

# Dialectical Behavior Therapy

## PROBLEMS (What to decrease)

- I. Confusion about yourself  
(Not always knowing what you feel or why you get upset; dissociation)
- II. Impulsivity  
(Acting without thinking it all through)
- III. Emotional instability  
(Fast, intense mood changes with little control; or, steady negative emotional state)
- IV. Interpersonal problems  
(Pattern of difficulty keeping relationships steady, getting what you want, or keeping your self-respect; frantic efforts to avoid abandonment)
- V. Teenager–family dilemmas  
(Polarized thinking, feeling, and acting—e.g., all-or-nothing thinking)

## SKILLS (What to increase)

- I. Mindfulness
- II. Distress tolerance
- III. Emotion regulation
- IV. Interpersonal effectiveness
- V. Walking the middle path

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**FIGURE 7.1.** Handout on DBT for adolescents and family members.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy Adolescent Diary Card		First name			Filled out in session? Yes/no				
Date	Self-harm		Suicidal		Alcohol		Drugs		Meds
	Urge	Actions	Thoughts	Actions	Urge	Use amount/ type	Urge	Use amount/ type	Taken as prescribed
	0-5	Yes/no	0-5	Yes/no	0-5		0-5		Yes/no

**\*USED SKILLS**

0 = Not thought about or used  
1 = Thought about, not used, didn't want to  
2 = Thought about, not used, wanted to  
3 = Tried but couldn't use them  
4 = Tried, could do them, but they didn't help  
5 = Tried, could use them, helped  
6 = Didn't try, used them, didn't help  
7 = Didn't try, used them, helped

**Instructions:** Circle the days you worked on each skill.

Core Mindfulness	1. Wise mind	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	2. Observe (Just notice what's going on inside)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	3. Describe (Put words on the experience)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	4. Participate (Enter into the experience)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	5. Don't judge (Nonjudgmental stance)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	6. Stay focused (One-mindfully: in the moment)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	7. Do what works (Effectiveness)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Emotion Regulation	8. Identifying and labeling emotions	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	9. PLEASE (Reduce vulnerability to emotion mind)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	10. MASTER (Building mastery, feeling effective)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	11. Engaging in pleasant activities	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	12. Working toward long-term goals	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	13. Building structure // time, work, play	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	14. Acting opposite to current emotion	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun

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**FIGURE 7.3.** Adolescent diary card.

How often did you fill out this section? ___ Daily ___ 2-3x ___ Once											Date started	
Other				Emotions							Skills*	Notes:
Cut class/school	Risky sex			Anger	Fear	Happy	Anxious	Sad	Shame	Misery		
Yes/no	Yes/no			0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-5	0-7	

**Rating scale for emotions and urges (above):**

0 = Not at all    1 = A bit    2 = Somewhat    3 = Rather strong    4 = Very strong    5 = Extremely strong

Urge to quit therapy: \_\_\_\_\_    Misery index: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Circle the days you worked on each skill.

Interpersonal Effectiveness	15. DEAR MAN (Getting what you want)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	16. GIVE (Improving the relationship)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	17. FAST (Feeling effective and keeping your self-respect)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Distress Tolerance	18. Cheerleading statements for worry thoughts	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	19. ACCEPTS (Distract)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	20. Self-soothe (Five senses)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	21. Pros and cons	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Walking the Middle Path	22. Radical acceptance	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	23. Positive reinforcement	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	24. Validate self	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	25. Validate someone else	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	26. Think dialectically (not in black and white)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
	27. Act dialectically (walk the middle path)	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun

## DBT Agreement

I am familiar with the theory, assumptions, and format of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT).

I agree to participate in the full DBT program.

I will come to group on time, with my materials and homework. If I don't do my homework, I agree to do a behavioral analysis.

(For teens) I am fully aware of the attendance policy, which is that if I miss more than four individual sessions and/or four skills training group sessions, I will have dropped out of DBT.

(For family members) I am fully aware of the attendance policy, which is that if I miss more than four skills training group sessions, I will have dropped out of DBT.

_____ (Your signature)	_____ (Date)
_____ (Skills trainer's signature)	_____ (Date)
_____ (Skills trainer's signature)	_____ (Date)
_____ (Individual therapist's signature)	_____ (Date)

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**FIGURE 10.1.** *Sample DBT agreement for adolescents and family members*

# Mindfulness

## Three Steps to Achieve Wise Mind: "What" Skills

### OBSERVE

- Just notice the experience in the present moment.
- *Wordless watching*: Watch your thoughts and feelings come and go, as if they are on a conveyor belt.
- Don't push away your thoughts and feelings. Just let them happen, even when they are painful.
- Observe both inside and outside yourself.

### DESCRIBE

- *Wordful watching*: Label what you observed with words.
- Put words on the experience—for example, "I feel sad," or "My heart is pounding."
- Describe only what you observe (without interpretations).

### PARTICIPATE

- Try not to worry about tomorrow or focus on yesterday. Throw yourself into the present moment fully (e.g., dancing, cleaning, taking a test, feeling sad in the moment).
- Fully experience your feelings without being self-conscious.
- Listen to your WISE MIND to help you choose to participate (a) in your discomfort; (b) in an alternate activity to escape/avoid distress; or (c) in order to experience life fully.
- Remember to use your "HOW" SKILLS while participating.

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**FIGURE 10.2a.** *Example of an adapted skills handout for adolescents.*

## **Emotion Regulation**

### **Taking Charge of Your Emotions: Why Bother?**

*Taking charge of your emotions is important because:*

Suicidal and depressed adolescents often have intense emotions, such as anger, frustration, depression, or anxiety.

Difficulties in controlling these emotions often lead to suicidal and other self-destructive behaviors.

Suicidal and other self-destructive actions are often behavioral solutions to intensely painful emotions.

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**FIGURE 10.2b.** *Example of an adapted skills handout for adolescents.*

# Distress Tolerance

## Crisis Survival Skills: Distracting

A good way to remember these skills is the phrase "Wise Mind ACCEPTS."

*Distract with . . .*

<u>A</u> ctivities	<i>Do something.</i> Call, e-mail, text-message, or visit a friend. Watch a favorite movie or TV show. Play sports. Play video games. Write in a journal. Clean your room.
<u>C</u> ontributing	<i>Contribute (do something nice) for someone.</i> Help a friend or sibling with homework. Surprise someone with a card, flower, or hug. Consider volunteer work. Send a thoughtful instant message.
<u>C</u> omparisons	<i>Make comparisons that will help you feel better.</i> Compare yourself to those less fortunate. Compare how you are feeling now to a time when you felt different. Consider those who are coping in the same way as, or less well than, you are.
<u>E</u> motions	<i>Create different emotions.</i> Watch a funny TV show. Rent a scary movie. Listen to music. Read comics. Get active when you are sad. Slow down when you are wound up.
<u>P</u> ushing away	<i>Push the painful situation out of your mind temporarily.</i> Leave the situation mentally by moving your attention and thoughts away. Build an imaginary wall between you and the situation. Block the situation from your mind. Remind yourself that you aren't thinking about that situation. Put the pain and situation in a box, on a shelf, or in a drawer, and leave it there.
<u>T</u> houghts	<i>Replace your thoughts.</i> Read. Do word puzzles. Count to 10. Notice the colors in a poster. Repeat the words to a song in your mind. Go to "reasonable mind" and stay there for a while.
<u>S</u> ensations	<i>Intensify other sensations.</i> Hold or chew ice. Listen to loud music. Wear a rubber band on your wrist. Take a hot or cold shower. Squeeze a ball or toy. Run fast.

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FIGURE 10.2c. Example of an adapted skills handout for adolescents.

# Interpersonal Effectiveness

## How to Get Someone to Do What You Want

A good way to remember these skills is the term "DEAR MAN."

Describe                      Mindful  
Express                      Appear Confident  
Assert                        Negotiate  
Reinforce

<u>D</u> escribe	Describe the situation. Stick to the facts.
<u>E</u> xpress	Express your feelings by using "I" statements ("I feel . . .," "I would like . . ."). Do not assume that the other person knows how you feel. Stay away from "You should . . ."
<u>A</u> ssert	Ask for what you want or say "no" clearly. Remember, the other person cannot read your mind.
<u>R</u> einforce	Reward (reinforce) the person ahead of time by explaining the positive effects of getting what you want. Also, reward him or her afterward.
(Stay) <u>M</u> indful	Keep your focus on what you want, avoiding distractions. Come back to your assertion over and over. Ignore attacks; keep making your point.
<u>A</u> ppear Confident	Make (and maintain) eye contact. Use a confident tone of voice—do not whisper, mumble, or give up and say "whatever."
<u>N</u> egotiate:	Be willing to "give to get." Ask for the other person's input. Offer alternative solutions to the problem. Know when to "agree to disagree" and walk away.

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**FIGURE 10.2d.** *Example of an adapted skills handout for adolescents.*



# Dialectics

## What Is It?

Dialectics teaches us that:

- There is always more than one way to see a situation, and more than one way to solve a problem.
- All people have unique qualities and different points of view.
- It is important not to see the world in "black-and-white," "all-or-nothing" ways.
- Two things that seem like (or are) opposites can both be true.
- Change is the only constant.
- Meaning and truth evolve over time.
- Change is transactional.



### Examples:

- You are doing the best you can, *and* you need to do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change.
- You are tough *and* you are gentle.

This perspective helps pave the way toward the middle path by helping you:

- Expand your thoughts and ways of considering life situations.
- "Unstick" standoffs and conflicts.
- Be more flexible and approachable.
- Avoid assumptions and blaming.

### Other examples of dialectics:

- Balancing validation with change
- Balancing reward with punishment
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

## Dialectics

### Walking the Middle Path: "How to" Guide

#### **Hints for thinking and acting dialectically**

1. Move away from "either-or" thinking to "both-and" thinking. Avoid extreme words: "always," "never," "you make me." Be descriptive.

#### **Example:**

—Instead of saying, "Everyone always treats me unfairly," say, "Sometimes I am treated fairly and at other times I am treated unfairly."

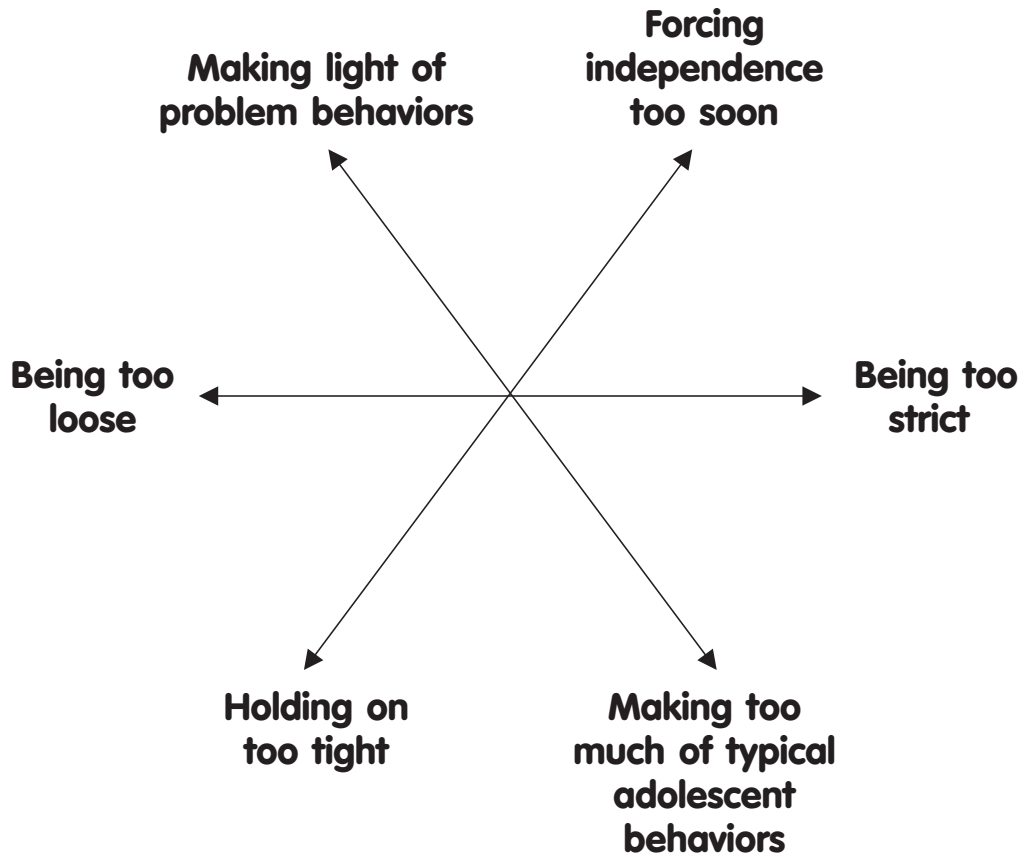
2. Practice looking at all sides of a situation/all points of view. Find the kernel of truth in every side.
3. Remember: *No one* has the absolute truth. Be open to alternatives.
4. Use "I feel ..." statements, instead of "You are ...," "You should ...," or "That's just the way it is" statements.
5. Accept that different opinions can be valid, even if you do not agree with them ("I can see your point of view, even though I do not agree with it").
6. Do not assume that you know what others are thinking; check your assumptions ("What did you mean when you said ...?").
7. Do not expect others to know what you are thinking ("What I am trying to say is ...").

#### **Practice:**

Circle the dialectical statements:

1. a. "It is hopeless. I just cannot do it."  
b. "This is a breeze. I got no problems."  
c. "This is really hard for me, and I am going to keep trying."
2. a. "I know I am right about this."  
b. "The way you are thinking doesn't sound right to me."  
c. "Well, I can see it this way, and you can see it that way."

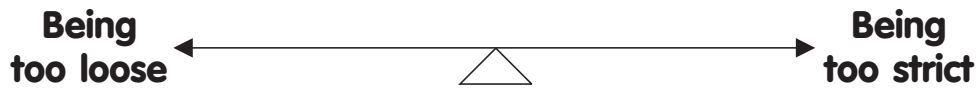
## Dialectical Dilemmas



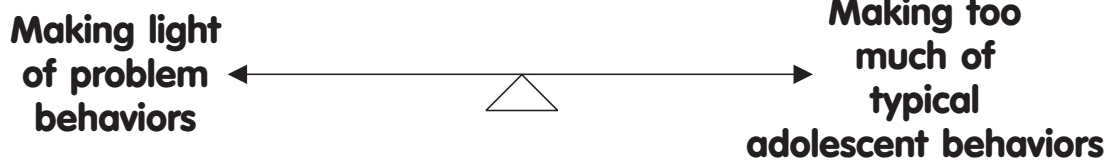
# Dialectical Dilemmas

## Walking the Middle Path

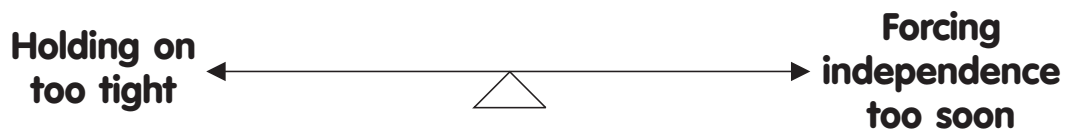
(Note: These apply to everyone, including yourself.)



Have clear rules and enforce them consistently, *and at the same time* be willing to negotiate on some issues.



Recognize when a behavior "crosses the line" and try to get help for that behavior, *and at the same time* recognize which behaviors are part of typical adolescent development.



Give your adolescent guidance, support, and rules to help the teen figure out how to be responsible with his or her life, *and at the same time* slowly give your adolescent greater amounts of freedom and independence, while continuing to allow an appropriate amount of reliance on others.

Place an X on each continuum that notes where you are, and a Y where your family member is.

## What's Typical for Adolescents and What's Not

### Typical

- Increased sexual maturation; increased focus on body image and self-consciousness
- Sexual experimentation
- Increased parent–adolescent conflict
- Experimentation with drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes
- Increased sensation seeking and risk taking
- Stressful transitions to middle and high school
- Increased argumentativeness, idealism, and criticism
- Becoming overwhelmed with everyday decision making

### Not typical; cause for concern

- Sexual promiscuity; bingeing, purging, or restricting eating, social withdrawal
- Multiple partners; unsafe sexual practices; pregnancy
- Verbal or physical aggression; running away
- Substance abuse; selling drugs; heavily substance-using peer group
- Multiple accidents; encounters with firearms; excessive risk taking (e.g., "subway surfing")
- Lack of connection to school or peers; school truancy, failure, or dropout
- Rebellious questioning of social rules and conventions; causing trouble with family members, teachers, or others who attempt to exert control over the adolescent
- Becoming paralyzed with indecision

## **Walking the Middle Path**

### Practice Exercise 1 Dialectical Dilemmas

*Identify a time this week when you DID NOT think or act dialectically.*

**Example 1:** Briefly describe the situation (who, what, when) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How did you think or act in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you making any thinking mistakes? If so, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is another dialectical belief about the situation? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_

*Identify a time this week when you DID think or act dialectically.*

**Example 2:** Briefly describe the situation (who, what, when) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How did you think or act in this situation? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you making any thinking mistakes? If so, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Validation

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## What Is It?

**Validation** communicates to another person that his or her feelings, thoughts, and actions make sense and are understandable to you in a particular situation.

**Self-validation** involves perceiving your *own* feelings, thoughts, and actions as accurate and acceptable in a particular situation.

**Remember: Validation  $\neq$  Agreement**

Validation *does not* necessarily mean that you like or agree with what the other person is doing, saying, or feeling. It means that you understand where the other person is coming from.

### WHAT should we validate?

- Feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in:
  - Ourselves
  - Other people

### WHY should we validate?

- It improves relationships!
- Validation can show that:
  - We are listening.
  - We understand.
  - We are being nonjudgmental.
  - We care about the relationship.
  - Conflict is possible with decreased intensity.

## Validation

### A "How To" Guide to Verbal and Nonverbal Validation

*How can we validate others?*

1. Actively listen. Make eye contact and stay focused.
2. Be mindful of both nonverbal and verbal reactions in order to avoid invalidation (e.g., rolling eyes; sucking teeth; walking away; saying, "That's stupid, don't be sad", or "I don't care what you say").
3. Observe what the other person is feeling in the moment. Look for a word that describes the feeling.
4. Reflect the feeling back without judgment. The goal is to communicate that you understand how the other person feels (e.g., "It makes sense that you're angry," "I understand that you are having a tough time right now") (for self, "I have a right to feel sad").
5. Show tolerance! Look for how the feelings, thoughts, and actions make sense, given the other person's (or your) history and current situation, even if you don't approve of the behaviors, emotions, or actions themselves.
6. Respond in a way that shows you are taking the other person seriously (with or without words). If someone is crying, give a tissue or a hug. If someone is presenting a problem, start problem solving immediately (unless the person wishes merely to be heard).

*How can we validate ourselves?*

Use Steps 3, 4, and 5.

Examples of validation of others \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Examples of self-validation \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## **Practice Exercise 2**

### Self-Validation and Validation of Others

List one self-invalidating statement and two self-validating statements:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

List one invalidating statement to others and two validating statements to others:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Choose a situation during the week in which you used validation skills with someone else or yourself.

**Situation:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who was the person you validated? \_\_\_\_\_

What *exactly* did you do or say to validate yourself or that person? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What was the outcome? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did you feel afterward? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Would you say or do something differently next time? If so, what? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Behaviorism

## What Is It?/Ways to Increase Behaviors

### What Is Behaviorism?

*Behaviorism* is a set of strategies or principles used to *increase* behaviors we *do* want and *reduce* behaviors we *don't* want (in ourselves and others).

Are there behaviors you would like to change in yourself or other people?

If so, what are some of these? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Ways to Increase Behaviors

- **Reinforcers:** *Consequences* that result in more of a behavior. Reinforcers provide information to a person about what you want that person to do. Remember: Timing is very important, and you should choose motivating reinforcers!

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Positive reinforcement:** *Increases* the frequency of a behavior by providing a *rewarding* consequence (e.g., praise, a compliment, or an A on an exam).
- **Negative reinforcement:** *Increases* the frequency of a behavior by removing a *negative* consequence. Examples of negative reinforcement include taking aspirin to get rid of a headache, doing homework to get Mom to stop nagging, or self-cutting to decrease or avoid negative feelings (although you are learning skills to manage this better).

### Negative reinforcer = RELIEF

- **Self-reinforcement:** Don't forget to reinforce yourself as well as others!
- **Shaping:** Reinforcing small steps that lead toward the ultimate goal. (For example, If a teenager is anxious about going to school and doesn't usually go, she might be encouraged to go for 1 hour on Monday, 2 hours on Tuesday, and so on until she is able to stay for a whole day, ultimately leading up to staying every day all week long.) Reinforce each step!

## **Behaviorism**

### Ways to Decrease or Stop Behaviors

- **Extinction:** Reducing the likelihood of a behavior because reinforcement is not given. For example, you ignore the unwanted behavior when attention to it will cause it to continue to happen. However, make sure you reinforce other, adaptive behaviors in the process.
  - If a little boy begins to throw a tantrum in the supermarket because he doesn't get what he wants, and the parent ignores it, he will eventually (over time) stop having tantrums.
  - Remember: Extinguishing a behavior that has been reinforced in the past may cause a "behavioral burst" (a temporary increase) of the very behavior you are trying to extinguish. *Don't give up* because of this! Also, don't forget to orient the person that you are beginning to extinguish the behavior. And remember to reinforce other adaptive behaviors during the extinction process.
- **Punishment:** *Consequence* that results in a *decrease* in behavior. It tells another person what you don't want the person to do.
  - **Effective punishment:**
    - Actions used to *decrease* behaviors that don't have natural consequences. These actions should be specific and time-limited, and the punishment should fit the "crime" (e.g., if you're out past curfew, you lose the chance to go out the next day).
    - Natural consequences (e.g., if you stay up all night, you will be too tired to focus in school, may fail a test, and may get in trouble for failing).
  - **Ineffective punishment:** Actions used to *decrease* behaviors that are not specific, time-limited, or appropriate for the crime (e.g., you break curfew and your parents forbid you to leave the house for 2 months, take away your cell phone, and remind you of the mistake constantly).

#### **Remember:**

- Punishment does not teach new behavior.
- Punishment may lead to self-punishment.

## **Practice Exercise 3**

### **Behaviorism: Positive Reinforcement**

Look for opportunities (since they are occurring all the time) to provide positive reinforcement to yourself or someone else.

1. In advance, identify the behavior you want to increase and the reinforcer you will use.

a. For yourself:

Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Reinforcer: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Someone else: \_\_\_\_\_

Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Reinforcer: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Describe the situation(s) when you used positive reinforcement.

a. For yourself: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Someone else: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What was the outcome? What did you observe?

a. For yourself: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. Someone else: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_