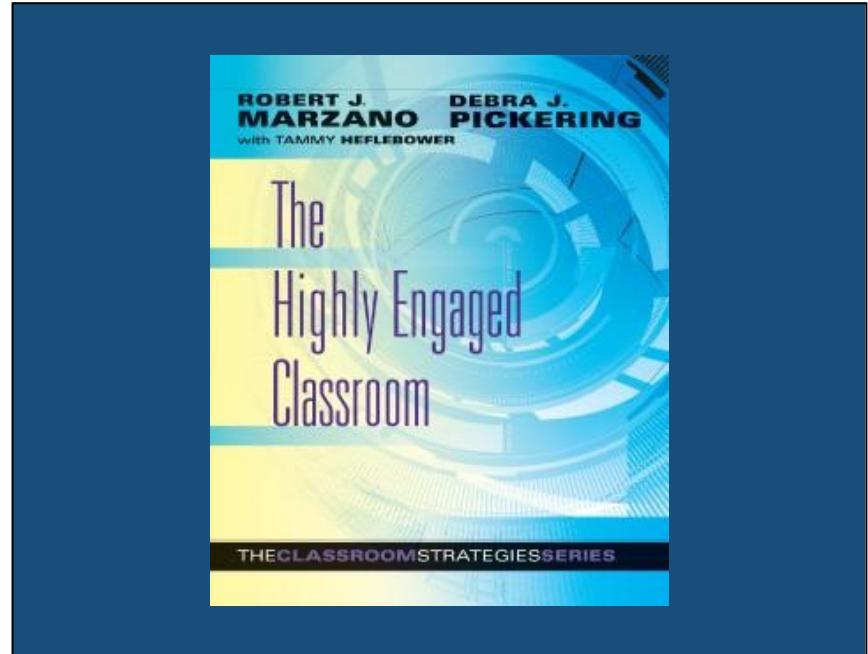
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>What Engagement Looks Like</b>
Cognitive	Being curious, wanting to understand, being invested in learning
Behavioral	Asking questions, attending class, paying attention
Affective	Caring about learning, interest, enthusiasm, excitement, motivation, willingness to participate

(Barkley & Major, 2020)



# Borrowing from Education Literature...

- To foster learner engagement, classroom instruction decisions should be made based on four questions (Marzano & Pickering, 2010). Engagement results when students answer affirmatively to the following:
  - How do I feel?
  - Am I interested?
  - Is this important?
  - Can I do this?





# Pedersons' Recommendations for DBT Teaching Skills (2017)

- Interactive Lecture
- Socratic Questioning
- Group Presentation & Discussion
- In-Group Experiential Learning
- Role Plays
- Modeling
- Mix in Audio, Video, and Other Media
- Behavioral Homework



## Video Example - Validation





# DBT Common Factors for Success

- DBT Program Fidelity Checklist (Harned & Schmidt, 2022)
- Clinician and Programmatic Factors (Popowich et al., 2020)
  - Systemic supports
  - Clinician commitment and “buy in”
  - Team cohesiveness
- Hibbs et al. (2024) found that higher ratings of client-perceived DBT skills group **treatment credibility** (helpfulness, acceptability, and the extent to which the group met their needs) was associated with greater improvements in most symptomatology measures.
- New metric in development: DBT - California Competency Scale - Skills Training Group (DBTCCS-G) (McFarr & Komtois, 2023).



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# What are your challenges with group engagement?

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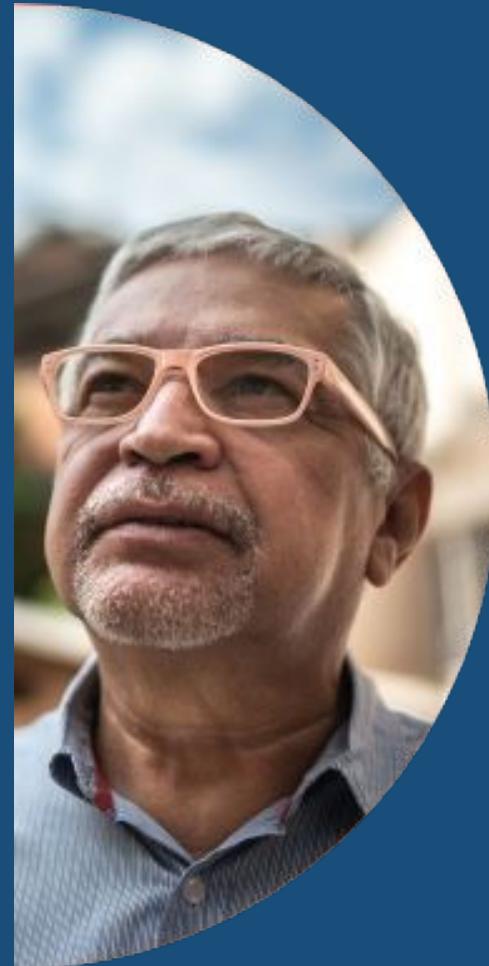


# Who's in the Room?



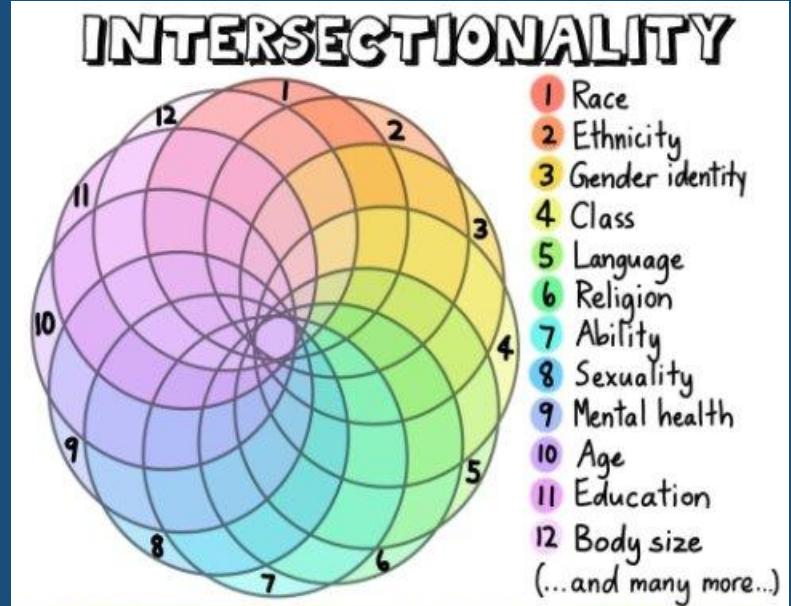


# Consideration for Inclusive Groups





# Richness of Identities



Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

— Kimberlé Crenshaw —

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# Culturally Responsive DBT

- A study of DBT with an adolescent American Indian and Alaska Native population found improvement in mood symptoms when DBT was incorporated with traditional cultural and spiritual practices (Becksted et al., 2015).
- O'Grady et. al. (2022) offer seven clinical recommendations for cultural adaptations to DBT:
  1. Utilize the client's native language
  2. Explicitly discuss identity-based prejudice when introducing the biosocial theory
  3. Provide psychoeducation and tools for clients to cope with cultural stigma
  4. Use flexibility within fidelity with the diary card
  5. Increase attention to cultural context in the interpersonal effectiveness module
  6. Adopt additional components into DBT teams
  7. Advocate for increased training of clinicians from different cultural contexts.

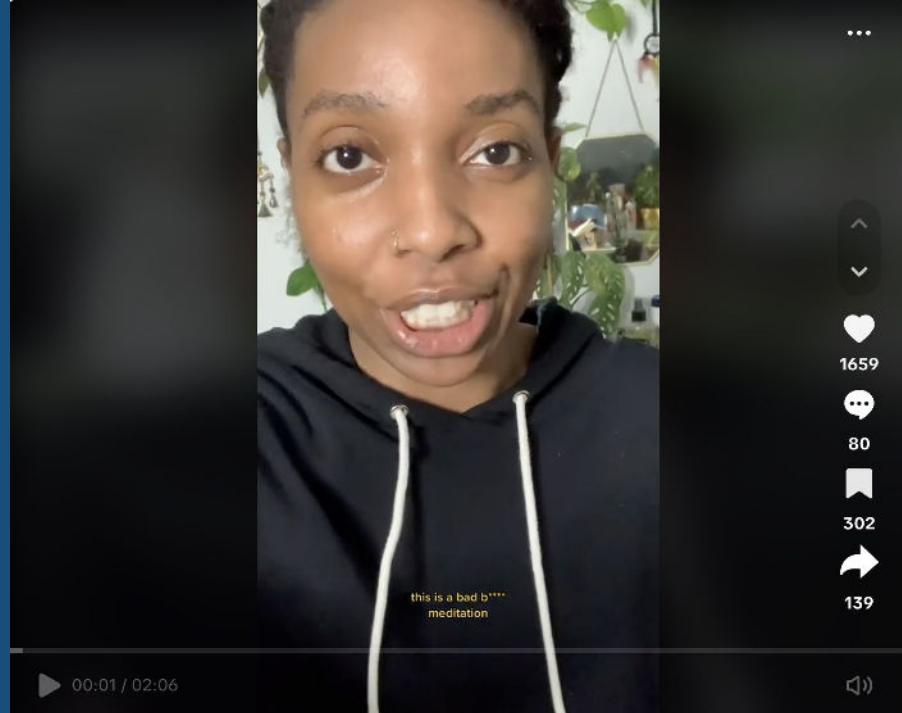


# Identity-Affirming DBT

- Cheng and Cohen (2022) proposed five clinical recommendations for doing affirmative DBT with LGBTQ+ clients, including:
  - Incorporate Minority Stress
  - Amplify Resilience
  - Center the LGBTQ+ Experience
  - Advocate: Engage in Consultation to the Environment
  - Check Yourself: We are all Fallible and Contribute to Oppressive Structures
- Brook et al. (2024) have also proposed neurodiversity-affirming guidelines for Autistic clients.



# In clients' native language...





# Developmental Considerations





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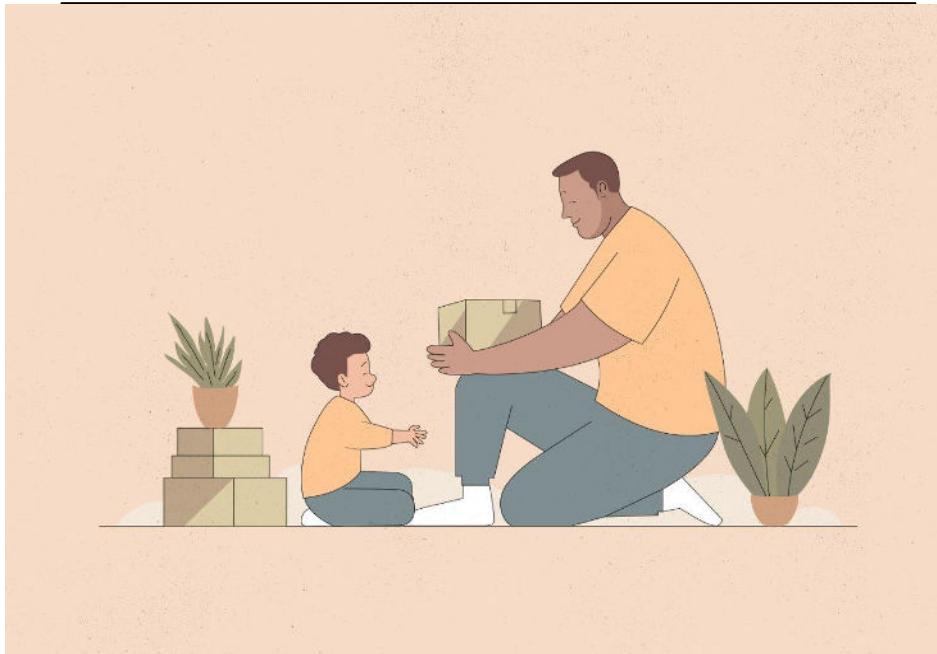
# How do people change as they age?

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# How do people change as they age?

- Cognitive capacity
- Ability for abstraction
- Fluid vs. crystallized reasoning
- Physical ability
- Identity development stages





# PRACTICE: Engaging Different Levels

- Think of a story (60-90 seconds)
- How would you tell it as if you were telling it to...
  - Your mother
  - A stranger
  - Your supervisor/boss
  - A 6-year-old child
  - A 12-year-old with ADHD
  - A 37-year-old adult who recently has been stressed
- What did you notice?
  - Tone changes
  - Body language
  - Frequency of checks for understanding
  - Length
  - Pulling points of interest

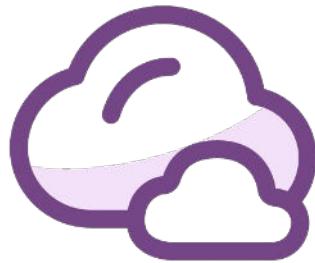


# Engaging Different Learning Styles





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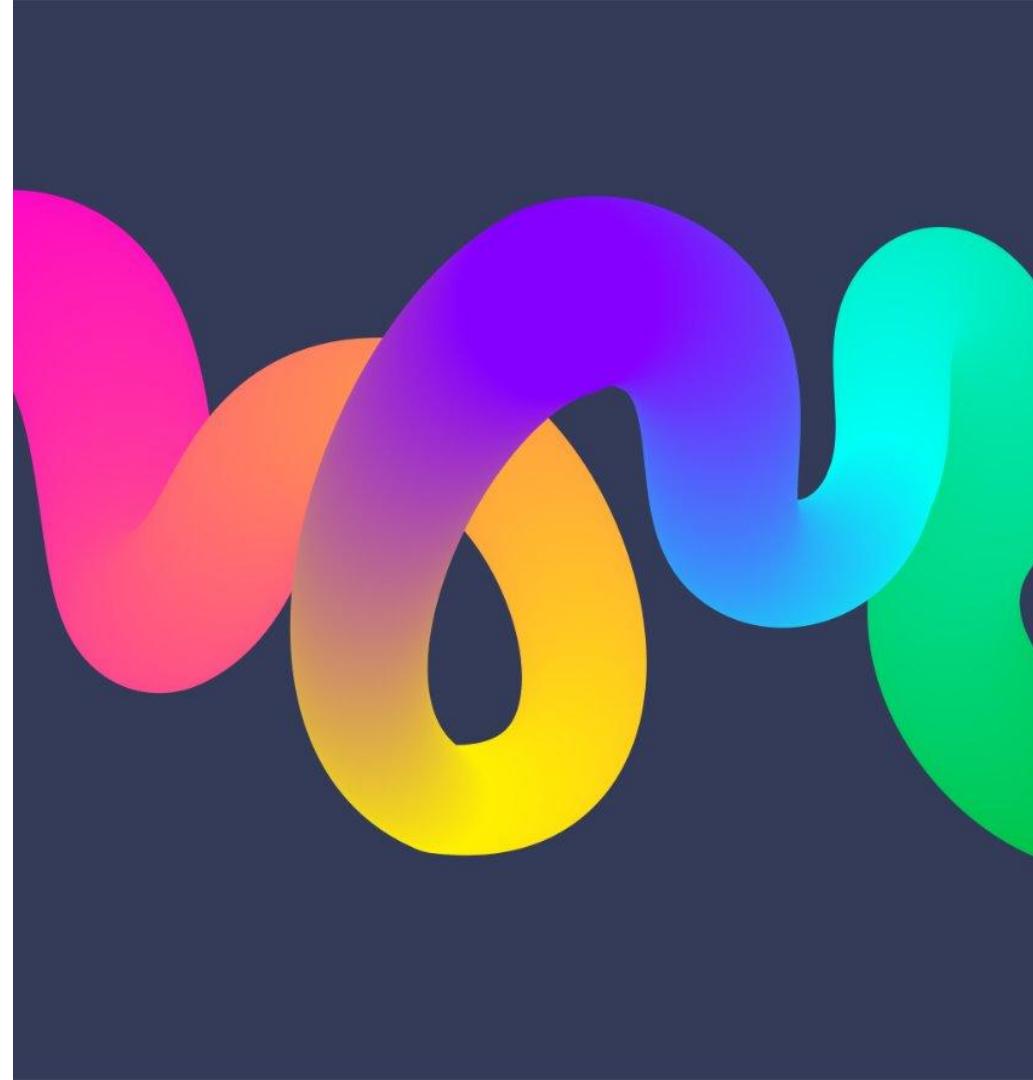


**We listen and don't judge -  
what is your least favorite  
skill to teach?**

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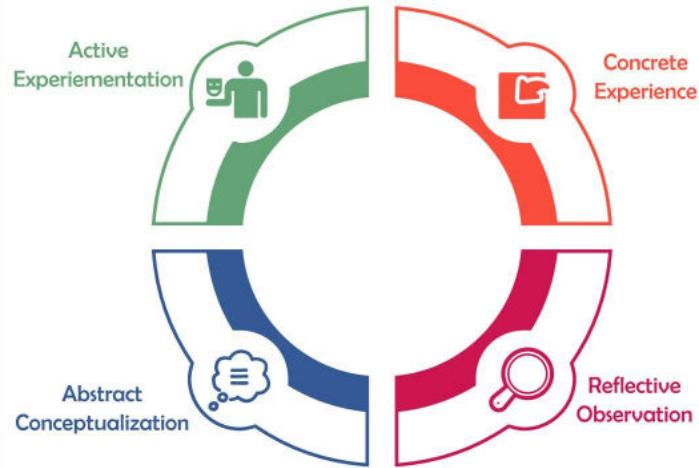
# Kolb Learning Cycles



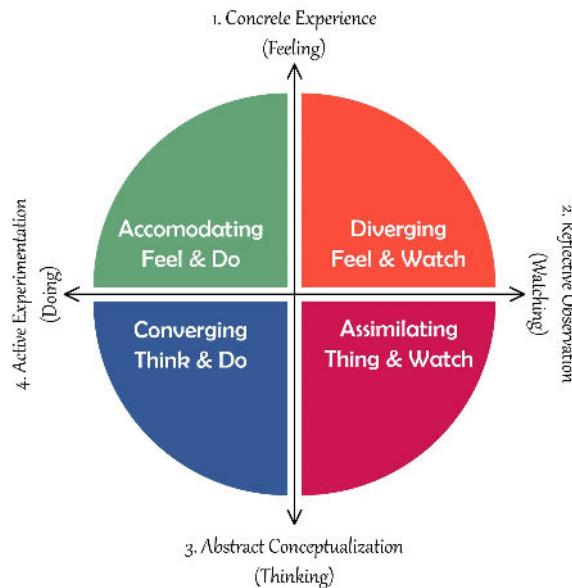


# Kolb Experiential Learning Theory (1984)

## Kolb's Learning Cycle



## Kolb's Learning Cycle





# Kolb Learning Strategies

01

## Diverging

- Working in groups
- Round the room discussion
- Emotion Reflection questions

02

## Assimilating

- Videos
- Storytelling from group leaders
- Brainstorming
- Hearing from others
- Reading from manual
- Reading/hearing practice situations from others
- Mental rehearsal
- Practice writing scripts
- Fake role plays
- Quizzes

03

## Converging

- Real role plays
- Rehearsal
- Dragging out

04

## Accommodating



# Ex: Assimilating Strategies

- Storytelling
  - Important to practice skills in daily life!!!
- Video demonstrations
- Brainstorming
- Discussions with others
- Reading sections from the manual





# Role Plays





# Opposite Action

- On your own, generate a list of urges that are associated with each of these emotions:
  - Happiness
  - Sadness
  - Fear
  - Anger
  - Disgust
  - Love
- Write them on cards, but don't list what the associated emotion is (or put it in code)





# Rehearsal





# Dragging Out Behaviors



# Questions?



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# Contact UCEBT

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Kimberly Applewhite – [kimberly.applewhite@ucebt.com](mailto:kimberly.applewhite@ucebt.com)

Rosa Waters – [rosa.waters@ucebt.com](mailto:rosa.waters@ucebt.com)

(801) 419-0139

[info@ucebt.com](mailto:info@ucebt.com)

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