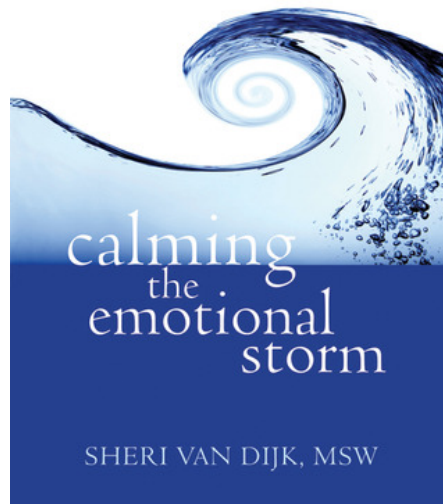


Using Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to
Manage Your Emotions & Balance Your Life



Calming the Emotional Storm: Using Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to Manage Your Emotions and Balance Your Life

Sheri Van Dijk

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When you have difficulties managing your emotions, it can feel like you're losing control of your whole life. Anger, hurt, grief, worry, and other intense feelings can be overwhelming, and how you react to these emotions can impact your ability to maintain relationships, succeed at work, or even think straight! If you find it difficult to understand, express, and process intense emotions—and most of us do—this book is for you.

Calming the Emotional Storm is your guide to coping with difficult emotions calmly and responsibly by using powerful skills from dialectical behavior therapy. This method combines cognitive behavioral techniques with mindfulness practices to change the way you respond to stressful situations. By practicing these skills, you can stop needless emotional suffering and develop the inner resilience that will help you weather any emotional storm.

This book will teach you how to:

- Establish a balanced life for an everyday sense of well-being
- Let go of unwanted worries and fears
- Become better at accepting yourself and others
- Work through a crisis without letting emotions take over

Calming the Emotional Storm: Using Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to Manage Your Emotions and Balance Your Life Details

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From Reader Review Calming the Emotional Storm: Using Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills to Manage Your Emotions and Balance Your Life for online ebook

Lolo says

A book with many good points about managing your emotions, but it was too short to like it. In each chapter I expected to elaborate more, provide more examples, explain more about the logic. It seemed to me that it was just a guide to follow the DBT method.

I would recommend this book as a starter for someone that wants to start managing their emotions.

Lee-Anne Bigwood says

Echoing other reviewers' " simple." Both in a positive and negative way. Helpful but not revolutionary.

Morgan Blackledge says

Calming The Emotional Storm is essentially a self-help book for people who struggle with Emotional Dysregulation.

Emotional Dysregulation (ED) refers to a trait of labile, easily destabilized or otherwise inadequately modulated emotional responses.

Possible behavioral manifestations of ED (not to be confused with erectile dysfunction, although behavioral manifestations can be similar) include angry outbursts, destroying or throwing objects, aggression towards self or others, and threats to kill oneself.

ED can be associated with an experience of early psychological and sexual trauma or chronic maltreatment (such as child neglect/abuse).

You can also catch it from dating someone with early psychological and sexual trauma or chronic maltreatment (such as child neglect/abuse).

Not really (but sorta).

ED may present in people with psychiatric disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

But this book is based on the Dialectal Behavioral Therapy (DBT) modal which is primarily focused on treatment of borderline personality disorder.

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a cluster-B personality disorder.

The essential features include a pattern of impulsivity and instability of behaviors, chaotic (high drama) interpersonal relationships, unstable self-image and ED (hypersensitivity to emotional stimuli and a slower return to a normal emotional state).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a short-term, goal-oriented psychotherapy treatment that takes a practical approach to problem-solving and symptom reduction.

CBT focuses on identifying and changing inaccurate or unhelpful ways of thinking,

CBT assumes that people suffer from unpleasant feelings and moods (e.g. anxiety and depression) because they have maladaptive (negative, harmful etc.) thoughts and behaviors.

For more on CBT check out professor Jason M. Saterfield's amazing Great Courses audio program titled Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and/or read my summary review of it, right here on Goodreads.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy:

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a modified form of CBT that was developed by Marsha M. Linehan.

DBT is designed to help individuals increase their emotional regulation by (a) identifying triggers that lead to emotionally reactive states, and (b) implementing effective coping skills.

DBT combines standard cognitive-behavioral techniques for emotion regulation and mindful awareness skill building exercises largely derived from Zen Buddhist meditation practice.

Mindfulness:

DBT is one of the major mindfulness based therapeutic protocols.

Mindfulness has been the buzzword lately, and for good reason. It's precisely what our stressed out culture needs. A little equanimity.

Mindfulness is not as much of a concept as it is a way of being with your inner experiences and being in the world.

Mindfulness refers to a way of assuming the role of the non judgmental witness of your own experience, as it arises, moment to moment, in the here and now.

Jon Kabat-Zinn is the guy most associated with secularizing mindfulness and introducing it into the clinical context.

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):

Kabat-Zinn created an 8 week program for people with untreatable chronic pain and anxiety called

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

He piloted MBSR at Boston Medical and was able to help people reduce their suffering from pain conditions, whom conventional treatment had failed (either due to developing too high a tolerance to pain medication or because of a lack of medical intervention for their condition or both).

MBSR is very effective for pain, particularly for chronic pain, but here's the catch.

MBSR doesn't help people reduce their pain.

MBSR helps people use mindfulness to open up and make space for the pain, and stop resisting it, and thereby reduce their suffering.

Similarly, DBT helps people use mindfulness to open up and make space for their difficult thoughts and emotions, and resisting against them, and thereby reduce their suffering.

Pain vs. Suffering:

According to the mindfulness traditions, pain and suffering are two different things.

Pain is an inevitability, suffering is optional.

One can have pain without necessarily suffering.

For example:

Remember when you were a kid and you had to get a shot from the doctor. If you were like me you threw a fit. You tensed every muscle in fear and resistance. Then you got the shot and it was not nearly as bad as you thought it would be.

In this example, the pain was the momentary sensory experience of the shot. The suffering was all of the extra stuff you projected onto the situation out of fear and all of the tension created due to resistance.

The short hand for this phenomena is:

Suffering equals Pain multiplied by Resistance

The pseudo math formula that explains the phenomena is:

Suffering (S) Is equal to (=) Pain (P) multiplied by (x) Resistance (R).

$S = P \times R$

Now as an adult, when you know you're about to get a shot, you still feel that wave of dread, but now you know to relax, breath, maybe close your eyes, and surrender to the moment. And poof, it's over with just a little prick sensation.

That's mindfulness in a nutshell.

So the whole equation goes like this:

Suffering equals Pain times Resistance divided by Mindful Acceptance

Or:

Suffering (S) equals (=) Pain (P) multiplied by (x) Resistance (R) divided by (/) Mindfulness and Acceptance (Ma)

Or:

$$S = P \times R / Ma$$

So what exactly is mindfulness?

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is:

- paying attention
- in a particular way
- on purpose
- in the present moment
- non-judgmentally (without prejudgment)

So if you're

- spaced out
- mind wandering
- future tripping
- dwelling in the past
- lost in fantasy
- operating on auto pilot
- resisting what is, and
- entangled in your judgmental thoughts

Then you're not practicing mindfulness.

That's okay.

But it's just not what we're talking about here.

Wise Mind:

DBT trains their clients to recognize and skillfully maneuver between 3 basic states of mind

- Rational Mind
 - intellectual, logical, planning thoughts
- Emotional Mind
 - viewing the world through the lens of feelings

- Wise Mind
- integrating thinking and feeling and arriving at healthy, sustainable, intentional behaviors

DBT helps clients act from Wise Mind via the practice of Mindfulness Meditation.

Mindfulness Meditation can be practiced in a variety of styles and methods depending on the individuals preferences and goals.

Formal Mindfulness Meditation practice:

This is what is most commonly thought of when people think of meditation. It entails sustained, relaxed concentration on an "object" of awareness, most commonly the breath.

If the mind wanders away from watching the breath, than the mindful attention is (gently and self lovingly) returned to the breath

It's usually done sitting in a comfortable but awake seated position, with eyes closed and in silence.

Formal practice is useful for developing basic skills and deepening practice, but is certainly not the only way to practice mindfulness.

Informal Mindfulness Meditation practice:

Entails maintaining the same type of relaxed concentration as formal practice, but in the context of ordinary activities, such as (but not limited to) walking, eating, exercising, doing the dishes etc.

People often think you have to be chill or tranquil to be mindful, or be doing something peaceful or sacred like yoga or really really slow walking.

But the activity itself is not the important part, it's the quality of Mindful Awareness that you bring to it that matters. And that can be done during any activity and in any thinking or emotional state, as long as you maintain mindful awareness of the thoughts, feelings and events.

The creators of DBT typically practice mindfulness with eyes open. The rationale is because they want their clients to bring their mindful awareness into their daily lives instead of having it be a special, occasional thing.

Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation:

Everyone has had the experience of becoming overwhelmed by intense emotions.

Whether your being "swept away" by strong feelings of love or happiness, or "flying off the handle" out of anger, both extremes share the quality of "loosing your self" in your emotional experience.

As we say in the biz, if it's not a problem, it's not a problem, but if it's a problem, it's a problem.

Generally speaking, emotions are not a problem. Far from it, they keep you safe and close to others. They are a source of internal guidance. They are the thing that makes life interesting.

But becoming emotionally dysregulated and behaving impulsively can be a HUGE problem.

When emotionally driven behavioral impulsivity is a problem, we need a good solution.

For a lot of people, more and more everyday, mindfulness is that solution.

Mindfulness allows you to have your emotions instead of your emotions having you.

Mindfulness can be an instrumental skill for emotional regulation for a lot of reasons. First and foremost is that it increases awareness of the emotions.

Mindfulness Researcher and Therapist Danial Siegel refers to the importance of Monitoring and Modulating emotional states.

He typically explains this concept with the following metaphor:

If you're driving a car you need to (a) look where you are going and (b) steer and operate the gas and break pedals.

You need to "monitor" the road conditions as you appropriately "modulate" left, right, gas and break.

Emotional Regulation is similar in the sense that you need "monitor" your emotions by bringing your mindful attention to the feelings, and appropriately "modulate" the emotion by practicing any number of "soothing" (emotional down regulation) skills e.g. mindful deep, elongated breathing.

As I mentioned earlier, suffering is increased when we meet pain with resistance ($S = P \times R$).

Conversely, suffering is decreased when we bring our mindful attention to it and meet it with willingness ($S = P \times R / Ma$).

So by simply practicing mindfulness on our feelings, we can drastically reduce the suffering we experience.

Flying Off The Handle:

Everyone has said and done things that they later regret due to being carried away by strong emotions.

People often behave impulsively when they are Emotionally Dysregulated.

Whether it's impulsive eating, sex, substance abuse or clashing with a partner or family member, the ramifications of emotionally driven impulsivity can be devastating.

This is an occasional problem for some, but for others who experience Emotional Dysregulation chronically, it's an everyday problem.

Auschwitz survivor and psychotherapist Viktor E. Frankl said:

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom".

Essentially, what Frankl is saying is that when difficult or triggering things happen, oftentimes we we simply automatically react.

This is totally understandable, there's no judgment, but when life comes at you, and you simply react, there isn't a lot of freedom in that.

No Space

v

Stimuli=>||<=Response

^

No Freedom

Frankl is asserting that there is actually a gap between what comes at you and how you behave. And the more you practice pausing. The larger that gap gets.

Being carried away with a powerful emotion is like having no space between the stimulus (the feeling) and the response (the behavior).

Practicing mindfulness on emotions (no matter how intense) increases the space between the stimulus and the response, increasing behavioral flexibility i.e. the freedom to choose the behavior instead of simply automatically and inflexibly reacting.

Mindfulness

v

Stimuli=>| |<= Response

^

The Freedom Zone

Practicing mindfulness is like having a "pause button" on life. You can "hit pause" before you take action.

For someone struggling to gain control over emotionally driven impulsive behavior, this is the difference between being a prisoner and freedom.

Having freedom to choose as opposed to being on autopilot is precisely what the creators of DBT are referring to when they say Wise Mind.

ACTing Wisely:

Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) is another of the major mindfulness based psychotherapy orientations.

ACT is focused more on the behavioral flexibility component than DBT, which is more focused on the emotional regulation.

The creators of ACT define mindfulness as being comprised of the following 4 psychological processes:

1: Contact with the Present Moment

- being in the "here and now"

2: Cognitive De-fusion

- taking a "step back" from thinking processes.
- watching our thoughts instead of being them.

3: Acceptance

- opening up and making room for painful feelings, sensations, urges, and emotions.
- dropping the struggle to feel one way or the other.
- being willing to be with what ever feelings arise.

4: Self As Context

- being identified with the spacious awareness of the thoughts and feelings, instead of being identified with the content of the thoughts and feelings.

Again, these are psychological skills that take practice and instruction to fully master. But if skillfully utilized, they can drastically reduce suffering and allow the individual to mindfully chose their actions instead of simply mindlessly reacting.

In other words, they can help you act from Wise Mind as opposed to acting all cray cray.

Take Note:

Mindfulness teacher (and all around geeky good guy) Shinzen Young teaches a secularized variant of a form of Buddhist Meditation called vipassana (which translated means "to see things as they really are").

One of the fundamental assumptions of vipassana is that our conscious experience is made up of lots of separate streams of information e.g. sight, touch, sound, mental talk, mental images, emotional feelings etc.

All of these information streams arise and subside in our "witnessing awareness" i.e. the part of us that is simply silently and nonjudgmentally aware.

Our ordinary experience of life is a jumble of sights, sounds, touch sensations, mental talk, mental images and emotional feelings (and smells and tastes and stuff) all twisted together in one undifferentiated stream.

Shinzen breaks them down like this:

Outside (sensory):

- S - sight (visual stimuli)
- T - touch (tactile stimuli)
- Sd - sound (audible stimuli)

STS for short

Inside (mental):

- F - feel (emotional body sensations)
- I - image (mental images)
- T - talk (mental talk)

FIT for short

According to Shinzen, these (STS-FIT) are all the different streams basic of information that combine to create our conscious awareness.

Vipassana practice teaches you to "deconstruct" your awareness into its component parts by mindfully directing your focus to one information stream at a time.

You do this by mentally labeling the target stream in order to maintain your mindful concentration on it.

For example: one of the practices is to simply notice self talk while your meditating. In order to do this you simply sit and watch your mind do what it does, and when ever you notice any "self talk" you mentally label it "talk".

You don't analyze the content or meaning of the words. You just label it "talk".

You don't take it personally, you don't try to stop it from happening, you simply observe it and label it "talk".

This is a way for you to differentiate yourself from the (rather endless) stream of mental talk that any healthy brain just sort of spews.

Brains make self talk, we don't necessarily have to get involved. We can simply sit and watch the self talk flow by like leaves on a stream.

"Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk".

By doing this, we are identifying as the witness of the talk instead of the being reflexively identified with the talk.

Shinzen's definition of mindfulness is "concentration, clarity and equanimity".

1. Concentration:

- intentionally maintaining relaxed attention

2. Clarity:

- remaining vividly awake and in witness mode

3. Equanimity:

- remaining nonjudgmental, excepting and willing

What he essentially means is, as long as we're on the bank watching the leaves flow by, instead of drowning in the river, were practicing mindfulness.

And as long as you're labeling (or simply noticing) a part of the stream of sensory and mental content (STS-FIT), you're doing exactly that.

You can learn more about Shinzen's teachings at

<http://www.basicmindfulness.org>

DBT utilizes this technique for emotional regulation.

The technique is straight up Shinzen style vipassana.

You simply label your emotions.

Whether you're happy or sad or angry or whatever, you simply "witness" whatever your feeling and label it "feel".

You sit on the bank of the stream and watch the "feels" flow on by like floating leaves.

"feel, feel, feel, feel, feel, feel, feel, feel, feel".

You're not focusing on the content of the feelings, you're just being the equanimous (nonjudgmental) witness of the feelings.

You're still feeling every little bit of them. You're just not drowning in a treacherous, fast-moving river of them.

By mentally noting your experience in this way, you're able to stay connected to your feelings by noticing them, but you're not allowing them to take over your identity and behavior and run the show called you.

This process helps you to take a "step back" from your feelings so that they don't overwhelm you.

It's one of the ways you can mindfully have your feelings instead of your feelings having you.

It's one of the best ways to act out of Wise Mind.

The Basic Trifecta of Emotional Regulation:

The absolute fundamental factors of emotional regulation are:

- (S) sleep
- (E) exercise
- (D) diet

Everyone has had the experience of feeling fucked up when you either eat too much or too little, sleep too much or too little or you don't get enough exercise.

Any of these can make you either lethargic and spaced out, or sensitive and irritable or all of the above and more.

Healthy diet and exercise and restful, restorative sleep are pretty much the basics of self care.

They are all important, and they all effect the other "tri-directionally" i.e. they are interdependent factors.

Meaning, if you mess one or two of them up, the other ones will also suffer, and you'll feel all kinds of fucked up.

If you drew them out diagrammatically, it would look like this:

The Basics of Emotional Regulation Triangle:

(S)
/\
(E) — (D)

S: sleep

E: exercise

D: diet

Not enough sleep (S) makes it more likely that you will over or under eat (D) and/or under exercise (E).

Not enough exercise (E) makes it more likely that you will over or under eat (D) and/or over or under sleep (S).

And

Over or under eating (D) makes it more likely that you will over or under sleep (S) and under exercise (E).

Basic Bitches:

So these are the absolute BASICS of self care and emotion regulation.

But I put them below mindfulness skills in this review for a good reason.

Because they occur later in the book.

But there's a good reason for that too.

The reason for that is because mindfulness can help regulate all of these interdependent factors.

Minding The Basics:

Mindful Eating can help you avoid over or under eating, and can help make better, healthier choices.

Mindfulness can help you get better sleep.

And

Mindfulness can also help you enjoy exercise more and know when you need to do more of it.

I could go on and on.

Rather than listen to me prattle on.

How about if you just read this short, simple, powerful little book.

Dana says

This is a good book for people who are wanting to get into DBT. The book is good for clinicians who don't have much understanding of DBT (particularly how to regulation emotions) or clinicians who simply want to refresh themselves on DBT and get ideas of how to better talk about emotion regulation and mindfulness to clients. Also, this book is a quick and easy read- always a plus for me!!

Aloha says

I've been applying these techniques all of my life naturally as self-soothing techniques to keep my sanity. Highly recommend but not a quick fix. Like long term health routines, these techniques have to be used consistently throughout the day until it becomes a natural habit. Forgive yourself if you fall off the wagon now and then.

Kate Arms says

Best book I have read on dealing with strong emotions so they don't throw you off balance. With a mix of theory and practical advice. This is a book you can read and take action on.

Definitely one I will be recommending to clients and friends as appropriate.

Kat says

This was an interesting primer on the topic, but it had so many citations to Linehan's work that I found myself wanting to read that instead. I'm glad I picked it up, but I'm also not sure I'd recommend it.

The concept of willfulness was genuinely helpful -- I realize I act this way a lot without having had a name for it.

???? says

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Claire Elizabeth says

First, in March 2013, I felt my life spin out of control a little so I got this book at the book store. I chose this book above the others because it was very short and I didn't have much time to commit to reading it. I began reading immediately, but after the first or second chapter, I put the book down.

I picked the book back up, and the following is my findings. Before getting to spiritually relevant information, I want to discuss the writer's voice. I did not like the jumpiness of the chapters or the feeling of rambling, because I was scared that without meticulous organization in the writing, the lessons would be lost. If I read through it like a novel and did not stop to reflect or re-read chapters at a time, then the lessons may very well have been lost on me. Instead, I actually wrote about my findings, completed the exercises, and reflected on the concepts. Therefore, I had a great experience overall with this book.

Before I go into specific thoughts on the book, I'd like to say: if you only read two chapters in the book, read Ch 5 (nonjudgment) and Ch 9 (positive thinking)—they are the quickest and easiest and most relate-able. The excerpts I have below are not necessarily from these chapters, but if I were limited in time and picked up this book, I would read Ch 5 and Ch 9. I truly think those chapters were the most powerful and least over-thought.

(1) Ah, So

In Jivamutki Yoga, there is an "Ah, So" story, accessible here <http://mylitworld.wordpress.com/2011/...>

The following quotes reflect the meaning of Ah, So, to me:

"It's okay that you feel like this. You've felt like this before, and it doesn't last forever. You're going to get through this." (VanDijk 39)

Regarding judgments, "Ideally, the goal is to be nonjudgmental, or neutral. In other words, the goal is to be neither positive nor negative." (VanDijk 96)

(2) Long-term v. Short-term

Recently, my man and I had an interesting discussion. We currently live and work in different cities, but we both hope that one day we will settle down with jobs and personal lives in the same city. He said something super-brilliant to me (to make me stop whining/crying about being apart from him): Lady, this is only temporary, look at our current jobs and cities as short term issues, and hold out for the long run.

It thrilled me, of course, to find that same sentiment reflected in the VanDijk book:

In the Leave the Judgments Out of It Section, VanDijk writes, "When you're being nonjudgmental, you're saying what you really mean rather than just sticking a short-term label on something. Being nonjudgmental is a more effective way of communicating." (94)

In the How to Be More Effective in Your Life Section, VanDijk asks What does Being Effective Mean? and answers, “The skill of being effective refers to doing what works, doing what moves you closer to your long-term goals, and doing what you need to do to get your needs met” (103, citations omitted)

She further states, “...it can help if you take some time, slow yourself down, and give some thought to setting a goal before acting...when you have conflicting goals...you need to access your wise self to help you decide which goal is most important to you...” (109)

(3) Sit in the Shit/ Be Content Whatever the Circumstances

In the fall, I had a prayer group study of Calm My Anxious Heart, and we discussed Christian scripture. One verse includes St. Paul saying that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances. A lady in our group explained that she has recently learned to “sit in the shit.” What? We all looked at her, aghast, did you just say “shit”? Yes, she replied, I have to learn to just sit with all the bad things and get used to them because they may be here a while.

For me, painful emotions feel like “shit.” In an attempt to accept the “shit” in my life and “be content whatever the circumstances,” I can now utilize VanDijk’s emotional recognitions.

In the Learning About Your Emotions Section, she suggests to name the emotions, saying “It’s a well known fact that people who are able to identify their emotions are more able to manage them...over time and with practice, you’ll become more familiar with your emotions and better at identifying them.”

She offers an exercise: “Ask yourself the question ‘What emotion is here?’ and just allow your attention to be drawn to whatever emotion makes itself known. Be open to it and curious about it. Describe it in as much detail as you can. Can you put a name on it? If you can, name it. Don’t judge it if it’s a painful emotion, just acknowledge its presence.”

In the Quieting Your Emotions Section, she states “Validating your emotions means that you accept them and have the ability to understand them; not that you like those emotions or want them to hang around, but that you acknowledge their presence, and give yourself permission to feel them. (82-83)

Heidi says

One of the most useful books I've read about this topic

Teo 2050 says

2h @ 2.5x.

Luiz Fabricio says

That’s a good book, filled with nice thecniques in DBT and Mindfulness. Some nice insights from the author.

Paul says

Excellent, no-nonsense book about how a person can use Dialectical behavioral Therapy DBT skills to cope with stress, anger and emotional dysregulation. Although this book is written for a wide variety of audiences, mental health practitioners can find a lot of useful information here. At the end of some of the chapters there are useful summaries that list how a person can use a particular DBT skill. The book is very well written and concise.

Ryn says

a simple and straight forward guide to applying DBT skills to your life. Would recommend highly to clients.

Rosetta Remillard says

Good tools, very helpful.
