

DBT Hierarchy of Priorities

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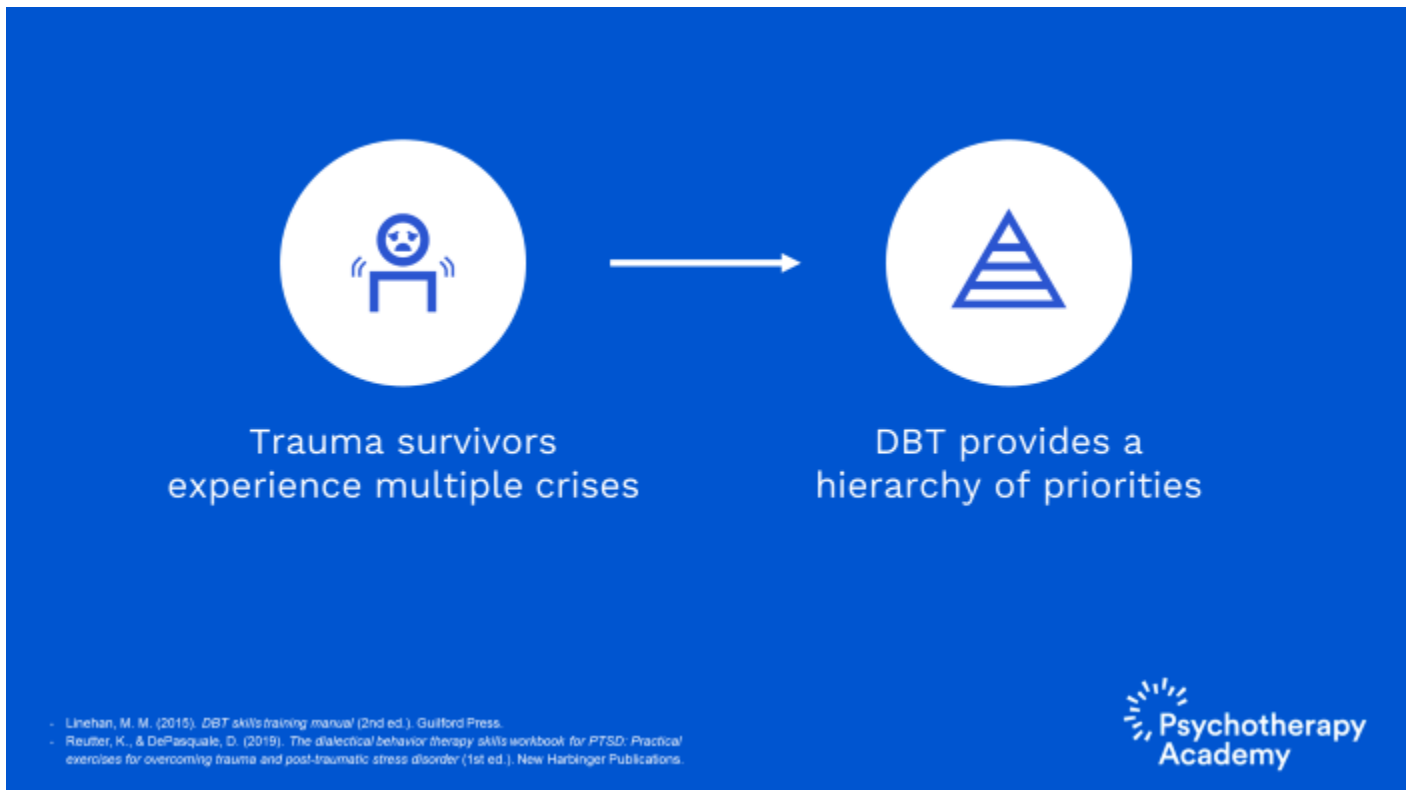
1. DBT provides a hierarchy of treatment priorities:
 - Suicidal thoughts or behaviors.
 - Treatment-interfering behaviors and/or ruptures to the therapeutic alliance.
 - Quality of life behaviors.
 - Skills training and reinforcement.
2. The first three priorities deal with crises, while the final priority deals with skills work. Each COW is an opportunity to practice skills.
3. There are strategies to deal with the crisis:
 - Allocate COW time for the beginning or end of a session.
 - Use a diary card or chain analysis.

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Treatment Priorities



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Welcome to the sixth video in this module. As we have learned from previous videos, clients with a chronic history of trauma may be dysregulated across a variety of domains. So, what do we do when a client has competing needs, or even multiple crises at the same time? Well, that's what we will learn in this video. So, let's get started.

It's no surprise that many trauma survivors experience multiple crises at the same time. Precisely for that reason, DBT provides a hierarchy of priorities so that clinicians know which issues to prioritize.

References

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Reutter, K., & DePasquale, D. (2019). *The dialectical behavior therapy skills workbook for PTSD: Practical exercises for overcoming trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder* (1st ed.). New Harbinger Publications.

First Priority



Address suicidal thoughts
or behaviors

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



The first priority is to address any suicidal thoughts or behaviors. It's no surprise that that would be top priority at all times because, if you think about it simply from a practical perspective, it doesn't matter how good of a therapist you are, you cannot do DBT or any other model for that matter to a client that's not alive.

References

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



Second Priority



Treatment-interfering behaviors



Ruptures to the therapeutic alliance



Not participating in a group or not showing up

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT skills training manual (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



The second priority is to address treatment-interfering behaviors and/or ruptures to the therapeutic alliance. So, what do we mean by a treatment-interfering behavior? That might refer to behaviors such as monopolizing a group, or not participating at all in a group, or showing up late to a session, or not showing up at all. Once again, it doesn't matter how good of a therapist you are, you can't provide any sort of treatment if the client doesn't even show up.

References

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT skills training manual (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



Third Priority



Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



The third priority is to address quality of life behaviors. This refers to behaviors such as constantly getting evicted, or constantly getting fired, or constantly moving from address to address. Once again, if a client's life is literally that unstable, it's going to be very difficult to participate in a consistent treatment regimen.

References

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



Fourth Priority



Engage in skills training
or reinforcement

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT skills training manual (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



Now, the fourth and final priority is to actually engage in skills training or reinforcement. If you think about it, the first three priorities all deal with crises while the final priority deals with skills work. But remember all of these are priorities and therefore they all need to be prioritized.

References

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT skills training manual (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.



COW: Crisis of (the) Week



Opportunities to deal with the crisis while teaching a skill

Reutter, K., & DePasquale, D. (2019). *The dialectical behavior therapy skills workbook for PTSD: Practical exercises for overcoming trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder* (1st ed.). New Harbinger Publications.



Just because a client is having what I call a COW, which stands for crisis of week, does not mean we neglect skills work. On the contrary, each COW that happens is an opportunity to practice skills and learn new ones. So if your client has recurring COWs, and trust me, we all have that client sometimes, so every single week it's either the same crisis or a different crisis but regardless, it's some kind of a COW, there are several strategies you can implement in order to honor all four of these priorities. In other words, deal with the crisis while still teaching skills.

References

Reutter, K., & DePasquale, D. (2019). *The dialectical behavior therapy skills workbook for PTSD: Practical exercises for overcoming trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder* (1st ed.). New Harbinger Publications.



Strategies for COWs



Place it at the beginning or end of a session



Use chain analysis to dissect the COW



Utilize between-session support



Use it to practice skills

Reutter, K., & DePasquale, D. (2019). *The dialectical behavior therapy skills workbook for PTSD: Practical exercises for overcoming trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder* (1st ed.). New Harbinger Publications.



Here are some suggestions for doing that. One suggestion is to allocate COW time for either the beginning or end of a session and then use the rest of the session for either skills work or trauma processing. Another option is to use a diary card or chain analysis to dissect the COW in more detail. Another option might be to utilize between-session support to deal with the COW in real-time so that it does not need to monopolize session time. And finally, use the COW itself as an opportunity to practice skills or learn new ones.

References

Reutter, K., & DePasquale, D. (2019). *The dialectical behavior therapy skills workbook for PTSD: Practical exercises for overcoming trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder* (1st ed.). New Harbinger Publications.



Key Points

- DBT provides a hierarchy of treatment priorities:
 - Suicidal thoughts or behaviors.
 - Treatment-interfering behaviors and/or ruptures to the therapeutic alliance.
 - Quality of life behaviors.
 - Skills training and reinforcement.



So, let's summarize a few of the key points we have learned in this video. First of all, many trauma survivors experience multiple crises at the same time. DBT provides a hierarchy of priorities so that clinicians know which issues to prioritize when. Priority one, address any suicidal thoughts or behaviors. Priority two, address treatment-interfering behaviors and/or ruptures to the therapeutic alliance. Priority three, address quality of life behaviors. And finally, priority four, engage in skills training and reinforcement.



Key Points

- The first three priorities deal with crises, while the final priority deals with skills work.
- Each COW is an opportunity to practice skills.



Another key point, the first three priorities all deal with crises while the final priority deals with skills work. However, it is important to remember that all four priorities need to be prioritized. Just because a client is having a COW, crisis of week does not mean we neglect skills work. On the contrary, each COW is an opportunity to practice skills and learn new ones.



Key Points

- There are strategies to deal with the crisis.
 - Allocate COW time for the beginning or end of a session.
 - Use a diary card or chain analysis.



And finally, if your client has reoccurring COWs, every week it's either the same crisis or a different crisis, there are several strategies you can implement that you honor all four priorities. In other words, deal with the crisis while still teaching skills. So here are some suggestions. Allocate COW time for the beginning or end of a session and then use the rest of the session for either skills work or trauma processing. Or you can use a diary card or chain analysis to dissect the COW in more detail or utilize between-session support to deal with the COW in real-time, so it does not need to monopolize session time. And regardless of your strategy, use the COW itself as an opportunity to practice skills work, or learn new skills.

