

Module 2 / Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

Teaching Notes

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Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

Goals of the Module

Interpersonal response patterns taught in DBT skills training are divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the core interpersonal skills of obtaining objectives while maintaining relationships and self-respect. These skills are very similar to those taught in many assertiveness and interpersonal problem-solving classes. The second section is designed for individuals who want help in developing and maintaining relationships. It focuses on decreasing interpersonal isolation by addressing how to find friends, get them to like you, and then build the sensitivity and communication skills necessary for maintaining friendships. How to end destructive relationships is also covered. The third section covers skills for walking the middle path, which have to do with balancing acceptance and change in relationships. These skills were developed for working with adolescents' families,^{1*} but they can be useful for individuals, as well as for any group members who wish to develop better communication and collaboration skills.

Core Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills: Obtaining Objectives While Maintaining Relationships and Self-Respect

The core interpersonal effectiveness skills include effective strategies for asking for what one needs,

for saying no, and for managing interpersonal conflicts skillfully. "Effectiveness" here has to do with "doing what works" in these areas.

Many individuals possess reasonably effective interpersonal skills in a general sense. Problems arise in the application of these skills to specific situations. People may be able to describe effective behavioral sequences when discussing how another person encounters a problematic situation, but they may be completely incapable of generating or carrying out a similar behavioral sequence for their own situation. It is important to remember here what is meant by the term "skill": "the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance."² Thus having a skill means not only having a specific response in one's behavioral repertoire (e.g., saying "no"), but also having the ability to respond in a way likely to have the intended effect. The ability to hold a flute in your hands, blow out air, and move your fingers over the flute's finger holes, for example, does *not* mean that you are a skillful flute player. Mastering any skill of consequence ordinarily takes practice and feedback, often repeated many times over.

Even if people have a very strong knowledge of interpersonal skills, any number of factors can interfere with their use of those skills. For example, an interpersonal mistake that many individuals make is premature termination of relationships. Such termination can be due to difficulties in several skill areas. Problems in distress tolerance can make it difficult to tolerate fears, anxieties, or frustrations that are typical in conflictual situations. Problems in emotion regulation can lead to difficulties with decreasing anger, with frustration, or with fear of another's reaction. Inadequate problem-solving skills can make it difficult to turn potential relationship conflicts into positive encounters. Problems

*Sections XIV–XVII of this chapter, as well as other material marked with note number 1, are adapted from Miller, A. L., Rathus, J. H., & Linehan, M. M. (2007). *Dialectical behavior therapy with suicidal adolescents*. New York: Guilford Press. Copyright 2007 by The Guilford Press. Adapted by permission.

with attending to the moment in a nonjudgmental fashion (i.e., problems with mindfulness) can make it difficult either to assess personal wishes and goals or to assess what is needed to improve the situation.

Obtaining Objectives Skillfully

The core interpersonal effectiveness skills (Sections I–IX of this chapter) teach participants how to apply specific interpersonal problem-solving, social, and assertiveness skills to modify aversive environments and to obtain their goals in interpersonal encounters. The module focuses on situations where the objective is to change something (e.g., requesting someone to do something or take a point of view seriously) or to resist changes someone else is trying to make (e.g., saying no). Thus it is most properly considered a course in assertion, where the goal is for persons to assert their own wishes, goals, and opinions in a manner that leads other people to respond favorably. The skills taught in this part of the module maximize the chances that a person's goals in a specific situation will be met, while at the same time not damaging (and, ideally, even enhancing) the interpersonal relationship and/or the person's self-respect. The instructional content is divided into several segments.

Factors That Reduce Effectiveness and Goal Identification

Sections I–IV deal with identifying factors that contribute to interpersonal effectiveness, as well as things that interfere with being effective. The particular behavioral patterns needed for social effectiveness are almost totally a function of a person's goals in a particular situation. Thus the ability to analyze a situation and to determine goals is crucial for interpersonal effectiveness. Section IV of the module in particular addresses this challenge.

Objectives Effectiveness: DEAR MAN

Section V focuses on objectives effectiveness—specific skills for getting what one wants, summarized with the mnemonic DEAR MAN: Describe, Express feelings, Assert wishes, Reinforce, (stay) Mindful, Appear confident, and Negotiate.

Relationship Effectiveness: GIVE

Section VI covers relationship effectiveness—skills for keeping a relationship, summarized with the mnemonic GIVE: (be) Gentle, (act) Interested, Validate, (use an) Easy manner.

Self-Respect Effectiveness: FAST

Section VII describes skills for self-respect effectiveness—keeping one's self-respect; the mnemonic here is FAST: (be) Fair, (no) Apologies, Stick to values, (be) Truthful.

Section VIII focuses on guidelines for modulating how intensely to ask for what one wants or say no. Section IX, the last section of core skills, focuses on troubleshooting—how to figure out why interpersonal skills may not be working.

In this part of the module, it is especially easy to spend too little time on teaching the skills of asking or saying no in an effort to have time for everything else. At least half of this part should be devoted to the objectives, relationship, and self-respect effectiveness skills (Sections V, VI, and VII). In-session practice and role plays of these new behaviors are essential; these activities constitute an important part of all interpersonal skills training programs. However, integrating behavioral practice of new behaviors within sessions can be one of the most difficult aspects of skills training for new therapists and for those not trained in behavior therapy. Thus it can be very easy to just let it slip by in this module.

Skills for Building Relationships and Ending Destructive Ones

The skills in this part of the module (Sections X–XIII) are designed specifically to teach individuals how to meet new people and interact in a way that facilitates the development of trust and friendship, and that reduces the likelihood of conflict. It also covers how to end relationships that are damaging.

Finding Potential Friends

In Section XI, the skills are aimed at getting individuals started at actively finding people who might become their friends. This is particularly important

for those individuals who are isolated and feel lonely much of the time.

Mindfulness of Others

Mindfulness of others and sensitivity to others' needs are critical components of developing and maintaining relationships and are covered in Section XII. Notice as you teach these skills that the mindfulness skill of describing is referred to often. Describing one's own or another's reactions, thoughts, or feelings is the opposite of making judgmental comments about oneself or others. This is a critical interpersonal skill, because judgmentalness is often poisonous in both new and ongoing relationships.

How to End Relationships

Staying in destructive relationships too long can, of course, be just as problematic as not having relationships. Skills for those who have difficulty ending relationships are covered in Section XIII. These individuals often have enormous difficulties in saying no, as well as difficulties in observing their own limits. Emotion dysregulation is often the culprit here—fear of what might happen to oneself or the other if the person leaves the relationship, out-of-control grief at another's current or potential suffering, excessive guilt at causing another pain, and compassion for another while failing to have compassion for oneself. In these cases, people often vacillate between avoidance of conflict and intense confrontation. Unfortunately, the choice of avoidance versus confrontation is often based on an individual's current emotional state (i.e., mood dependency) rather than on the needs of the situation. Interpersonal effectiveness skills are difficult to develop in a vacuum; perhaps more than any other set of skills, they depend on simultaneous improvement across all skill areas.

The skills in this part of this module do not cover the finer points of finding love or a life partner, or of developing intimate relationships and deep and lasting friendships. Nor are the skills directed at how to make time alone more palatable. The skills, however, are essential basic skills for anyone who wants to meet new people, find and keep love or a partner, form and maintain lasting intimate friendships, and build a life where time spent alone is filled with satisfying activities.

Walking the Middle Path

As noted above, the skills for walking the middle path (Sections XIV–XVII) were originally designed for family skills training with adolescents and their caregivers. The skills, however, are also important for adults and can be helpful in any relationship. They are also essential for DBT skills trainers. There are three skill sets in walking the middle path: dialectics, validation, and behavior change strategies. Taken together, the skills in this part of the module focus on balancing acceptance and change in interpersonal relationships.

Dialectics

The skill of dialectics is covered in Section XV. As discussed in Chapter 1, dialectics as a world view forms the basis of DBT. It has three primary characteristics. The first stresses the wholeness of reality and directs our attention to the immediate and larger contexts of behavior, as well as to the interrelatedness of individual behavior patterns. Second, from a dialectical perspective, reality is comprised of internal opposing forces (thesis and antithesis), and out of their synthesis evolves a new set of opposing forces. Dichotomous, extreme thinking, behavior, and emotions are viewed as dialectical failures; the individual has become stuck in polarities unable to move to synthesis. Third, dialectics assumes that the nature of reality is change. Both the individual and the environment are undergoing continuous transition. In essence, every relationship is one of continuous transition and change.

Validation

Although validation as a skill is covered as one of the relationship effectiveness GIVE skills (see above and Section VI), it is retaught in Section XVI in more depth, because it is so essential to developing and maintaining close and intimate relationships. Validation has to do with communicating clearly to others that you are paying attention to them, that you understand them, that you are nonjudgmental, that you have empathy, and that you can see the facts or the truth of their situation. The key to teaching validation is for participants already to have a firm foundation in mindfulness. Validation requires the ability to observe and describe without necessarily adding to what is observed, and to listen and

interact nonjudgmentally. As you teach the validation skills, you may need to review the mindfulness skills. How to recover from invalidation is also included in this section. This skill teaches participants how to validate themselves effectively when necessary. For a thorough discussion of validation and how to use it see Linehan (1997).³

Strategies for Changing Behavior

Finally, the middle path skills include basic behavioral contingency management skills. The basic idea is that systematic and contingent application of consequences following others' behaviors can have an enormous impact on their behavior in the future. Although telegraphing consequences of behavior is part of the core DEAR MAN skills taught in Section V (Reinforce), in this section specific contingency management skills are taught—including positive and negative reinforcement, shaping, extinction, satiation, and punishment. These are the very same skills that therapists also use in DBT. (See Chapter 5 in this manual, and also see Chapter 10 of the main DBT text.)

Selecting Material to Teach

As noted above, there is a great deal of material for each skill in the interpersonal teaching notes that follow. Most of it you will not cover the first time you teach specific skills. The notes are provided to give you a deeper understanding of each skill so that you can answer questions and add new teaching as you go. As in Chapters 6 and 7, I have put a checkmark (✓) next to material I almost always cover. If I am in a huge rush, I may skip everything but checkmarked points. Similarly, on this manual's special website (www.guilford.com/dbt-manual), I use stars (★) for core handouts I almost always use.

And as in Chapter 7, I have indicated information summarizing research in special “Research Point” features. The great value of research is that it can often be used to sell the skills you are teaching.

Moreover, as when you are teaching any skills module, it is important that you have a basic understanding of the specific interpersonal effectiveness skills you are teaching. Decide what skills you are going to teach first. Carefully study the teach-

ing notes, handouts, and worksheets for each skill you have selected to teach. Highlight the points you want to make, and bring a copy of the relevant pages with you to teach from. Practice each skill, and make sure you understand how to use it yourself. Before long you will solidify your knowledge of each skill. At that point, you will find your own favorite teaching points, examples, and stories, and can ignore mine.

Finally, a number of handouts in this module offer brief, optional, multiple-choice quizzes of skills taught. They can be used within group sessions and discussed, or can be assigned as homework. An answer key for all of these handouts is provided below, and the key for each handout is provided at the end of the sections in which the handout might be used.

Answer Key for Multiple-Choice Handouts

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11a: Identifying Skills to Find People and Get Them to Like You

- Effective answers: 1A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6B, 7B, 8B, 9B, 10B, 11B, 12A

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12a: Identifying Mindfulness of Others

- Effective answers: 1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7B, 8B, 9B, 10A, 11B, 12B

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13a: Identifying How to End Relationships

- Effective answers: 1B, 2B, 3B, 4A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16c: Identifying Dialectics

- Effective answers: 1A, 2B, 3B, 4B, 5A, 6C, 7B, 8B

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18a: Identifying Validation

- Effective answers: 1B, 2A, 3A, 4B, 5A, 6B, 7B, 8B

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19a: Identifying Self-Validation

- Effective answers: 1A, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5A, 6B

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22a: Identifying Effective Behavior Change Strategies

- Effective answers: 1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8A


Teaching Notes

I. GOALS OF THIS MODULE (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 1)

Main Point: The basic goal of this module is for participants to learn how to be effective in interpersonal interactions, so that their interactions with others will have outcomes they want. These skills teach participants how to be effective at achieving their own goals without alienating the other person or losing their self-respect. Interpersonal effectiveness skills are also necessary for strengthening current relationships and for finding and building new relationships.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 1: Goals of Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills. This handout is intended to orient participants to interpersonal goals for which the skills taught in this module might be very useful. Go over it briefly, link the module to participants' goals, and generate some enthusiasm for learning the interpersonal effectiveness skills. Then move to the next handout. If time permits, have participants checkmark the goals that are most important to them. Spend more time on the handout later, if necessary.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills (Optional). This worksheet is designed to help participants (1) decide whether they want to use interpersonal skills instead of power tactics to get what they want, and (2) decide whether to go after what they want instead of giving up on getting it. Its major use is to communicate that the goal is to be *effective* in getting what they want (i.e., in reaching their own goals). It is not about being nice, following rules, giving in, or doing what other people want. This worksheet can also be used as an exercise to improve the likelihood of being effective when a person is overcome with emotions (e.g., when the person just wants to yell and scream, or to avoid an interpersonal situation completely). It can also be used as a teaching tool for how to figure out goals. For instructions in teaching pros and cons, see the teaching notes for the Distress Tolerance module (Chapter 10, Section V) on reviewing pros and cons as a way to make behavioral decisions. Assign this worksheet as optional if you teach other handouts in the session that have associated worksheets.

- ✓  **Discussion Point:** Either before or after reviewing Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 1, ask participants to check off each goal that is important to them in the boxes on the handout, and then to share choices.

The goals of interpersonal effectiveness skills include the following:

✓ A. Be Skillful in Achieving Objectives with Others


The skills in this section are a variation on assertiveness skills. They have to do with being interpersonally effective in two sets of situations.


1. Asking Others to Do Things

- ✓ Skills for asking others to do things we would like them to do include making requests, initiating discussions, solving problems in relationships/repairing relationships, and getting others to take our opinions seriously.

2. Saying No to Unwanted Requests Effectively

Skills for saying no to unwanted requests include resisting pressure from others and maintaining a position or point of view.

- ✓  **Discussion Point:** Ask participants whether they have more trouble asking for what they want or saying no to unwanted requests from others. Ask who has trouble getting others to take their opinions seriously. Are there some people with whom, or some times when, being assertive is harder? How about easier?

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss with participants how they view their own interpersonal skills. Some individuals will be skillful at asking for things but not skillful at saying no, whereas others can say no but cannot ask for anything. Still others are deficient across the board. Sometimes individuals are able to apply skills in some situational contexts but not in others. For example, some people may be quite comfortable at saying no to strangers but not to friends; others may be able to ask for help from friends but not from their bosses. Elicit from each person the situations and skills he or she feels are strong (enough) and those that need further work.

Note to Leaders: The major goal here is for participants to see the relevance of interpersonal effectiveness skills training to their own lives by seeing areas in which they need improvement. Keep in mind that participants' descriptions of their strengths and weaknesses in these skills may not correspond with their actual skill levels. Some will report having no skills, but are able to apply skills in role plays; others may report strong skills, but then demonstrate clear deficits in role plays. Both sorts of participants will benefit from support and encouragement in their process of building mastery and a fact-based sense of self-efficacy.

Feel free to share with participants your own areas of strength and weakness. This can serve to normalize the notion of skill deficits by highlighting that we all have areas in which we can improve our skills. In my experience, some individuals are exceptionally skilled in many interpersonal situations and may present as if they do not need interpersonal effectiveness skills training. However, a closer discussion, especially of various situational contexts, will reveal that almost everyone can use some skills training. Therefore, even with a very skilled person, make every effort to identify areas where that person can use improvement.

✓ **B. Build Relationships, Strengthen Current Relationships, and End Destructive Ones**

Skills for relationships include skills for doing these things:

- Not letting hurts and problems build up.
- Heading off problems.
- Repairing relationships (or ending them if necessary).
- Resolving conflicts before they get overwhelming.

Unattended relationships can develop cracks that create enormous stress. This stress then increases emotional vulnerability, and life can go downhill. Unattended relationships often blow up, and can end even when people want them to continue. Having the ability to repair relationships is much more important than keeping them from “tearing” in the first place. However, the longer relationships remain unattended to, the harder they are to repair. Relationships that are ignored can weaken and disappear. Once a relationship disappears, it can be difficult to resurrect it. Sometimes, rather than disappearing, relationships become intolerably difficult; thus learning how to end an intolerably painful and hopeless relationship is also an important skill.

Note to Leaders: If you plan on teaching the skills for building relationships and ending destructive ones (Sections X–XIII of this module), then stress these skills as a way to both find and build new relationships, as well as to end hopeless relationships.

✓ C. Walk the Middle Path

A final set of interpersonal effectiveness skills involves “walking the middle path” (a concept covered in Chapter 7 among the supplementary mindfulness skills). If you are teaching these skills, emphasize these points to participants:

- Keeping relationships requires balancing our own priorities with the demands of others.
- Relationships require balancing change with acceptance without letting go of either.

Maintaining relationships also require us to remember that relationships are transactional. For relationships to work, it is important to practice looking at all sides of situations, finding the kernel of truth in other people’s views. Although we need to have skills that can get others to change their behavior, we must also balance that with accepting others as they are.

II. FACTORS REDUCING INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 2–2A)

Main Point: Lack of skill, indecision, interference from emotions, prioritizing short-term goals over long-term goals, interference from the environment, and interpersonal myths can each make interpersonal effectiveness very difficult.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2: Factors in the Way of Interpersonal Effectiveness. This handout can be reviewed quickly. If time is short, skip the discussion and lecture points provided below. You can revisit this handout later to troubleshoot difficulties in using interpersonal effectiveness skills successfully.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2a: Myths in the Way of Interpersonal Effectiveness (*Optional*). This handout can be used as part of an exercise on identifying and challenging worry thoughts and myths. See Section F below for a detailed description. If time is short, skip this handout and instead describe several myths when introducing the factors that interfere with interpersonal effectiveness.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 2: Challenging Myths in the Way of Interpersonal Effectiveness (*Optional*). Listing the same myths as on Handout 2a, this worksheet helps participants develop new challenges or rewrite the challenges discussed in group sessions in more personal language. The important point is for the participants to “own” a challenge, not to necessarily think up one on their own. There are also spaces for participants to write in and challenge their own myths. Be careful about assigning too much homework, but if you assign this worksheet, be sure to review it with participants. If necessary, instruct them in how to rate intensity of emotions. (For instructions, see Chapter 10, Section VI.)

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 7: Troubleshooting Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills. If participants have already gone through the Interpersonal Effectiveness skills module once and this is their second time, encourage them to use this worksheet. It covers the same topics, organized in the same sequence as in Handout 2 above. However, it is overwhelming and hard to use when participants are going through the module for the first time. It works much better when given at the module’s end or when these skills are repeated.

(Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 9: Troubleshooting: When What You Are Doing Isn’t Working. This handout may also be appropriate when the module is repeated. It also covers the same topics in the same sequence as Handout 2 and Worksheet 7.)

✓ Being interpersonally skillful is hard. There are many reasons why interactions may not be effective.

✓ A. Lack of Needed Skills

Say to participants: “When you lack skills, you don’t know what to say or how to act. You don’t know how to behave in order to obtain your interpersonal goals.”

1. Lack of Ability versus Lack of Motivation

Lack of ability to behave in a certain way is very different from lack of motivation. Emphasize that people learn social behaviors by observing someone else do them first, practicing them, and refining them until they can be used to obtain good results. People sometimes don’t have enough opportunities to observe; therefore, they don’t learn the behaviors. Or they may not have the chance to practice the behaviors they do observe.

2. Ability, Observation, and Modification

Tell participants: “Having a skill means that you not only have a specific ability (for instance, to say no), but that you can do two other things.”

- “You have the ability to observe the effect of what you do and how you do it on others.”
- “And you can then modify what you do, based on this feedback, in order to have an intended effect. Becoming interpersonally effective usually requires that critical skills are overlearned, so that they are automatic when needed. Any skill of consequence, however, ordinarily takes practice and feedback many times over to master.”



Practice Exercise: Hold up your hands as if you are holding a flute, and ask participants to do the same. Then ask participants to pucker their lips and blow air as they move their fingers over the imaginary holes in the flute. Ask them: “Does this mean that all of you can now play the flute?” The same can be said for sports, public speaking, solving problems, and—most importantly—interpersonal skills. Elicit examples of skills participants have learned that took lots of practice to get proficient at.

Note to Leaders: When I teach this, I do the practice exercise above first. Then, using the information below, I explain why the ability to blow air and move my fingers does not mean that I can play a flute.

✓ B. Indecision

Say to participants: “Even if you have the ability to be effective, you may not know or can’t decide what you want. There are several ways that indecision can hinder you.”

- “Not knowing what you really want can be confusing and get in the way of being clear about what you are asking for or saying no to.”
- “Indecision on how to balance your needs with those of others can lead to ambivalence and make it hard for you to know how insistent to be in asking or saying no to things.”
- “Vacillating between asking for too much and not asking for anything, or between the equal extremes of saying no to everything and giving in to everything, can keep you in an extreme position and make you unlikely to be effective.”



Discussion Point: Discuss the tendency to go to extremes of asking (or saying no) versus not asking (or giving in). Also discuss tendencies to go to extremes: complete neediness (asking in a clinging, begging, grasping, or hysterical manner) versus complete self-sufficiency (never asking, saying yes to everything); complete worthiness (asking in an inappropriately demanding manner or refusing belligerently) versus complete unworthiness (never asking or saying no). Elicit examples.

✓ C. Interference from Emotions

Tell participants: “Emotions may get in the way of your ability to behave effectively. You may have the capability to use interpersonal skills, but your skills are mood-dependent and are interfered with by your emotions.”

- Emotions can inhibit skillful actions or overwhelm known skills. In fact, emotions can be so strong that emotional actions, words, and facial and body expressions become automatic.
- Automatic emotional reactions can be based on previous conditioning. Or they can be a result of believing myths (discussed below).
- A person can have skills in one set of situations but not in another, or in one mood but not in another, or in one frame of mind but not in another.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit examples of strong emotions interfering with skillful behavior.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit examples of having variable skills, depending on current emotions or mood.

✓ D. Prioritizing Short-Term Goals over Long-Term Goals

Several factors can cause us to give priority to short-term over long-term goals. Two major ones are low distress tolerance and failure to think about consequences.


1. Low Tolerance for Distress

Low distress tolerance often leads us to jump into a situation and demand what we want, even when it is not in our long-term interest or is inconsistent with our long-term goals, values, and/or self-respect.

Example: If our tolerance for conflict is low, we might end a relationship that we really want, or give in to another person’s wishes when we know we don’t really want to.

2. Failure to Consider Consequences

Sometimes we don’t think about the consequences of our actions for ourselves and the people we are interacting with. When angry, we may make threats and demand our way right this minute; in a calmer moment later, we realize that getting what we want is less important than the relationship.


 **Discussion Point:** Elicit examples of putting short-term over long-term goals and regretting it later.

✓ E. Interference from the Environment

Environmental factors, including other people, may preclude effectiveness. At times even the most skilled individuals cannot be effective at getting what they want, keeping others liking them, or behaving in ways that they respect.

- When the environment is powerful, other people may simply refuse to give us what we want, or they may have the authority to make us do what they want. Saying no or insisting on our rights under these circumstances may have very negative consequences.
- Sometimes there is no way to keep the other person liking us and also get what we want or say no. People may be threatened, jealous, or envious, or may have any number of other reasons for not liking someone.
- When we are faced with a conflict, and achieving an objective is very important (e.g., food or medical care for ourselves or our children), we may have to act in ways that damage our pride or otherwise hurt our self-respect.
- Fully applying ourselves to being interpersonally effective is the only way to know whether the environment is preventing effectiveness. This includes preparing for assertiveness ahead

of time, and getting feedback on the plan from trusted individuals, such as getting DBT skills coaching.

 **Discussion Point:** Some people believe that all failures to get what they want from someone else are failures in skills. They have difficulty seeing that sometimes the environment is simply imperious to even the most skilled individuals. Thus, when they fail to get what they want by using interpersonal effectiveness skills, they may fall back into hopelessness, try an aggressive response, or threaten (e.g., blackmail) other people. Although increased interpersonal skills should increase the probability of getting objectives met, they are not a guarantee. Elicit times when participants have been very skillful (or seen someone else be skillful) but not successful at getting what was wanted.

Note to Leaders: Some individuals have a very unrealistic view of the world and of what skilled people can do. The idea that people often don't get what they want or need isn't clear to them. The belief that people can always get what they want and need precludes the necessity of developing distress tolerance skills. Without such skills, frustration often turns into anger. Be very careful on this point, especially during homework discussions.


✓ F. Interpersonal Myths

All people have some worries about standing up for themselves, expressing opinions, saying no, and so on. Sometimes worries are based on myths about interpersonal behavior.

Tell participants that they can counteract worries and myths in several ways:

- Arguing against them logically.
- Checking the facts (see Emotion Regulation Handout 8).
- Practicing opposite action (see Emotion Regulation Handout 10).
- Practicing cope ahead with imagined negative consequences (see Emotion Regulation Handout 19).

Counteracting worry thoughts and myths is an example of cognitive modification or cognitive therapy. It can sometimes be useful in getting people to do things they really want to do but are afraid to do. Challenges to myths can be used to challenge worries that crop up about trying interpersonal skills.

✓  **Practice Exercise:** Conduct an exercise in identifying and challenging myths. If you use Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2a, distribute it here. Avoid giving an introduction to the handout. Instead, ask participants to read the myths, to circle the ones they believe are true when they are in emotion mind, and to put a checkmark by the ones they agree with when they are in wise mind. After the participants have marked myths as true, ask which myths they checked and which they circled. There are then two possible ways to proceed:


1. Ask those who checked or circled a myth to offer challenges to one or both.
2. Use the devil's advocate technique to discuss myths. In this strategy, you present a myth and then make an extreme statement in favor of the myth, thus getting participants to argue the case for the counterstatements. As the participants argue against the myth, you continue to make extreme and universal (i.e., applying to all people) arguments to the myth. After several arguments, you give in and agree with the participants. (See Chapter 7 of the main DBT text for further discussion of this strategy.) The discussion on each statement should be resolved by transcending the extremes to find a synthesis or balancing point of view.


Not every myth has to be discussed in this exercise; the participants should be included in choosing which ones to go over. Whichever strategy you use, the task of participants is to develop per-

sonalized challenges or counterarguments against the myths. Ask everyone to write challenges down as participants think them up. Be sure that each challenge on the one hand contradicts the myth in some way, and on the other hand is at least somewhat believable to individual participants. For example, one participant might be able to challenge the myth “I don’t deserve to get what I want or need,” with “I do deserve to get what I want and need,” but this might be too strong for (and therefore rejected by) another participant. However, the second participant might be able to practice the challenge “Sometimes it’s OK for me to get things I want or need.” These challenges can be used as cheerleading statements later, to help participants get themselves to act effectively.

Note to Leaders: A homework assignment might be to have participants complete the challenges not covered during the exercise above. Another assignment might be to have them observe themselves over the week and write down any other myths that they operate by. They should also think up challenges to these other myths.

It is important to have participants practice reviewing their personalized challenges, in order to develop a strong habit of overcoming their myths. It can be very effective to have participants develop a plan for reviewing their challenges, such as placing them on their refrigerators or bathroom mirrors for daily review.

 **Discussion Point:** If you don’t use Handout 2a, ask participants what worry thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, and myths have gotten in the way of their asking for what they want or need and saying no to unwanted requests. Then generate challenges as noted in the exercise above for some or all of the myths.

 **Discussion Point:** Unmanaged worries can interfere with effectiveness even if they are not based on myths (e.g., “This person might get upset with me for asking,” or “I hope my anger doesn’t get out of control,” or “This person might say no to my request, and I won’t get what I want”). Elicit from participants worries that get in the way of effectiveness.

G. Interplay of Factors

Say to participants: “Very often, a combination of various factors may be keeping you from being effective. For example, the less you know, the more you worry, the worse you feel, the more you can’t decide what to do, the more ineffective you are, the more you worry, and so on. Or the more you experience nongiving and authoritarian environments, the more you worry, the less you practice skillfulness, the less you know, the worse you feel, the more you can’t decide what to do, and so on.”

III. OVERVIEW: CORE INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 3)

Main Point: Introduce the core DBT interpersonal effectiveness skills. These are the basic assertiveness skills necessary to achieve objectives, maintain relationships, and enhance self-respect. These three sets of skills are referred to by the mnemonics DEAR MAN, GIVE, and FAST. The effectiveness of these skills depends in part on two additional skills: clarifying priorities and determining how intensely to ask or say no.

Interpersonal Handout 3: Overview: Obtaining Objectives Skillfully. This overview handout can be reviewed briefly or skipped, depending on time. Do not actually teach the material while going over the points below unless you are skipping the related handouts, all of which are ordinarily taught.

Worksheet: None.

Say to participants: “The skills in this section of the module are aimed at being effective when you ask someone for something or respond to a request, while at the same time maintaining or even improving both the relationship and your self-respect.”

✓ **A. Clarifying Priorities**

Tell participants: “Clarifying your priorities is the first and most important interpersonal skill. It is the essential task of figuring out (1) what you actually want and how important it is, compared to (2) keeping a positive relationship and (3) keeping your own self-respect.”

✓ **B. Objectives Effectiveness Skills: DEAR MAN**

Say to participants: “DEAR MAN is DBT shorthand for the set of skills enabling you to effectively obtain your objective or goal.”

✓ **C. Relationship Effectiveness Skills: GIVE**

Continue: “GIVE is DBT shorthand for the set of skills enabling you to create or maintain a positive relationship while you also try to obtain your objective.”

✓ **D. Self-Respect Effectiveness Skills: FAST**

Continue: “FAST is DBT shorthand for the set of skills enabling you to maintain or increase your sense of self-respect while at the same time trying to obtain your objective.”

✓ **E. Skills for Evaluating Your Options**

Conclude the overview by telling participants: “Every situation is different. Sometimes it is very important to push hard to obtain your objective; at other times it can be equally important to give up your personal goals in favor of someone else’s. These skills help you figure out how hard to push for what you want and how strong to hold to saying no to someone else.”

IV. CLARIFYING GOALS IN INTERPERSONAL SITUATIONS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 4)

Main Point: To use interpersonal skills effectively, we have to decide the relative importance of (1) achieving our objective, (2) maintaining our relationship with the person(s) we are interacting with, and (3) maintaining our self-respect. The skills we use depend on the relative importance of these three goals.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 4: Clarifying Goals in Interpersonal Situations. This handout reviews the goals and priorities an individual might have in any interpersonal situation. Be sure that participants understand this handout before moving on, as it is an important underpinning of subsequent handouts. Generally, what is most difficult for participants to understand is that all three of these priorities must be considered in every goal-directed interpersonal situation.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 3: Clarifying Priorities in Interpersonal Situations. Review this worksheet with participants. In describing the prompting event, remind them to use the mindfulness “what” skill of describing (see Mindfulness Handout 4). This is very important, because when it comes to interpersonal conflict or fears about an interpersonal situation, individuals often fail to notice that much of what they describe as happening in a situation is actually their interpretations or assumptions.


✓ **A. Why Clarify Goals?**

To be effective in interpersonal interactions, it is important for us to know what we actually want—in other words, what our goal is. This is no easy task, however. Many interactions get off track

because we are not clear about what we really want. Interactions also get off track when emotions interfere with knowing what we want.

Example: “If you are afraid of asking for what you want or of saying no to a request, you may be too afraid even to think about what you want.”

Example: “Shame and thinking you don’t deserve to get what you want can interfere with believing it is OK to have goals and objectives.”

- ✓  **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have had trouble figuring out what their actual goal was in an interpersonal interaction. Discuss how these interactions turned out.

✓ **B. Three Potential Goals in Interpersonal Situations**


✓ **1. Objectives Effectiveness**

Say to participants: “Objectives effectiveness refers to attaining your objective or goal in a particular situation. Generally, the objective is the reason for the interaction in the first place.”

Emphasize: “The key question to ask yourself here is ‘**What specific result or change do I want from this interaction?**’ This is the specific change or outcome you want from the other person by the end of the interaction. It may be what the other person is to do, to stop doing, to commit to, to agree to, or to understand. It is important for the objective to be as specific as possible. The clearer you are about what you want, the easier it will be to apply objectives effectiveness skills, and the clearer you will be as to whether or not you succeed in reaching your goal.”

✓ *Examples:*

- “Standing up for your rights in such a way that they are taken seriously.”
- “Requesting others to do something in such a way that they do what you ask.”
- “Refusing an unwanted or unreasonable request and making the refusal stick.”
- “Resolving interpersonal conflict.”
- “Getting your opinion or point of view taken seriously.”

-  **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants which goals they find important (standing up for rights, making requests, refusing requests, etc.). Which are hardest and require the most skills?

✓ **2. Relationship Effectiveness**

Tell participants: “Relationship effectiveness refers to keeping or improving the relationship, while at the same time trying to achieve your goal in the interaction.”

Emphasize: “The key question to ask yourself here is ‘**How do I want the other person to feel about me after the interaction is over (whether or not I get the results or changes I want)?**’ At its best, you will get what you want, and the person may like or respect you even more than before. This likelihood is increased by using relationship effectiveness skills.”

Examples:

- “Acting in a way that makes the other person actually want to give you what you are asking for or feel good about your saying no to a request.”
- “Balancing immediate goals with the good of the long-term relationship.”

a. Improving a Relationship Can Be a Main Objective

Explain to participants: “If the main goal of the interaction is to get the other person to notice, like, or approve of you, or to stop criticizing or rejecting you, then enhancing the relationship is the objective and should be considered under objectives effectiveness. In that case, relationship effectiveness refers to choosing a way to go about developing, improving, or keeping the relationship that does not at the same time damage the relationship over the long run.”

Example: “You understand the other person’s perspective, while at the same time you ask this person to change how he or she treats you. You avoid threats, judgments, or attacks.”



b. Always Making the Relationship the Main Objective Doesn’t Work

Many individuals, of course, are highly concerned with maintaining relationships, approval, and liking. Some are willing to sacrifice personal objectives for the sake of interpersonal relationship goals. They may operate under the myth that if they sacrifice their own needs and wants to other people, their relationships will go more smoothly, approval will be ever forthcoming, and no problems will arise.

Discussion Point: Elicit examples of when participants have made relationships overly important, at the expense of their own objectives and self-respect—or even the relationships themselves.



c. Subverting Personal Needs in a Relationship Doesn’t Work

Draw a time line on the blackboard like that in Figure 8.1. At the left end of the time line, mark the beginning of a relationship. Then move the chalk toward the right as if time were marching on, and discuss how a relationship goes if a person constantly subverts his or her own needs for the sake of a relationship. Although a person can survive in such a relationship for some time, frustrations will build up and will have to be dealt with. Usually at the point where frustrations are long-standing, the unmet needs are large, and the sense of inequity is extreme, one of two things will happen: The frustrated individual will (1) blow up and thereby risk losing the relationship through the other person’s rejection; or (2) in frustration, leave the relationship on his or her own. Either way, the relationship comes to an end or is in serious jeopardy.

Discussion Point: Discuss the ways in which constantly subverting personal needs for the sake of a relationship has worked in participants’ lives. Usually someone can give examples of how he or she has blown up and ruined a relationship. Behaviors that may show up at the far end of the continuum include violent acts or threats, screaming or yelling, saying very hurtful things, and suicide attempts. (Other dysfunctional behaviors can also be used as examples.) Such behaviors often function to get someone else to take a person’s feelings and opinions seriously, or they may function to get other people to change their behavior. It is important to elicit from participants how blowing up or walking out of relationships inadvertently jeopardizes their own goals.

d. Extreme Behaviors May Be Effective in the Short Term but Not over the Long Term

Say to clients: “Extreme, unskillful behaviors early in a relationship may get you what you want in the moment, but they can also jeopardize a relationship’s very existence in the long run. Employing interpersonal skills will not only enhance your relationships, but improve your chances of obtaining interpersonal and social approval rather than the opposite.”

Discussion Point: A strategy that is sometimes useful at this point and at many other points is to ask participants to imagine another person behaving toward them in extreme ways, such as using violence, threats of suicide or other terrible acts, or blowing up. Ask, “How would it feel?”



FIGURE 8.1. Over time, subverting personal needs in a relationship usually ends the relationship.

From that perspective, individuals often find it easier to see the dysfunctional nature of these behaviors. The main goal here is to elicit participants' commitment to the value of learning and practicing interpersonal skills. Of course, commitments often waver in the actual situations where employing the skills is necessary; nonetheless, obtaining commitment is the first step in the process of shaping interpersonal skills.

Note to Leaders: Participants may have great difficulty seeing this point. In my experience, some individuals believe that extreme behaviors are not only effective but are the only behaviors possible, given the circumstances of their lives or of the group or culture in which they are living. It is essential at this point to help them develop some insight into how these strategies are self-defeating in the long run. Other individuals confuse the idea that a behavior can have a consequence (e.g., can be inconveniencing or hurtful) with the idea that the person *intends* the consequence. It is important to discuss the difference.



3. Self-Respect Effectiveness

Instruct participants: “Self-respect effectiveness is maintaining or improving your respect for yourself, and respecting your own values and beliefs, while you try to attain your objectives. Self-respect effectiveness means acting in ways that fit your sense of morality, and that make you feel a sense of competence and mastery.”

Emphasize: “The key question to ask yourself here is ‘How do I want to feel about myself after the interaction is over (whether or not I get the results or changes I want)?’”

a. Improving Self-Respect Can Be a Main Objective

Say to participants: “If the main goal of the interaction is to do something that will enhance your self-respect, then enhancing self-respect is the objective and should be considered under objectives effectiveness. This is particularly the case when the simple act of standing up and speaking is most important—in other words, when actually getting what you want is not as important as asserting what you want (such as asking for something, saying no, or expressing an opinion). In these cases, self-respect effectiveness refers to how you go about improving or keeping your self-respect. Relationship effectiveness refers to choosing a way to improve your self-respect that does not at the same time inadvertently damage your self-respect either short term or long term.”

Examples: Again, give a number of examples:

- “Standing up for yourself.”
- “Defending a friend.”
- “Stepping forward to do or say something courageous.”
- “Voting for what you really believe in (even if you are in the minority or will lose friends over your vote).”



b. Always Making Self-Respect the Main Objective Doesn't Work

Some individuals make maintaining their self-respect the major issue in almost all interactions. Always wanting to be “on top” or to have control or power, never letting another person win in an interaction, wanting to prove a point or defend a position no matter what—each of these positions can compromise long-term effectiveness.




c. Violating Our Own Moral Values Diminishes Self-Respect in the Long Term

Giving in on important things just for the sake of approval, lying to please others or to get what we want, or any activity that is experienced as “selling out” or “selling our souls” diminishes self-respect over time.

✓ **d. Acting Helpless Also Diminishes Self-Respect in the Long Term**

Even if acting helpless is strategic—that is, deliberately calculated to get someone to do something—the strategy will inevitably lead to reduced mastery and self-respect if it is overused.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have done things in relationships that reduced their sense of self-respect. When have they acted in ways that enhanced their sense of self-respect? Where do they need to improve their skills?

C. Deciding on the Relative Importance of the Three Effectiveness Types

1. All Three Types Must Always Be Considered

Emphasize that participants need to consider all three types of effectiveness in every situation with a specific interpersonal objective or goal.

✓ **2. Each Type of Effectiveness May Be More or Less Important in a Given Situation**

Note that, generally, one type of effectiveness may lose importance when pursuing it will interfere with a more highly valued type of effectiveness.

✓ **3. The Effectiveness of a Behavior in a Particular Situation Depends on a Person's Priorities**

Discuss the following examples of situations, goals, and priorities.

Example:

Situation: Diego's landlord keeps his damage deposit unfairly.

Objective: Get the damage deposit back (most important to Diego).

Relationship: Keep the landlord's good will and liking, or at least keeping good reference (second most important).

Self-respect: Not lose self-respect by getting too emotional, "fighting dirty," threatening.

Example:

Situation: Carla's best friend wants to come over and discuss a problem; Carla wants to go to bed.

Objective: Go to bed.

Relationship: Keep a good relationship with the friend (most important to Carla).

Self-respect: Balance caring for the friend with caring for herself (second most important).


Example:

Situation: Tiffany wants a raise; her boss wants sex in return.

Objective: Get the raise; stay out of bed with the boss.

Relationship: Keep the boss's respect and good will (second most important).

Self-respect: Not violate her own moral code by sleeping with the boss (most important to Tiffany).

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times they have risked losing what they want, a relationship, or their self-respect for a short-term relationship gain.

Examples may include attempting or threatening suicide or violence to get what they want or keep someone from leaving; attacking another person for voicing criticism; lying (and being found out) to get something; demanding to get their way; laying a "guilt trip" on another person to get that person to do something; and so on.



Practice Exercise: Have participants generate other situations and identify the objective(s) in the situation, the relationship issue, and the self-respect issue for each situation. Discuss priorities for each situation. Continue generating situations until it is clear that the participants have grasped the essential points. The following examples can be used; however, be sure to ask participants what would be most important to them before suggesting the priority given in boldface at the end of each example.

Example:

Situation: Yvonne is in a very difficult financial situation and has overdrawn her bank account. There is now a big overdraft fee on the account. Yvonne goes to the bank to ask a clerk to remove the fee.

Objective: Get the overdraft fee removed from the account.

Relationship: Keep the clerk's good will.

Self-respect: Not lie about what happened; not get too emotional and cry in front of the clerk.

In a very serious financial situation, getting the objective may be most important.

Example:

Situation: A friend asks Tony to engage in an illegal activity with him or her.

Objective: Not do anything illegal.

Relationship: Keep a good relationship with the friend.

Self-respect: Not go against Tony's values.

If engaging in activity could lead to legal trouble, getting the objective may be most important.

Example:

Situation: Sharon's boss asks her to stay overtime and finish a project.

Objective: Go home and relax.

Relationship: Keep a good relationship with the boss.

Self-respect: Balance self-care with doing the job well.

If the boss does not overdo these types of requests, keeping the relationship may be most important.

Example:

Situation: Sharon's boss asks her to stay overtime and finish a project.

Objective: Go to her child's piano recital right after work.

Relationship: Keep a good relationship with the boss.

Self-respect: Balance self-care with doing the job well.

Even if the boss does not overdo these types of requests, going to the piano recital may be most important.

Example:

Situation: Jim's younger sister asks him to cover for her and tell their parents she spent the night at Jim's place, which is not true.

Objective: Keep his sister out of trouble.

Relationship: Maintain a good relationship with his sister.

Self-respect: Not violate his moral code of not lying.

If lying is not a large violation of Jim’s moral code, the objective may be most important. If it is, self-respect may be most important.

Example:

Situation: Juanita gets into a controversy with her partner about a political issue.

Objective: Voice her opinion and have it taken seriously.

Relationship: Maintain a good relationship with her partner.

Self-respect: Stand up for what she believes.

Self-respect may be most important.



Practice Exercises: Ask participants to generate areas where they need to ask for something or say no to something. Work with participants in describing objectives, relationship issues, and self-respect issues. Discuss variations of which would be most important.

V. OBJECTIVES EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS: DEAR MAN (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 5–5A)

Main Point: Objectives effectiveness skills help us to be as effective as possible in achieving our objectives or goals. The term DEAR MAN is a way to remember these skills.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 5: Guidelines for Objectives Effectiveness: Getting What You Want (DEAR MAN). This handout describes the skills to use when a person wants to ask for something, say no, maintain a position or point of view, or achieve some other interpersonal objective. The skills are Describe, Express, Assert, Reinforce, (stay) Mindful, Appear confident, and Negotiate. Teach these didactically rather quickly, and then move to doing role plays.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 5a: Applying DEAR MAN Skills to a Difficult Current Interaction (Optional). This handout gives examples of how to handle situations where the other person also has very good interpersonal skills and keeps refusing legitimate requests or keeps asking for what he or she wants even when the first person keeps saying no. Material here can be woven into your teaching or can be given to participants as a take-home to read. Skills described can be practiced if there is time or can be covered in advanced classes.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 4: Writing Out Interpersonal Effectiveness Scripts. This is a worksheet for participants who want to figure out what they are going to do and say *before* they practice their interpersonal skills. Review the worksheet with participants and remind them to use the mindfulness “what” skill of describing (Mindfulness Handout 4) when describing the prompting event. Notice that this sheet requires participants to write down their goals for objectives, relationship, and self-respect effectiveness. You might want to review these definitions, as well as one or two examples, when you review this sheet. For this lesson on DEAR MAN skills, tell participants to fill out the worksheet through Step 6 (or as far as you have taught).

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 5: Tracking Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills Use. This is a general worksheet for tracking use of interpersonal effectiveness skills. Like Worksheet 3, it requires describing the prompting event and figuring out and writing down interpersonal priorities. It also asks about conflicts in priorities. (This part does not need to be filled out if there were no conflicts.) Next, participants describe what they actually said and did in the situation. The check lines are included on the sheet as a reminder of what the skills actually are, and to cue the participants both in practice and in writing down. Finally, the worksheet asks how the interaction went. Here you want the participants to say

whether they actually got their objectives met and what effects the interaction had on the relationship and their own self-respect.

A. What Is Objectives Effectiveness?

Say to participants: “Objectives effectiveness refers to attaining your objective or specific goal in a particular situation. The objective is ordinarily the reason for the interaction in the first place. These skills are really the same thing as assertiveness skills. Several types of situations call for objectives effectiveness or assertiveness.”

- “Getting others to do what you ask them to do.”
- “Saying no to unwanted requests and making it stick.”
- “Resolving interpersonal conflict or making changes in relationships.”
- “Getting your rights respected.”
- “Getting your opinion or point of view taken seriously.”

✓ B. The DEAR MAN Skills

Tell participants: “You can remember these skills with the term DEAR MAN.⁴ This stands for Describe, Express, Assert, Reinforce, (stay) Mindful, Appear confident, Negotiate.”

✓ 1. Describe the Situation

Instruct clients: “When necessary, begin by briefly describing the situation you are reacting to. Stick to the facts. No judgmental statements. Be objective.”

Why describe? Beginning an assertion by reviewing facts can be useful for a number of reasons. First, it ensures that the other person is oriented to the events leading to the request, refusal, opinion, or point of view. Also, sticking to objective facts helps the two parties get on the same page and begin a pattern of agreeing. Finally, if the other person is not in agreement on the basic facts of the situation, it gives the participant a fair warning that the assertion might not be well received or successful.


Remind participants that describing here is just like using the mindfulness skill of describing. When there is conflict or fear that the other person will disagree with a participant’s version of events, describing accurately can be very difficult. To help participants get the idea of describing observable facts, have them consider what a third party could have observed, or would agree had occurred. Or participants might consider what could be submitted for evidence in a court.

Example: “I’ve been working here for 2 years and have not gotten a raise, even though my performance reviews have been very positive.”

Example: “This is the third time you’ve asked this week for a ride home from work.”

Example: “I have gone over our budget and our outstanding debts very carefully, to see whether we do or do not have enough money for a vacation.”

Example: “I bought this shirt 2 weeks ago, and the receipt says I can return it within 90 days. The clerk refused to take it back, saying it was on sale. But, I have my receipt right here, and it says I can return it.”

- ✓  **Practice Exercises:** Role-play some of these examples, and elicit feedback from group members on the experience of describing events. Suggest that participants try describing really difficult interpersonal situations (briefly, giving just the facts) or times when they were angry with someone. Be sure to give feedback when participants drift from describing events to describing interpretations as if they were the events. For example, they should only say, “This is the third time you have left the front door unlocked,” as a prelude to asking someone to stop leaving the door unlocked if it is indeed the third time.

Note to Leaders: Practice Exercises are essential in teaching interpersonal skills. Once a chunk of material is presented and discussed, move to rehearsal, where the material just learned can be practiced. To get a good situation to practice, elicit examples from participants, dream them up yourself, or use one or more of the examples given below. Rehearsal techniques are as follows:

- **Rapid rehearsal.** Go around the room and have each person briefly rehearse a particular skill. For example, ask participants to describe a problem situation where they want to ask for something. For example, “There are a lot of dishes to wash,” as a prelude to asking someone to help wash the dishes. Next, have participants practice going around and expressing feelings or opinions about a situation (either the one practiced for describing or a new one), and likewise for asserting (by asking for something or refusing directly) and for reinforcing. You can have everyone practice on the same situation (which either you or the participants make up), or have each person use a situation from his or her own life. Practicing on the same situation is usually quicker if time is of the essence. Use this procedure at least once for each individual skill.

- **Role playing with a leader.** One person can rehearse (role-play) a situation with you, the leader, during the session. Usually, this is done when the participant is describing homework and it seems useful to try acting differently in the situation right away. It can also be used when a participant wants (or needs) help with particular types of situations.

- **Role playing with other participants.** Participants can role-play a situation, taking turns playing the person who is asking or saying no and the other person in the situation. Taking the part of the other person can be very important, because it gives participants an idea of what it feels like when someone else uses behavioral skills on them.

- **Dialogue rehearsal.** If a participant simply cannot role-play or refuses to do so, present the situation in story fashion: Ask, “Then what would you say?” Wait for a response, and then say, “OK, then the other person says _____. What would you say next?”

- **Covert rehearsal.** If a participant refuses even dialogue rehearsal, ask him or her to role-play the situation mentally and imagine giving a skilled response. Do a fair amount of prompting to guide the participant’s attention and focus.

Do not sacrifice rehearsal in order to present more material. Role playing is often the most difficult procedure for therapists with little experience in behavior therapy; nonetheless, it is essential. (You might try the role-play procedures with your DBT consultation team, or even with a friend, to get some practice.) Role playing can also be hard for participants at first, but with experience it gets easier. At the beginning, you sometimes have to pull or drag them through the practice. The most important thing with a reluctant role player is that you not fall out of role, even if he or she does. Just keep responding to the person as if you are actually in the situation you are rehearsing. Usually this will do the trick, and the person will get back into the role play.

2. *Express Clearly*

Say to participants: “Next, express clearly how you feel or what you believe about the situation. Don’t expect the other person to read your mind or know how you feel. For instance, give a brief rationale for a request or for saying no.”


Why express? Explain to participants: “By sharing your personal reactions to the situation, you are making it easier for the other person to figure out what you really want from the interaction. This can help alert the other individual to what makes the situation important to you, and can potentially draw personal interest to your situation. This can make you feel vulnerable at times, but it also has the advantage of providing important information to the other person.”

Example: “I believe that I deserve a raise.”

Example: “I’m getting home so late that it is really hard for me and my family.”

Example: “I am very worried about our current finances.”

Example: “I believe that I have a right to return this, and I am distressed that your clerk would refuse to take it back, particularly because there is no damage to it and I have the receipt.”

- ✓  **Practice Exercises:** Role-play some examples, and elicit feedback from group members on the experience of hearing expressions of feelings. This can help clarify the value of expressing genuine thoughts and feelings.

- ✓ Note that the Describe and Express skills are not always necessary. For example, a person might simply ask a family member going to the grocery store to get some orange juice (without saying, “We’re out and I’d like some”). In a hot, stuffy room, the person could ask someone else to open a window (without necessarily saying, “The room is stuffy and I’m feeling hot”). In saying no to a request, the person might simply say, “No, I can’t do it.” Every participant, however, should learn and practice each of the skills, even if not all of them are always needed.

3. Assert Wishes

Tell participants, “The third DEAR MAN skill is to ask for what you want. Say no clearly. Don’t expect people to know what you want them to do if you don’t tell them. Don’t beat around the bush, never really asking or saying no. Don’t tell them what they *should* do. Be clear, concise, and assertive. Bite the bullet and ask or say no.”

Example: “I would like a raise. Can you give it to me?”

Example: “I have to say no tonight. I just can’t give you a ride home so often.”

Example: “We simply do not have the money for the vacation we planned for this year.”

- ✓ *Example:* “Will you accept a return on the shirt?”


✓ **a. Expressing Is Not Asserting**


Many individuals feel very uncomfortable with asking an assertive question, and will need practice and simple feedback on whether or not they are actually asking a question (often confusing Express with Assert).

b. Asking versus Demanding

Some individuals feel very strongly that asking for things is weak, and that in many instances they should not have to ask for what they want, as others should be told or know what to do and do it. There are two points to make here.

- First, orient them to the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness. When people get their way by demanding and not giving the other person any say in the outcome, this is controlling, is potentially hostile, and tends to damage relationships. The group might give feedback on who wishes to be spoken to that way.
- Second, if a person tells someone what to do (rather than asking the person to do something), but does not request feedback on whether or not he or she will do it (i.e., with a question such as “Will you do that for me?”), then by the end of the interaction the person will not be certain whether or not the goal has been reached. Has the other person committed to, agreed upon, or accepted anything?

- ✓  **Practice Exercise:** Role-play the “demanding/telling” versus the “asking” strategies with participants, asking for feedback on strength of assertiveness (such as on a scale from 0 to 10).

- ✓  **Practice Exercise:** Role-play some examples, and ask each group member to role-play making one request to the person sitting next to him or her. Go all around the circle. Afterward, have participants discuss how it felt to be assertive, as well as how it felt to be asked. Give feedback to participants if they ask in a harsh or demanding way.

4. **Reinforce**

Say to participants: “The fourth DEAR MAN skill is to reinforce the other person. That is, identify something positive or rewarding that would happen for the other person if he or she gives the response you want. This can involve taking time to consider the other person’s perspective and motivation, and drawing connections between what you’re asking for and what the person wants or needs. Alternatively, you could offer to do something for the other person, if the other does this thing for you. At a minimum, express appreciation after anyone does something consistent with your request.”


The basic idea here is that people are motivated by gaining positive consequences (and by avoiding negative consequences). Explain to participants: “Linking your request to consequences that other people desire will make them more likely to agree. Also, if other people do not gain at least some of the time from complying with a request, taking no for an answer, or listening to your opinions, then they may stop responding in a positive way.”

Example: “I will be a lot happier and probably more productive if I get a salary that reflects my value to the company.”

Example: “I would really appreciate it if you would accept that I can’t always give you rides home.”

Example: “I think we will both sleep better if we stay within our budget.”

Example: “My hope is that we can work this out, so that I can continue shopping in this store and encouraging my friends to do likewise.”

 **Discussion Point:** The notion of behaviors’ being controlled by consequences, instead of by concepts of “good” and “bad” or “right” and “wrong,” can be particularly difficult for some participants to grasp. Discuss this idea with participants.

Emphasize to clients that “carrots” are more effective than “sticks.” That is, motivating with positive consequences (carrots) tends to be more effective than punishments (sticks) not only for maintaining positive relationships, but also for getting people actually to follow through with desired behaviors once the punishment is past. Although identifying positive consequences often takes more effort, it tends to pay off in effectiveness. However, when a request is extremely important and there are either no options for positive consequences or they have not worked, it may be necessary to motivate by introducing a negative consequence.

Note to Leaders: If you plan to teach the behavior change strategies of reinforcement, punishment, and extinction (see Section XVII of this chapter and Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 20–22), or have already taught them, you can reference the first two here. Extinction can be referenced later when you review the broken record and ignoring attacks (see below).

5. (Stay) **Mindful**

Tell participants: “The next DEAR MAN skill is to stay mindful of your objectives in the situation. Maintain your position and avoid being distracted onto another topic. There are two useful techniques here.”

a. **The “Broken Record”**

Instruct clients: “The first technique is to act like a skipping record on a turntable. That is, keep asking, saying no, or expressing your opinion over and over and over. This can include starting the DEAR script again from the top, or from any part that seems to make the most sense. Keep saying the exact same thing. The idea is that you don’t have to think up something different to say each time. The key is to keep a mellow voice tone—‘kill them with kindness,’ so to speak. The strength is in the persistence of maintaining the position.”

Go around and practice this with each person. This is perhaps one of the most important objectives effectiveness skills. Participants can usually learn it without much trouble, because it is easy to do and remember.

b. Ignoring Attacks and Diversions

Tell participants: “The second technique is that if another person attacks, threatens, or tries to change the subject, ignore their threats, comments, or attempts to divert you. Just keep making your point and don’t take the bait.”

If participants object to this (and many will), continue: “Paying attention to attacks gives the other person control. When you respond to an attack, you often lose track of your objective—and when that happens, the other person has taken control of the conversation. Also, if you pay attention to attacks, respond to them in any way, or let them divert you in the slightest, then you are reinforcing the attacks and diversions—which means that they are likely to occur more often. If you want to respond to the attacks, that is another issue and can be dealt with at another time or after this discussion is finished.”

Example: Here is an instance of giving the other person control:

REQUESTER: Would you give me the money you owe me?


OTHER: You are such a jerk for bringing up the fact that I owe you money when you know I don’t have much money.

REQUESTER: I’m not a jerk for wanting my money back.

OTHER: Yes, you are. You went and told my wife that I owe you money and that I am 3 months late in paying you back.

REQUESTER: No, I did not tell her that. Who told you that? [And on and on and on.]

Check to be sure that participants see that this is an example of getting off track.

 **Discussion Point:** Once participants get the hang of this skill, it can be quite fun to use. Elicit feedback on this point from participants, paying special attention to their belief that they have to respond to every criticism or attack made by another.


Note to Leaders: Be sure to practice both ignoring attacks and the “broken record” with all participants. Used together, these two strategies constitute a very effective skill for maintaining a refusal or putting pressure on someone to comply with a request. When the other person attacks, a participant should simply replay the “broken record.” It is extremely difficult to keep attacking or criticizing a person who doesn’t respond or “play the game.” But being a broken record and ignoring diversions are a lot harder than they look. The only way for participants to get the hang of these skills is to practice. Also, it can be a nice idea to have participants practice with each other, to see what having their own attacks and diversion strategies ignored or having another person keep repeating a request, opinion, or refusal feels like. The key to both the “broken record” and ignoring attacks is to keep hostility out of the voice while keeping on track.




6. Appear Confident

Encourage clients: “Use a confident voice tone, and display a confident physical manner and posture, with appropriate eye contact. Such a manner conveys to both the other person and yourself that you are efficacious and deserve respect for what you want. No stammering, whispering, staring at the floor, retreating, saying you’re not sure, or the like.”



 **Discussion Point:** Note that the skill is “Appear confident,” not “Be confident.” Note that it is perfectly reasonable to be nervous or scared during a difficult conversation; however, acting ner-

vous or scared will interfere with effectiveness. Elicit examples from participants about situations where it may be important to appear confident even when they are not.

 **Discussion Point:** How confident to act in a given situation is a judgment call. A person needs to walk a fine line between appearing arrogant and appearing too apologetic. Elicit examples from participants.




7. Negotiate

Say to participants: “The final DEAR MAN skill is negotiation. Be willing to give to get. Offer and ask for alternative solutions to the problem. Reduce your request. Maintain your no, but offer to do something else or solve the problem another way.”

Continue: “An alternative technique is to ‘turn the tables’—that is, to turn the problem over to the other person. Ask for alternative solutions.”

Example: “What do you think we should do? I’m not able to say yes, and you really seem to want me to. What can we do here? How can we solve this problem?”

 **Discussion Point:** Negotiating or turning the tables is useful when ordinary requesting or refusing is going nowhere. There are many variations on the negotiating strategy. Get participants to discuss any time they have negotiated or turned the tables.

C. Applying DEAR MAN Skills to a Difficult Current Interaction

To turn around a really difficult situation, a person can focus the skills on the other person’s behavior right now. See Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 5a for examples of effective and ineffective scripts for the following four steps.

1. *Describe the Current Interaction*

Tell participants: “If the ‘broken record’ and ignoring don’t work, make a statement about what is happening between you and the other person now, but without imputing the person’s motives.”

2. *Express Feelings or Opinions about the Interaction*

Say: “For instance, in the middle of an interaction that is not going well, you can express your feelings of discomfort in the situation.”

3. *Assert Wishes in the Situation*

Say: “When a person is refusing your request, you can suggest that you put the conversation off until another time. Give the other person a chance to think about it. When another person is pestering you, you ask him or her politely to stop it.”

4. *Reinforce*

Say: “When you are saying no to someone who keeps asking, or when someone won’t take your opinion seriously, suggest ending the conversation, since you aren’t going to change your mind anyway.”



Practice Exercise: Using Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 5a, go around the room and have one person read an example of an effective statement, and the next person read one of the ineffective statements. Keep going until everyone has had a chance to read a statement. Discuss the difference in emotional responses to both types of statements.

✓ D. Elicit and Review Ideas for Practicing DEAR MAN Skills


An essential component of interpersonal skills training is behavioral rehearsal, both in sessions and between sessions as homework. It is important to discuss situations where DEAR MAN skills can be used.

1. Use the Skills If a Situation Arises

Emphasize that participants are to try to use their skills when a situation occurs between sessions where they can ask for something or say no.

2. Actively Search for Practice Situations

Say to participants: “If nothing arises in daily life to provide an opportunity to practice, it is important to dream up situations where you can practice. That is, do not just wait for a situation to arise where you can practice. Actively search out situations.” If no situations arise naturally, suggest creating opportunities to practice. The practice ideas listed below are examples of ones participants can create for practice.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants what DEAR MAN skills they are willing to practice during the week. Describe items below if participants have difficulty coming up with something. Discuss any objections to doing DEAR MAN. Be flexible here. Remember your principles of shaping. (See Chapter 10 of the main DBT text.)

3. Practice Ideas

- “Go to a library and ask for assistance in finding a book.” (Variation: “Go to a store and ask the salesperson to help you find something.”)
- “While you are talking with someone, change the subject.”
- “Invite a friend to dinner (at your house or at a restaurant).”
- “Ask a waiter/waitress at a restaurant a question about your bill.”
- “Take old books to a used-book store and ask how much they are worth.”
- “Pay for something costing less than \$1.00 with a \$5.00 bill, and ask for change.”
- “Ask for special ‘fixings’ on a sandwich at a fast-food restaurant.” (A variation of this is to ask for a substitution on the menu when ordering a meal.)
- “Ask a store manager to order something you would like to buy that is not usually carried by the store.”
- “Ask coworkers or classmates to do a favor for you (such as fix you a cup of coffee while they are fixing their own, let you look at their notes, or lend you their textbook).”
- “Ask someone you know for a ride home.”
- “Disagree with someone’s opinion.”
- “Ask a parent, spouse, partner, or child to accept more responsibility in a specific area.”
- “Ask a friend for help in fixing something.”
- “Ask a person to stop doing something that bothers you.”
- “Ask somebody you don’t know well what time it is.”

VI. RELATIONSHIP EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS: GIVE (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 6–6A)

Main Point: Relationship effectiveness skills are aimed at maintaining or improving our relationship with another person while we try to get what we want in the interaction. The term GIVE is a way to remember these skills.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6: Guidelines for Relationship Effectiveness: Keeping the Relationship. This handout describes the GIVE skills: (be) Gentle, (act) Interested, Validate, (use an) Easy

manner. Quickly teach these skills didactically, and then, as with the objectives effectiveness skills, move to doing role plays.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a: Expanding the V in GIVE: Levels of Validation (*Optional*). This material lists six different ways to validate (the V in GIVE). It can be covered with or without using the handout. A fuller description of these steps in validation is provided in the later discussion of walking the middle path for interpersonal effectiveness (see Section XVI of this chapter, and Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 17 and 18).

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 4: Writing Out Interpersonal Effectiveness Scripts; Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 5: Tracking Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills Use. These worksheets are the same as those used for the DEAR MAN skills. Instructions for their use can be found at the start of Section V, above.

✓ A. What Is Relationship Effectiveness?

Tell participants: “Relationship effectiveness refers to improving or maintaining a good relationship with the other person in an interaction, while at the same time trying to obtain your objective.”

- ✓ “When improving a relationship is the main objective, interpersonal effectiveness focuses on *how* you go about trying to improve the relationship. For instance, is your voice gentle and respectful, or are you angry and yelling? Do you ask, or do you demand? Do you listen to the other person, or do you cut this person off?”

Example: “If you cry and throw a tantrum every time your best friends forget your birthday, you will surely get them to remember your birthday in the future, but they may remember it with bitterness instead of love and affection. A more effective approach might be gently reminding them a few days ahead of time, or asking them with an easy manner to put your birthday in their calendar so they remember it.”

Emphasize that relationship effectiveness is always needed in any interaction. Participants will sometimes insist that they have no relationship goal in certain interactions—for example, when dealing with a store clerk they never intend to see again, or when breaking up with a significant other. You can generally dispel this idea by asking them to imagine two scenarios. In the first one, the objective goal is met (e.g., a participant’s significant other understands that the relationship is over), but the interaction is not relationship-effective (e.g., the significant other leaves wishing that the participant would drop dead). In the second scenario, the objective goal is met, and this time the interaction is relationship-effective (e.g., the significant other leaves thinking that the participant has handled this very respectfully, and wishing the best for the participant). Ask: All things being equal, which scenario would group members prefer? The presence of a relationship goal becomes obvious. It is simply a lower priority.

✓ B. The GIVE Skills

Say to participants: “You can remember these skills with the term GIVE. This stands for (be) Gentle, (act) Interested, Validate, and (use an) Easy manner.”

✓ 1. (Be) Gentle

Tell clients: “Being gentle means being nice and respectful in your approach. People tend to respond to gentleness more than they do to harshness.” Clarify that gentleness specifically means four things: no attacks, no threats, no judging, and no disrespect.

a. No Attacks

Begin by saying: “People won’t like you if you threaten them, attack them, or express much anger directly.”

b. No Threats

Continue: “Don’t make ‘manipulative’ statements or hidden threats. Don’t say, ‘I’ll kill myself if you . . .’ Tolerate a ‘no’ to requests. Stay in the discussion even if it gets painful. Exit gracefully.”

Emphasize that attacks and threats have limited effectiveness: “When you use punishment, threats, or aggression to get what you want, people may do what you want while you are around them. But when you are not around them, or when you cannot see or monitor what they are doing, they will be unlikely to do what you want.”

Example: A customer service agent at an airport may be very courteous to a person yelling and screaming about a missed flight. But the same agent may surreptitiously keep this person off the next flight to his or her destination.

Note to Leaders: This point concerning threats may be very sensitive with some participants. I usually present it as if it is not sensitive, and then ask whether anyone has made threats or been accused of making threats. The idea is to normalize the interpersonal behavior (making threats, “manipulating”) that some may have been accused of by others. Acknowledge how hard it is to stop such behavior.

Usually this question will come up: “What does and doesn’t sound like a threat?” More specifically, participants may ask how a person can communicate a desire to leave a relationship or situation, to quit something because it is too hard (e.g., a job or school), or to express an extreme wish (e.g., to commit suicide, beat up a child, or get a divorce) in such a way that others do not take it as a threat. This is a good question. Generally, the best way is for the person to couple the communication with a statement of wanting to work on the relationship or job, or not wanting to commit suicide or file for a divorce.

Say to participants: “The idea is to make it sound as if you are taking responsibility for the situation, even if you did not cause it, rather than making it the other person’s responsibility. When others feel you are making them responsible, they usually say that you are threatening or manipulating them. In general, if you say that you are going to kill or harm yourself, use drugs, hit the children, start smoking again, or go off your diet, but at the same time say that you want help or that you know you can control yourself, it is not a threat. But it is a threat to say you are going to do these things if others do not change what they are doing. It is a threat to say or even imply that you are going to commit suicide, harm yourself, or use drugs if someone else doesn’t come through for you, do what you want, cure you, or make things better.”

Another option is for participants to share dysfunctional desires by *mindfully describing* the urges, as opposed to voicing the urges directly. For example, the statement “My urges for suicide are getting high,” or “I’m noticing a strong urge to use alcohol,” will generally sound less threatening than “I want to kill myself,” or “I’m going to a liquor store.”



c. No Judging

Continue: “The third part of gentleness is no judging. That means no name calling, ‘shoulds,’ or implied put-downs in voice or manner. No guilt trips.”



Discussion Point: The injunction not to judge is woven throughout all of the skills. But it is so important that it is emphasized here as a separate skill. Elicit from participants times when they have felt judged by others. Try a role play to help them see what it feels like to be judged.

**d. No Disrespect**

Say: “The last part of gentleness is no disrespect. That means no sneering, expressing contempt or scorn, or walking out on conversations. Also, again, it means no put-downs.”



Discussion Point: Elicit times when participants have used skillful words, but have communicated nonverbally that they have no respect for the other’s opinion or request. What does it feel like? Remember, people almost always pay attention to nonverbal communication over the words used. When have you done the same thing? Discuss.

**2. (Act) Interested**

Say to participants: “The second GIVE skill is to be interested in the other person. Listen to the other person’s point of view, opinion, reasons for saying no, or reasons for making a request of you. Don’t interrupt or try to talk over the other person. Don’t mind-read thoughts or intentions without checking them out. Don’t assume that your ideas about what is going on inside the other’s mind are correct, especially if you think the other person is being intentionally hostile, hurtful, rejecting, or simply uncaring. If you have a concern about what the other person is thinking or is motivated by, gently ask, and listen to the answer. Be sensitive to the other person’s desire to have the discussion at a later time, if that’s what the person wants. Be patient.” (Note that this is Level 1 validation on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a.)

a. People Respond Well to Interest

Tell participants: “People will feel better about you if you seem interested in them and you give them time and space to respond to you.”

b. The Skill Is “Act” Interested, Not “Be” Interested

Continue: “There are times when you may want for someone to have a positive experience interacting with you, and you are not actually interested in what they want to talk about. Choosing to listen means deliberately choosing to be effective in achieving your goal of helping them have a positive experience interacting with you.”



Discussion Point: Elicit examples from participants.



Practice Exercise: Divide participants into pairs. (If necessary, pair one client with one of your leaders.) Instruct participants that when you indicate “Start,” one person should start talking to his or her partner about any topic, and the partner should listen intently, nod occasionally, and in general appear very interested. After several minutes when you indicate “Switch,” the talker should continue talking on the topic, but the partner should look as uninterested as possible (e.g., file nails, look around, pick up things to read, go through his or her wallet or purse). After several minutes, stop and then do it again, this time with the listening partner now doing the talking. Discuss how difficult it was to keep talking or even stay organized on the topic once no one was listening.

Note to Leaders: This exercise is a very effective way to demonstrate the negative effects of discounting or invalidating another person. Many participants also want to discuss how often this happened, or is still happening, to them in their lives. The main point is that no matter what has happened to them, it is not effective to turn around and do the same to others. You can also note that when they feel ignored, participants can apply objectives effectiveness skills to get others to change such behaviors.



Discussion Point: Some people find it very easy to be quiet and listen to others. But other people find it very hard. Such a participant may have a racing mind and may always be a step or two

ahead of the person talking, or may have an impulsive tongue that just seems to start talking on its own. Discuss.

3. **Validate**

Say to participants: “The third GIVE skill is validation. This means communicating that the other person’s feelings, thoughts, and actions are understandable to you, given his or her past or current situation.” (Note that this is actually an example of Level 2 validation on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a.)

a. **Validate the *Why* Even While Disagreeing with the What**

Note that we can validate a reason why a person is feeling, thinking, or doing something, without agreeing with what they are actually thinking or doing.

Example: We can say, “I know that you feel you have to yell at me, because if you don’t you will keep things inside of yourself and never get what you want. At the same time, I don’t like it at all, and I really want you to stop yelling and try just telling me what you want me to do.”



b. **Validate with Words**

Continue: “Acknowledge with words the other person’s feelings, wants, difficulties, and opinions about the situation, without judgmental words, voice tone, facial expression or posture.”

Story Point: Tell the following story or one like it.

“Johnny is sitting in class, trying to pay attention, and he accidentally knocks his notebook off his desk, making a loud noise on the floor. The peers next to him chuckle. The teacher stops in her tracks and says, ‘There you go again, John, disrupting the class, trying to get attention. . . . I am really getting tired of this behavior!’ Johnny feels extremely embarrassed, hurt, and angry, since he’d been making a true effort to focus and behave more skillfully. He later goes home and recounts the story to his mother, who replies, ‘Why do you keep doing this to yourself? You’re never going to get into college at this rate. You’d better shape up!’”¹

Discussion Point: Ask participants what they think Johnny must have felt after his teacher’s and mother’s responses. Why were these responses so hurtful? What was missing from their responses?¹

c. **Read and Validate the Other’s Nonverbal Signals**

Say to participants: “Validating often requires you to read and interpret the other person’s nonverbal signals, such as facial expression and body language. These are clues to figuring out what problems the person might be having with your request or your saying no. Acknowledge those feelings or problems. For example, you can say, ‘I know that you are very busy,’ ‘I can see that this is really important to you,’ ‘I know this will take you out of your way a bit,’ or something like that.” (Note that this is an example of Level 3 validation on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a.)

Continue: “In addition, notice and validate when other people are right about what they are saying, when their behavior fits the facts of the situation, or when they are making a lot of sense given the current facts.” (Note that this is an example of Level 5 validation on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a.)

Example: “You are demanding that a person return something you loaned him or her. The person reminds you that he or she already gave it back. Drop your defensiveness and admit you were wrong when you remember that the other person is correct.”

d. Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Explain to participants: “Validating with words can sometimes be invalidating. This is true when the situation calls for action but we only validate with words. It is important to validate with action when the situation calls for it and you believe another’s request is indeed valid.” (Note that this is an example of Level 5 validation on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6a.) You can give these two examples of ineffective validation with words only:

Example: “You are returning a shirt you bought, but you don’t have your receipt. The store clerk asks you to follow him to go and talk with his supervisor. You say, ‘I understand that we will need to talk with the supervisor,’ but you don’t make a move to follow the clerk.”

✓

Example: “You are screaming out the window in a fire, ‘Help me, help me, it’s hot in here,’ and the firefighter yells up, ‘I see that you are hot,’ instead of climbing up right away to get you out.”

✓



Practice Exercise: Ask a participant to come stand near you. Then put your foot on the participant’s foot. Ask the participant to tell you when it starts to hurt. As soon as he or she says something, keep your foot pressure at that level and say, “I can see that this hurts your foot.” Repeat several times. Discuss.

Emphasize that **validating others is effective for improving relationships any time**: “A conflict situation does not have to arise; you don’t need to make a request of someone or want to say no to validate another’s feelings, thoughts, or actions.”

Note to Leaders: For a fuller understanding of validation see notes associated with handouts 17–18. You can also read a chapter I wrote that describes validation in great detail.³

✓

4. (Use an) Easy Manner

Tell participants: “The final GIVE skill is an easy manner. That is, try to be lighthearted. Use a little humor. Smile. Ease the other person along. Wheedle. Soothe. This is the difference between the ‘soft sell’ and the ‘hard sell.’ Be political.”



Discussion Point: Elicit from participants conversations they have had where the tension was so thick it could be cut with a knife; the moments seemed to drag on and on; or it felt like walking near a land mine, where any wrong step could lead to an explosion. Using an easy manner helps create a comfortable atmosphere in such situations. It helps to convey the message that the conversation is safe and that the other person can be relaxed, without worrying too much. Discuss.

Emphasize to participants: “Get people to like giving you what you want. People don’t like to be bullied, pushed, or made to feel guilty.” Although some participants may have been called manipulators by others, a really good manipulator makes other people like giving in. The premise in DBT is that individuals need to learn to be better at inducing others to do what they want them to do, while at the same time getting the others to like doing it.

VII. SELF-RESPECT EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS: FAST (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 7)

Main Point: Self-respect effectiveness skills help us to keep or improve our self-respect, while at the same time we try to get what we want in an interaction. The term FAST is a way to remember these skills.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 7: Guidelines for Self-Respect Effectiveness: Keeping Respect for Yourself. This handout describes the self-respect effectiveness skills: (be) Fair, (no) Apolo-
gies, Stick to values, (be) Truthful. As with the DEAR MAN and GIVE skills, teach these didactically rather quickly, and then move to doing role plays.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 4: Writing Out Interpersonal Effectiveness Scripts; Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 5: Tracking Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills. These worksheets are the same as those used for the DEAR MAN and GIVE skills. Instructions for their use can be found at the start of Section V, above.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 13: Self-Validation and Self-Respect (Optional). This might be a good worksheet to use when interpersonal effectiveness skills fail and self-validation is needed. The worksheet can be used in conjunction with Handout 7 (see above), as well as with Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 17: Validation.

✓ A. What Is Self-Respect Effectiveness?

Say to participants: “Self-respect effectiveness refers to acting in a manner that maintains or increases your self-respect after an interpersonal interaction. *How* you go about attempting to obtain your objectives requires self-respect effectiveness skills. The key question here is how to ask for what you want or say no to a request in such a way that you will still respect yourself afterward.”

Example: Some people lose respect for themselves if they cry and/or get extremely emotional during an interpersonal interaction. Others lose self-respect if they give in and act passively, rather than sticking up for themselves. Still others lose respect for themselves if they get extremely angry, mean, or threatening.

Ask: “Do you stand up for your peer group’s values or your own values? Do you put on a tough attitude to avoid humiliating yourself, but at the same time lose self-respect by being mean and tough? Do you lie or tell the truth? Do you act competent or incompetent?”

Emphasize that **self-respect effectiveness is always needed in any interaction**. The usual problem here is that on the one hand, participants have not considered how to keep their own self-respect, or, on the other hand, they have focused on it to the extreme. The goal here is to identify the skills needed to keep self-respect while not forgetting the mindfulness “how” skill of effectiveness (see Mindfulness Handout 5). Tell participants: “Giving up getting your objective in favor of doing what you believe is necessary to keep your self-respect is not always the best decision.”


✓ B. The FAST Skills

Say to participants: “You can remember these skills with the term FAST. This stands for (be) Fair, (no) Apologies, Stick to values, (be) Truthful.”

✓ 1. (Be) Fair

Tell participants: “The first FAST skill is to be fair to yourself and the other person in your attempts to get what you want. It is hard to like yourself over the long haul if you consistently take advantage of other people. You may get what you want, but at the risk of your ability to respect yourself.”

Continue: “Validate your own feelings and wishes as well as the other person’s. It is also hard to respect yourself if you are always giving in to others’ wishes and never sticking up for your own wishes or beliefs.”

 **Discussion Point:** Some individuals always prioritize others’ needs ahead of their own. What impact does this have on self-respect? Discuss with participants.

✓ 2. (No) Apologies

Say to participants: “The next FAST skill is not to overapologize. When apologies are warranted, of course, they are appropriate. But no apologizing for being alive, for making a request, for having an opinion, or for disagreeing. Apologies imply that you are wrong—that you are the one making a mistake. This can reduce your sense of mastery over time.”

Explain that **excessive apologies can hurt relationships**. Making an apology can at times enhance a relationship. Excessive apologies, however, often get on other people's nerves and usually reduce both relationship and self-respect effectiveness.



3. Stick to Values

Continue: "The third FAST skill is to stick to your own values. Avoid selling out your values or integrity to get your objective or to keep a person liking you. Be clear on what, in your opinion, is the moral or valued way of thinking and acting, and hold on to your position."



Discussion Point: When a situation is dire, or lives are at stake, people might choose to give up their values. The problem is that many individuals have black-and-white views on this issue: Either they are willing to sell out everything to get approval and liking (to give up their entire "selves," it seems), or they interpret everything as an issue of values and view flexibility of any sort as giving up their integrity. Elicit examples.

Note to Leaders: This Discussion Point assumes that participants know their own values and are clear about what they believe is moral and immoral. Many individuals, however, have difficulties with one or both of these. For these individuals, it can be helpful to review Emotion Regulation Handout 18: Values and Priorities List.

Note that **values can be at issue in relationships**: "A conflict between what others want you to do and what your own moral code or personal values tell you to do is not uncommon. It is difficult to maintain your self-respect when you give in to others and do or say things you believe to be wrong. It can also be very difficult to stand up for yourself, particularly when your values are not the values of the other people in the relationship. Losing your self-respect in a relationship can lead over time to a corrosion of the relationship. This corrosion, or falling apart, can sometimes be very subtle, but in the end it can destroy a relationship."



Discussion Point: Elicit and discuss times when participants have been in a situation where a person or group wants them to do or say something that conflicts with their own moral values. Discuss the difficulties of standing up for oneself. Discuss the consequences of giving in and violating one's own values.



4. (Be) Truthful


Tell participants: "The final FAST skill is to be truthful. Don't lie, act helpless when you are not, or exaggerate. A pattern of dishonesty over time erodes your self-respect. Even though one instance may not hurt, or may even occasionally be necessary, dishonesty as your usual mode of getting what you want will be harmful over the long run. Acting helpless is the opposite of building mastery."



Discussion Point: At times, being honest may actually reduce relationship effectiveness. The "little white lie" was invented for just this reason. Any attempt to convince participants that honesty is always the best policy will probably fail. Discuss this point with participants. The crucial idea is that if one is going to lie, it should be done mindfully rather than habitually.

Stress that **mastery is the opposite of passivity**. Building mastery requires doing things that are difficult, that involve a challenge. Helplessness is the enemy of mastery. Overcoming obstacles is one route to mastery. Most successful people in this world do not have fewer obstacles; they just get up after falling down more often than unsuccessful people do. Getting up after falling down is mastery. Falling down is irrelevant. The drive to mastery seems to be innate.⁵ Small children learning how to walk keep falling down and getting up, falling down and getting up.

Note to Leaders: The concept of mastery here is very similar to the skill of building mastery in emotion regulation (see Emotion Regulation Handouts 14 and 19).

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have done things that reduce their own sense of self-respect. When have they enhanced their sense of self-respect? Where do they need to improve their skills?

✓ **C. Balancing Self-Respect Effectiveness and Objectives Effectiveness**

Make these points to participants in regard to balancing self-respect and objectives effectiveness:

- “No one can take away your self-respect unless you give it up.”
- “Using DEAR MAN skills can improve your self-respect by increasing your sense of mastery. But using DEAR MAN ineffectively sometimes leads to a loss of self-respect for the other person.”
- “You can also enhance self-respect by giving up things you want for the welfare of the other person.”
- “Balancing what you want and what the other person wants and needs might be the best path to self-respect.”

✓ **D. Balancing Self-Respect Effectiveness and Relationship Effectiveness**

Make these points to participants in regard to balancing self-respect and relationship effectiveness:

- “Using GIVE skills well will probably enhance your sense of self-respect, because most people’s sense of self-respect is somewhat dependent on the quality of their relationships.”
- “However, if you frequently use GIVE skills with a person who abuses you or doesn’t care about you, your self-respect is likely to erode over time.”
- “Using GIVE skills when they are needed, and putting them away when harshness and boldness are necessary, might be the best path to self-respect.”


✓ **VIII. EVALUATING YOUR OPTIONS: HOW INTENSELY TO ASK OR SAY NO (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 8)**

Main Point: It is important to consider whether to ask for something or say no, and how strongly to ask or say no.


Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 8: Evaluating Options for Whether or How Intensely to Ask or Say No. The first page of this handout can be reviewed rather quickly. “Factors to Consider” should be discussed to be sure that participants understand each point. Getting and giving examples are both important here. Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 6 can also be used to teach this skill either before or after going over the factors to consider in Handout 8.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 6: The Dime Game: Figuring Out How Strongly to Ask or Say No. Use this worksheet with participants in class as a way to teach this skill. Bring 10 dimes with you to the class, and extra copies of the worksheet for participants to use as homework practice.

✓ **A. Range of Intensities for Asking and for Saying No**

 **Discussion Point:** Draw a vertical line on the board with “Low intensity” at the top (number it 1) and “High intensity” at the bottom (number it 10), like Figure 8.2. Identify low-intensity behaviors (not asking, hinting, asking tentatively, giving in to other’s requests, etc.), and high-intensity

behaviors (speaking firmly, insisting, resisting, refusing to negotiate, etc.). Go around the room and ask each participant to identify where he or she tends to fall on this continuum, and what the pros and cons are of that approach.

 **Alternative Discussion Point:** Instead of having the discussion described above, review levels of intensity on the first page of Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 8, and then ask participants to put a checkmark where they usually fall when asking for something and another checkmark when saying no. Then ask participants to put an X where they wish they could be for both. Discuss.

1. *Interpersonal Effectiveness Changes as Situations and Timing Change*

What works in one situation at one point in time may not work in another situation or in the same situation at another point in time.

Example: “Being pushy may get your 16-year-old child to pick you up from work when you are too tired to take a bus, but may not work when you ask your husband or wife.”

Example: “Asking your mother to make you a special meal that she always makes you when you go home may be very effective at one point in your life, but when your mother is in bed dying of cancer, asking may damage your self-respect and sense of morality.”

Emphasize that appropriateness is not black or white; **there are levels for asking and saying no.** Being interpersonally effective requires thinking through whether it is appropriate to ask for something or to say no to a request. Contrary to what many people think, the answer is not usually as clear-cut as it is for the example of the mother in bed with cancer. Instead, there are levels of asking and levels of saying no.

2. *Analyze Each Situation to Determine How Intensely to Ask or Say No*

Tell participants: “Asking and saying no can be very intense and firm, where you try every skill you know to change the situation and get the outcome you want. Asking and saying no can also

Low intensity (let go, give in)	
Asking	Saying no
Don't ask; don't hint.	1. Do what the other wants without being asked.
Hint indirectly; take no.	2. Don't complain; do it cheerfully.
Hint openly; take no.	3. Do it, even if you're not cheerful about it.
Ask tentatively; take no.	4. Do it, but show that you'd rather not.
Ask gracefully; but take no.	5. Say you'd rather not, but do it gracefully.
Ask confidently; take no.	6. Say no confidently, but reconsider.
Ask confidently; resist no.	7. Say no confidently; resist saying yes.
Ask firmly; resist no.	8. Say no firmly; resist saying yes.
Ask firmly; insist; negotiate; keep trying.	9. Say no firmly; resist; negotiate; keep trying.
Ask and don't take no for an answer.	10. Don't do it.
High intensity (stay firm)	

FIGURE 8.2. Options for whether or how intensely to ask or say no.

be of very low intensity, where you either don't ask or say no, or are very flexible and willing to accept the situation as it is."

✓ B. Factors to Consider

Go over the "Factors to Consider" from Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 8 with participants.

1. *Capability (Your Own or the Other Person's)*

Encourage participants: "Increase the intensity of asking if the other person has what you want. Increase the intensity of saying no if you do *not* have (and therefore cannot give or do) what the other person wants."

2. *Your Priorities*

When an objective is very important, the intensity of asking or saying no should be higher. When getting an objective interferes with a relationship and/or with self-respect, then intensity should be lowered to the degree that the relationship and self-respect are important. Say to participants: "Often relationship issues are such that you may be willing to trade an objective for keeping the other person happy. If so, lower the intensity of the response. If getting an objective requires sacrificing your self-respect, then intensity might need to be lowered."

3. *Self-Respect*

Say: "Increase the intensity of asking if you usually do things for yourself and are careful to avoid acting helpless. Increase the intensity of saying no if saying no will *not* result in feeling bad about yourself, and if wise mind says no."

4. *Rights*

Say: "Increase the intensity of asking if the other person is required by law or moral code to give you what you want. Increase the intensity of saying no if you are *not* required by law or morals to give the other person what he or she wants (in other words, saying no would *not* violate the other person's rights)."

5. *Authority*

Continue: "Increase the intensity of asking if you are responsible for directing the other person or telling him or her what to do. Increase the intensity of saying no if the other person does *not* have authority over you, or if what the person is asking is not within his or her authority."

6. *Relationship*

Go on: "Increase the intensity of asking if what you want is appropriate to the current relationship. Increase the intensity of saying no if what the other person wants from you is *not* appropriate to the current relationship."

7. *Long-Term versus Short-Term Goals*

Continue: "Increase the intensity of asking if being submissive will result in peace now but create problems in the long run. Increase the intensity of saying no if giving in will get you short-term peace but *not* a long-term relationship you wish to have."

8. *Reciprocity*

Say: "Increase the intensity of asking if you have done at least as much for the other person as you are requesting, and you are willing to give if the other person says yes. Increase the intensity of saying no if you do *not* owe the other person a favor, or the other person does *not* usually reciprocate."

9. Homework

Say: “Increase the intensity of asking if you know all the facts necessary to support a request, and both the goal and the request are clear. Increase the intensity of saying no if the other person’s request is *not* clear or you are *not* sure of what you would be saying yes to.”

10. Timeliness

Tell participants: “Increase the intensity of asking if this is a good time to ask (the other person is in the mood for listening and paying attention; he or she is likely to say yes to a request). Increase the intensity of saying no if this is *not* a bad time for you to say no.”

Point out here that **wise mind** can be used as an additional factor in deciding whether to ask or say no and how intensely to push for what one wants. Tell participants to use wise mind to calibrate the importance of other factors described above, and to attend to any factors not included in the list. The more important a factor, the more it should be weighted in the final tally of pros and cons for levels of intensity. In using wise mind as a factor, however, it is important actually to be in wise mind (and not in emotion mind).

✓ C. Figuring Out How Strongly to Ask or Say No: The Dime Game



Practice Exercise: Use Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 6 to give participants practice in deciding whether or how strongly to ask for something or say no to a request.

- ✓ 1. **Ask a participant to give an example of a situation where he or she is trying to decide whether to ask for something or say no to someone.** Be sure to use a real situation, not one made up. Give the participant the 10 dimes you brought to the session. Using that situation, go over the worksheet. Ask each question on the left side if the person is trying to decide whether to ask someone for something. Ask questions on the right side if the person is trying to decide whether to say yes or no to a request. On the left side, have the participant put a dime in the bank for each “yes” answer. On the right side, have him or her put a dime in the bank for each “no” answer.
- ✓ 2. **On the left side, count the number of “yes” responses.** The participant should then go into wise mind and decide whether one or more “yes” responses should be added or subtracted. If after this adjustment there are more “yes” than “no” responses, then participants should make the request. The more “yes” responses, the stronger the request should be.
- ✓ 3. **On the right side, count up the number of “no” responses.** The participant should then go into wise mind and decide whether one or more “no” responses should be added or subtracted, and also whether other factors should be considered. If there are more “no” than “yes” responses, then the participants should say no to a request made of him or her. The more “no” responses, the more it makes sense to increase the intensity of saying no to the other person.
4. **Ask participants for another situation** where they are having difficulty asking for something or saying no to something. Put the 10 dimes back on the table, and then go through the questions on Worksheet 6 with another participant, following the instructions above. Continue doing this with several participants.

IX. TROUBLESHOOTING INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 9)

Main Point: Difficulty in obtaining an objective can be due to many possible factors. When we can identify the problem, we can often solve it and be more effective at getting what we want.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 9: Troubleshooting: When What You Are Doing Isn't Working. This handout gives questions for diagnosing which factors are reducing interpersonal effectiveness. These are the same factors briefly described on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 2. Troubleshooting is best taught by reviewing Worksheet 7 (see below).

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 7: Troubleshooting Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills. Have participants follow along with the worksheet as you review the material. It may be useful to have participants mark on the worksheet their most common problems as you go through. If you do this, give them extra copies of the worksheet to use as homework.


- ✓ Tell participants: “When what you are doing isn’t working, you can troubleshoot by asking yourself the questions on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 9 and Worksheet 7.”

✓ **A. Lack of Skill**

Say to participants: “When you lack the skills, you don’t know how to act or speak effectively to obtain your objectives, maintain the relationship, and keep your self-respect.”

Many people have simply not been taught the interpersonal skills they need to be interpersonally effective. In this module, the skills are taught, but only a limited amount of time is spent on each skill. A participant may have missed some of the important skills classes, or may have been too shy to do role plays. To be interpersonally effective takes much practice and much role playing. Practice also takes discipline and the overcoming of fear. Some participants may not have practiced enough to get a skill down.

- ✓ Have participants ask themselves: “**Do I have the skills I need?**” The first step in answering this question is to carefully read over the instructions for each skill tried. If this does not help, the next step is to write out a script and then practice the script with a friend or in front of a mirror. Participants should get some coaching if needed in how to use the skills or in how to select the skill likely to be the most effective.


 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants interpersonal effectiveness skills they believe they have not learned sufficiently to use in daily life. Discuss whether their problems are due to not learning them in the first place or not practicing them enough to feel confident in using them. Discuss possible solutions to such problems.


Note to Leaders: This is a good time for you to share with participants times you have misused interpersonal skills and how you revised what you were doing to get a better outcome. It is important to encourage both participants and their individual therapists (if they have such therapists) to review and practice skills often, to be sure that the participants are using the skills correctly. It is very easy just to assume this, but the assumption is often incorrect.

✓ **B. Unclear Objectives**

Tell participants: “Not knowing your objectives in a situation can make it almost impossible to be effective. When you don’t know what you want, getting what you want is mostly based on chance.”

- ✓ Have participants ask themselves: **ASK: “Do I know what I want in the interaction?”** If they are not sure, they should fill out a pros-and-cons worksheet (Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 1) comparing different objectives; they can also use emotion regulation skills, including opposite action, to reduce fear and/or shame about asking or saying no.


 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they were ambivalent about what they really wanted, could not decide on an objective, or did not know what their priorities were in a situation. Discuss the role of fear of conflict or of potential guilt or shame in these situations.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when fear and shame have gotten in the way of knowing what they want. When this is the case, it may be very hard to reduce indecision and ambivalence without first reducing anxiety and fear. Similarly, a person may feel ashamed of asking for something or feel too ashamed to say no. As with anxiety and fear, reducing shame may be an essential first step in clarifying goals. Discuss ways of figuring out what is wanted.

✓ C. Short-Term Goals Interfering with Long-Term Goals

Explain to participants that at times, impulsively going for short-term goals can interfere with getting what we really want in the long term. This is true when we sacrifice a relationship or our self-respect to get an immediate goal or reduce distress. It can also happen when we consistently give up getting what we want or need in order to avoid conflict and keep others happy in the short term.

- ✓ Have participants ask themselves: “Are my short-term goals getting in the way of my long-term goals?” If they are not sure, they should fill out another copy of Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 1, comparing short-term with long-term goals. Advise them, “Wait until you are not in emotion mind to do this. Try to get in wise mind.”

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have let short-term goals trump long-term goals. Discuss the consequences of doing that for themselves, as well as the consequences for the long-term relationship with the other person.

✓ D. Emotions Getting in the Way of Skills


Say to participants: “At times, your emotions may be so extreme that you simply cannot get into wise mind in order to figure out what to do and say. Instead of saying something skillful, you make emotional statements that are extreme and ineffective—or you retreat into silence, pout, or leave the interaction, which are also ineffective strategies. Out-of-control sobbing and crying may make it all but impossible to communicate what you want to say. Although tears can often be an effective communication, at other times they can become a vortex of catastrophizing: The more you cry, the more distressed you become; the more you cry, the less you can control what you say and do during interactions. This can also happen with extreme anger or other intense emotions. In these situations, you can be said to fall into a sea of dyscontrol. Reasonable mind does not have a chance to surface and moderate the influence of emotion mind. You may have the skills, but emotions interfere with using your skills.”

- ✓ Have participants ask themselves: “Am I too upset to use my interpersonal skills?” Explain to them: “Trying complicated skills when you are at your skills breakdown point can be intensely frustrating and eventually lead you to give up on skills. The problem is that you may be so far into emotion mind that you don’t even know you have hit your skills breakdown point. One solution is to practice your most important interpersonal skills over and over when you are *not* in emotion mind. However, even when you have practiced the skills, you are sometimes too overwhelmed with emotion to use them. When this happens, use crisis survival and emotion regulation skills to stop out-of-control unskillful responses and to reduce emotional arousal.”

Give participants this list of skills to use when they are upset:

- **The STOP skill** (see Distress Tolerance Handout 4) to keep from saying things they will regret.
- **Opposite action** (see Emotion Regulation Handout 10) to get themselves to use skills they know they need to do but don’t want to use.
- **Self-soothing skills** (see Distress Tolerance Handout 8) before an interaction, to get themselves calm enough for the interaction.
- **TIP skills** (see Distress Tolerance Handout 6) to regulate their emotions rapidly. If they can get their emotions regulated, taking a short break before the interpersonal interaction to do so will be well worth it.
- **Mindfulness of current emotions** (see Emotion Regulation Handout 22) to become aware


of their emotions—particularly those that may be interfering with their skills—and then to refocus completely on the present objective.


 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants emotions that get in their way interpersonally. Make a list on the board. Then elicit skills that could be used both to regulate emotions and to help participants use interpersonal skills more effectively.

✓ E. Worries, Assumptions, and Myths Interfering

Tell participants: “Worries about negative outcomes, and assumptions and myths about the value of expressing your opinions or thoughts, can cause much trouble when you are trying to improve your interpersonal skills. Some beliefs invalidate ever asking for what you want, such as believing that asking for things or saying no is always selfish. Other myths interfere with maintaining relationships, such as believing that people should know what you want without having to ask.”

✓ Have participants ask themselves: “**Are worries, assumptions, and myths getting in the way of using interpersonal skills?**” Then advise them: “Try challenging myths and checking the facts when you are worrying and making assumptions. Practicing opposite action *all the way* is a good way to test assumptions and myths about feared negative consequences. It is important when practicing to focus both on your current objectives and on the other person.”


 **Discussion Point:** Elicit worries, assumptions, and myths that get in the way of skillful behavior. Write some on the board. Get participants to counter myths for each other, and write their revisions on the board. Be sure all participants also write down the revisions in their notes.


 **Discussion Point:** Even when worries are true (e.g., maybe the other person *does* become annoyed by the request or says no), they can distract participants from being fully present when asserting themselves, and therefore can decrease effectiveness. Discuss options for managing worries, such as pushing away, turning the mind, and (if necessary) pros and cons of worrying.


✓ F. Environment More Powerful Than Skills

Say to participants: “When you don’t reach your objectives, it is helpful to search for ways in which you were not skillful. It is also important to consider the power of the environment, compared to your own power as a person making a request or saying no. For example, in a company beset by financial losses, requests for raises may be denied no matter how skillful you are in asking. If the police arrive at your home with a warrant for your arrest, your refusing to be arrested will probably be met with force. Refusing to pay a bill that you owe may mean dealing with a bill collector. Getting a stubborn spouse or partner to empty the garbage every night may be met with a resistance that no use of skills can overcome.”

✓ Have participants ask themselves: “**Are the other people in the interaction so powerful that they don’t have to do anything I ask? Do they have the authority to make me do what they want?**” Advise them: “Try problem solving just to be sure. If the objective is important, try to find an ally who is as powerful as or more powerful than the person you are interacting with. If all else fails, practice radical acceptance of not getting what you want, or of having to do what someone else asks you to do.”

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss how and why some people might resist a request or refuse to accept no from another person, simply because they feel personally threatened by the request or the refusal. Ask participants to discuss possible solutions to such a problem.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit situations where skills didn’t work and couldn’t be made to work because the other person in an interaction was so powerful that a participant had almost no influence or leverage. Discuss what it would be like to practice radical acceptance in these situations.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit situations where participants were powerful and someone else did something outrageous to get them to do what the other person wanted. What did that feel like?

Note to Leaders: When done intentionally as a means of influence, the use of outrageous behavior (including threats of dire consequences such as suicide, being unable to cope, losing everything, etc.) is rightfully called “manipulation.” This can, and at times should, be discussed. However, it must be done carefully. See an extensive discussion of this topic in Chapter 1 of the main DBT text.

X. OVERVIEW: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND ENDING DESTRUCTIVE ONES (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 10)

Main Point: This section of the module teaches supplementary DBT skills for building relationships and trust with other people, as well as for ending relationships that are destructive, hopeless, or unwanted.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 10: Overview: Building Relationships and Ending Destructive Ones. This is an overview handout to be reviewed briefly. Stay on it longer if you are using it to review skills already taught. If you are teaching only some of the skills on this handout, consider skipping the overview entirely. Do not teach the material while covering this handout, unless you are skipping the related handouts (Interpersonal Effectiveness Handouts 11 through 13a).

Worksheet: None.

✓ A. Finding Friends and Getting Them to Like You

Forming friendships is the first step in reducing interpersonal isolation and loneliness. Covered here are basic principles of finding people and developing friendships—including the principles of proximity and similarity, as well as very basic skills of starting and maintaining a conversation, expressing liking, and joining groups.⁶

✓ B. Mindfulness of Others

Friendships last longer when we are mindful of others. This skill includes observing and paying attention to others, describing what is observed rather than judging it, and participating in the flow of interactions. The skill of mindfulness of others is an extension of the relationship effectiveness skills (GIVE) taught earlier in this module.

✓ C. Ending Destructive, Hopeless, or Unwanted Relationships

Sometimes relationships must be ended. This can be the case when there is little hope of improving a relationship, the relationship is abusive, or it interferes with very important lifetime priorities. These skills focus on how to end such relationships effectively.

XI. SKILLS FOR FINDING POTENTIAL FRIENDS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 11–11A)*

Main Point: Finding people and getting them to like us often requires an active effort. It usually does not happen by itself. To be successful, we have to know where and how to look.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11: Finding and Getting People to Like You. This handout reviews skills for how to search for friends, as well as some ideas on how to be effective at finding them.

*The skills in this section are adapted from Linehan, M. M., & Egan, K. J. (1985). *Asserting yourself*. New York: Facts on File. Copyright 1985 by Facts on File Publications. Adapted by permission of the authors.


Review each section, and then discuss it before moving to the next section. This handout can be taught didactically or very interactively, depending on time.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11a: Identifying Skills to Find People and Get Them to Like You (*Optional*). Skip this handout if you do not have extra time, or give it out as homework and then discuss it at the next session. The correct responses are listed below in the teaching notes, as well as at the end of the introduction to this chapter.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 8: Finding and Getting People to Like You. Review this worksheet with participants. Remember to remind participants to use the mindfulness “what” skills of describing (see Mindfulness Handout 4) when describing events and what they or others have said or done. This is “practicing mindfulness” when participants are writing down homework practice. The first section of the worksheet asks participants to describe any opportunities they have had to make contact with people, to mix with people like them, to ask questions or give answers, or to join in a group conversation. It is essential here to get participants to think flexibly and “outside the box.”

✓ A. Why Find Friends?

Say to participants: “Finding people and getting them to like you is the first step in decreasing isolation and loneliness. It is also important whenever you move to a new location, take a new job, or join a new group.”

 **Discussion Point:** For some people, making friends is very easy and seemingly effortless. For others, it can take a lot of work and a long time. Some people have lots of friends to do things with; others have only one or two very good friends. Some people have lots of acquaintances but few good friends; others have a few good friends but very few acquaintances. Elicit from participants what types of friends they have and what types of friends would they like to have.

1. Friends Are Essential for Happiness

Many people believe that “needing” friends and relationships means being emotionally dependent, and that they should be able to be happy alone. This belief flies in the face of almost everything we know about human happiness. Although there are indeed some people who are happy with lives of solitude, for most humans all over the world, intimate and supportive relationships with others are an essential aspect of happiness.

✓ 2. All Human Beings Are Lovable by Someone

You will need to counteract the belief of many participants that they are unlovable. The idea, however, is not to engage in cognitive modification to get clients to see their own lovable characteristics. Although this may work sometimes, it often fails if the persons do not believe that they are currently loved (or have ever been loved) or are connected to someone somewhere by love. Thus it is easier to point out that, in essence, all people are indeed lovable by someone. That is, by virtue of inclusion in the human race, participants are lovable. Participants will often try to disprove this by bringing up individuals who have committed horrible crimes (e.g., torture, or murder followed by cannibalism). Point out how after these people are put in prison for life without parole, some woman or man on the outside will very often correspond with them and fall in love with them.

✓ B. Proximity Favors Friendship⁷

Say to participants: “A first step in forming new relationships is to find opportunities to make casual but regular contact with people in your everyday environment. There are many ways to do this. If you share an office with a lot of people, turn your desk to face the middle of the room instead of the wall. Use elevators or the coffee machine when lots of other people are also there. Go to parties

when invited; stay after activities for a while to chat with others; gravitate to where other people are. Given a choice of a class, job, or housing, you can opt for more or fewer opportunities to make contact with others. Mundane as it sounds, a lot of people find many of their friends among classmates, members of groups or churches they join, and work colleagues. Online dating sites may be good for finding romantic partners, but they may not be as useful for finding nonromantic friends. That said, there are many other online opportunities to find potential friends. For example, a hiker can go online to find hiking partners; a music buff can go online to find other people who like the same music.”

We make friends with people we see most often. Researchers at the University of Leipzig found that students were more likely to become friends with people sitting next to them than to others in a class, even when they were randomly assigned to their seats in the classroom.⁸ There is now a large body of research that adds weight to these findings. It does not seem to matter why people are brought together; in one study, it was because their names began with the same letter of the alphabet.⁹

✓ C. Similarity Tends to Increase Liking

Tell participants: “A second step in making friends is to mix with people whose attitudes are similar to yours. When you discover them, be sure to let them know that’s the case. It may be true occasionally that ‘opposites attract,’ but for most of us most of the time, it isn’t. Instead, birds of a feather have a great tendency to flock together. Almost always we like those who share our attitudes to issues like politics, lifestyle, morals, and so on. These attitudes are the ones that matter. Groups based on characteristics (such as age or single parenthood) that are unrelated to these attitudes are often only partly successful.”

Note to Leaders: The belief that “opposites attract” may be hard to shake. If so, describe some of the research described below to make your point.

- ✓ **Research Point:** There is a lot of research showing that similarity increases attraction. Similarities not only in attitudes, but also in personality traits, activities, age, education, ethnic background, religion, socioeconomic status, and occupations, have each been shown to increase attraction between people. In sum, we seem to like people who remind us of ourselves.^{10–15} The tendency to like those who are similar to us shows up very early in development. For example, one study showed that children as young as 3 years old chose puppets whose food preferences matched their own and also preferred to play with another child who shared their toy preferences.¹⁶

- ✓ **Research Point:** Similarity and liking do not always go together, however, and similarity can sometimes actually be threatening.¹⁷ For example, it has been found that if people who are similar to us also have something unattractive about them (such as having been in prison or in a mental hospital), we tend to like them less than we do people who are dissimilar, but have nothing unattractive about them. In this case, the similarity is threatening; it does not really validate our view of the world, and suggests that we too are vulnerable to the aspect that is unattractive. This is one reason why it can be effective for people not to reveal personal problems very early in forming new relationships.

✓ D. Conversation Skills Are Important


Three behaviors are typical of people who are rated as “good conversationalists”: They ask plenty of questions; they give “positive feedback” (indicating that they have heard, understood, and ap-

preciated what the other person says); and they carry their end of the conversation. Carrying one's end of a conversation means speaking roughly half of the time—not all the time, but also not so little that the other person is under pressure to keep the conversation going.

1. *Ask and Respond to Questions*

There is a thin line between asking questions skillfully and turning a conversation into an interrogation session. If both speakers are skilled, the questions tend to be reciprocated.



 **Discussion Point:** Read the following two conversations, and then have participants discuss which one sounds like the better conversation.

Conversation 1

Person A: Do you know many people here?

Person B: No, but I am a friend of Bill's. Do you know him?

Person A: No, but I work with his sister, Susan. How do you know Bill?

Person B: We went to high school together. Are you a musician like Susan?

Conversation 2

Person A: Do you know many people here?

Person B: No, I don't.

Person A: Are you a friend of Susan's?

Person B: Yes.

Person A: How do you know her?

Person B: We work together.

Note that one reason why the first exchange seems altogether smoother and easier (and results in greater liking) is that A and B are not only asking each other questions, but also volunteering more information than is actually asked for, which quite naturally leads to more questions. Discuss.

2. *Make Small Talk*

Conversations do not have to be deeply meaningful to be enjoyable. The value of “small talk” or “chit-chat” should not be underestimated. Good conversationalists can participate actively in small talk. Students in one experiment who were asked to get to know each other without using small talk found the task impossible. They simply didn't know where to begin.

3. *Self-Disclose Skillfully*¹⁸


Appropriate and skillful self-disclosure—not too much and not too little—requires social sensitivity and social judgment. As relationships progress, there is a tendency to disclose more and more about ourselves, but too little or too much at the wrong time can decrease liking. People seem to like each other best when they disclose roughly the same amount and kind of information.

4. *Don't Interrupt*

Skillful conversationalists also do not interrupt. Explain to participants: “Interrupting does not always mean breaking into someone's sentences. Starting to talk just fractionally before or instantly after someone has finished risks giving the impression that you are not really listening to them, only waiting for them to be quiet so that you can have your say!”

5. Learn What to Talk About

Good conversationalists learn what to talk about by observing which topics are being discussed and how people react to them. Sometimes the problem is not knowing what to talk about. For some people, this means not being sure which topics are appropriate for which situations. Although there are no rules for this, observing others is a good idea. For other people, the “what to talk about” problem has more to do with lack of activity: If these persons have few hobbies, do not keep abreast of current affairs, rarely venture out to the theatre or the cinema, or rarely travel, they might have little to contribute to a conversation.

 **Discussion Point:** Many individuals feel very socially inadequate; understandably, they also find it very difficult to talk about this publicly. Ask in a matter-of-fact way who has low self-confidence about their conversation skills. Then ask who has trouble knowing what topics are appropriate to talk about, and who has trouble thinking of anything to say. Remind participants that their difficulties are most likely situation-specific. Elicit the situations that are most difficult. Then have participants brainstorm ideas for topics of conversation, or activities to help them know what to talk about (e.g., reading newspapers, watching new movies).

Note to Leaders: This skill can be difficult to teach if you yourself have social difficulties or social anxiety in some situations. If you do, now is the time to confess it publicly! You can be a very useful role model if you also practice homework assignments and then discuss them with participants.

✓ E. Express Liking Selectively

It is a lot easier to like someone who likes us than someone who does not. We can communicate liking and caring for others in many ways. We can tell them. We can praise or compliment them. We can seek their company. We can listen to them. We can be supportive of their needs. We can support their causes or people they care about. However, there are a number of important caveats about expressing liking to others, and these should be discussed with participants.

✓ 1. Don't Remark on Obvious or Nonexistent Characteristics

Instruct participants: “Don’t remark on totally obvious positive characteristics, particularly if they are obvious to everyone or are common among the people you are with. For example, don’t comment on how pretty a person is when she has just won a beauty pageant, or on how well an immigrant reads English when he has been in an English-speaking country for 20 years. Also, don’t tell people they have skills they don’t possess. For instance, don’t compliment the driving skills of someone who has just failed the road test for the third time. We tend to react most positively to people who praise us for attributes we would like to have but are not quite sure we possess—not for attributes we and everyone else know we have, or for ones that we wished we had but know very well we haven’t.”

✓ 2. Don't Praise Everyone for Similar Characteristics

To be liked by someone who likes everyone is no great honor. Similarly, to be praised by someone for characteristics nearly everyone has is not likely to increase attraction. Going overboard with praise for everyone, in fact, can have unintended negative consequences. The absence of praise can then be construed as disapproval, and that may reduce liking. Excessive praise can also make others question a person’s sincerity and wonder whether he or she has an ulterior motive. The person may be seen as ingratiating (i.e., praising someone to get something). Ingratiating people are generally disliked. Expressing liking, therefore, is not always a straightforward process.

✓ **F. Join Conversation Groups**

If we wait for people to approach us, we may never have friends. Sometimes we must make the first move in finding friends. To do this, we need to find new groups of people to be around. When we are invited to a party at someone's home where we know none of the guests, it is reasonable to expect that the host or hostess will introduce us to at least one person or one group of people. But this does not always happen, and even when it does, we usually cannot stay with the same person or group for the entire party, meeting, or event.

There are two important skills for joining ongoing conversational groups. First, we need to know how to tell whether a group of people having a conversation is open or closed to new people. Second, if the group is open, we need to learn how to join the conversation.

✓ **1. Figuring Out Whether a Group Is Open or Closed**

It is important to determine whether a group is open or closed. Open groups will be receptive to our entering the conversation; closed groups may not welcome new members.

In open groups:

- Everyone is standing somewhat apart.
- Members occasionally glance around the room.
- There are gaps in the conversation.
- Members are talking about a topic of general interest.

In closed groups:

- Everyone is standing close together.
- Members attend exclusively to each other.
- There is a very animated conversation with few gaps.
- Members seem to be pairing off.

2. Figuring Out How to Join an Open Group Conversation

Usually the best way to join conversations in open groups is to wait for a lull in the conversation, move close to or stand beside a friendly-looking member of the group, and say something like "Mind if I join you?"

✓ **G. Join Organized Groups**

One of the most important reasons for joining groups is to meet others. Thus joining ongoing groups that meet regularly can be an effective way of making friends.

1. Find a Group That Meets Frequently

Explain to participants: "The more frequently the group meets, the more likely you are to become friends with someone in the group."

2. Find a Group Where Members Are Similar to You

Tell participants: "It may be more difficult to make friends in groups based on characteristics such as age, sex, or occupation that are not associated with attitudes; in this case, the larger the group, the greater the chance of finding people who share your values. Imagine, for instance, a small local club for divorced people or for single parents. The people in it may have so little in common other than their singleness that meetings become a strain rather than a pleasure."

3. Find a Group That Has Cooperative Aims

In a group organized around a shared interest, it is better to find a group emphasizing mutual help or one aimed simply at having a good time, rather than a competitive group where members

are always pitting their skills against one another. Cooperation is conducive to liking. People ordinarily appear more attractive to one another if they are cooperating rather than competing.



Practice Exercise: Give Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 11a: Identifying Skills to Find People and Get Them to Like You to participants. Explain the task, and give participants time to check the more effective response in each pair. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants whether they have been in other situations where it was not clear to them what would be the better course of action between two options.

Correct responses for Handout 11a are as follows: 1A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6B, 7B, 8B, 9B, 10B, 11B, 12A.

XII. MINDFULNESS OF OTHERS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 12–12A)

Main Point: Friendships are easier to form and last longer when we remember to be mindful of the other persons in these friendships.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12: Mindfulness of Others. Notice that the three mindfulness skills described here (B, C, and D) are the three core mindfulness “what” skills taught in the Mindfulness module. Under each of the “what” skills are the three core “how” skills also taught in the Mindfulness module. This handout can be taught didactically or very interactively, depending on time.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12a: Identifying Mindfulness of Others (Optional). Use this handout if you have extra time in the session, or give it out as homework and then discuss it at the next session. The correct responses can be found at the end of this section of the teaching notes, as well as at the end of the introduction to this chapter.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 9: Mindfulness of Others. Review this worksheet with participants. Tell participants to check off any of these skills they attempted, whether they completed them successfully or not. Remind them that the idea is to practice, not to be perfect. As in previous worksheets, remind participants to use the mindfulness “what” skill of describing (see Mindfulness Handout 4) when describing events and what they or others have said or done.

✓ A. Why Be Mindful of Others?

Relationships last longer when we remember to be mindful of the other persons in these relationships.

Mindfulness of others is an extension of the relationship effectiveness (GIVE) skills taught earlier in this module (see Section VI of this chapter, plus Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 6).

- ✓ Mindfulness of others is also a reiteration of the core mindfulness “what” and “how” skills (see Chapter 7, plus Mindfulness Handouts 4 and 5). The skills here include observing and paying attention to others, describing what is observed rather than judging it, and participating in the flow of interactions.

Note to Leaders: A good way to teach these skills is to have participants first read Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12 and check the boxes on this handout next to all of those they find difficult and need to work on. Ask each participant to share which boxes they have checked. Afterward, teach each of the points, then go back and discuss. If you are worried about time, you can save this exercise for last.

B. Observing and Attending to Other People


Observing and attending to other people involves several subskills.

✓ **1. Pay Attention with Interest and Curiosity**

The first subskill is to pay attention with interest and curiosity to others around us. The important words here are “interest” and “curiosity.” When we have such an attitude, we are open to getting to know someone new. We are also open to learning new information about others. This is, of course, critical, since all people and events are in a state of constant change.

2. Be Open to New Information about Others

Approaching people with interest and curiosity is the opposite of being rigid, or unwilling to change our minds about a person when we discover that we have been wrong. It is also the opposite of holding a person to what they said, believed, felt, or wanted yesterday or even 5 minutes ago. People often change their beliefs or what they want. When we are mindless, pouting, or willful, we often cannot or will not acknowledge that a person has changed—even when we want the changes.

✓  **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when others have been closed to new or corrective information about themselves. How did they feel? What did they want from the other persons?

✓ **3. Let Go of Overfocusing on Self**

Say to participants: “You can miss much of what the other person is saying or doing when you are overly focused on yourself. Although you want to be aware of yourself during interactions, a problem arises when you are overly focused on yourself. It is hard to be empathic to others or validate what they are saying or doing when you are not focused on them.”

Two things can happen when we overfocus on ourselves. First, it can lead to our talking mostly about ourselves. Although some of this is good, too much makes others feel that they are not very important. This does not ordinarily lead to positive interactions. Second, focusing on ourselves during interactions can lead to anxiety¹⁹ about how we are doing and what people are thinking. Anxiety can lead us either to avoid being with people or to stay very quiet when we are with them. Avoiding people and keeping our mouths shut when around others are not effective ways to make or keep friends.

✓ **Research Point:** Data on social phobia^{20, 21} show that individuals who are highly anxious about joining groups or talking in groups are often overfocused on themselves and on how they appear to others. Part of an effective treatment is to get these individuals to practice throwing their complete attention toward the other people they are interacting with. This may need to be practiced many times, but ordinarily it is very helpful in reducing anxiety when with others.




Practice Exercise: Conduct two role plays where you ask clients to manipulate the focus of their attention. In the first role play, ask the clients to demand a high standard of themselves—that is, to imagine that they need to appear witty and intelligent at all times and to constantly monitor how they’re fulfilling that standard. In the second role play, ask the clients to reduce expectations and only focus on what the other persons say. After the role plays, ask the clients about their subjective experience of anxiety and how they would rate it (on a scale of 0–100), and also give feedback on performance. You can ask the other group members to give feedback as well.

4. Stay in the Present

Another important subskill is to stay in the present. That is, we need to listen to other persons in real time, instead of planning what we will say next or thinking about the future consequences of what the persons are saying.


✓ **5. Stop Multitasking**

Say to participants: “It’s essential not to start multitasking when you are interacting with someone else. Don’t text others, or answer and start phone conversations with others, during a face-to-face conversation with someone else. It can even mean turning off your cell phone if a conversation is important. In groups, don’t look over a person’s shoulder when you are talking with him or her, to see if there is someone else you would rather talk to. It is difficult for other people to feel that they are important to you or that you care about them when you frequently turn their attention away from them.”

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when other people have paid attention to something or someone else during interactions. How did this feel?

✓ **6. Give Up Judgments and Always Being Right**

Judgmental thinking, voice tone, and statements are off-putting to others and spring from an attitude that we are right and others are wrong. This is an ineffective attitude in interpersonal relationships. Always attempting to be right can be lethal in making and keeping friends. Others don’t want to always be wrong. It makes them feel that we don’t respect their point of view, and they then want to avoid us.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants which of the relationship-observing skills they have most difficulty with. Discuss ways to practice being more observing of others.

✓ **C. Describing**

In regard to mindfulness of others, observing involves several things.

✓ **1. Describe What You Observe in a Matter-of-Fact Way**

The key words in the heading above are “describe” and “matter-of-fact.” When we describe, we state what we observed: the “who,” “what,” and “where.” We might be describing thoughts, feelings, or sensations of our own—how something smells or tastes to us, or what we have seen, heard, or done. The key to describing, as noted in the discussions of the mindfulness skills in Chapter 7, is to distinguish what we are observing within ourselves (e.g., thoughts, feelings, sensations, images) from what we are observing outside of ourselves.

2. Put Aside Judgmental Thoughts and Statements

Judgmental thoughts and statements very often get in the way of describing. Rather than just noticing what someone is doing or saying, we add an evaluation of “good” or “bad” onto what we observe. In addition, we usually then assume not only that we are correct, but also that the entire universe should operate on our rules of what is correct and right. The best way to keep friends and increase emotional closeness with others is to replace judgmental thoughts and words with descriptive words.

3. Don’t Make Assumptions about Others

We need to avoid assuming what others are thinking, how they are feeling, what they must be doing, or what they really want or don’t want. Such assumptions and interpretations of others can cause no end of trouble in relationships. This is especially true when we don’t bother to check the facts. If we want to make and keep relationships, it is essential to treat assumptions and interpretations as hypotheses to be tested, instead of as known facts.

Remind participants: “Remember, you can only describe what you observe through your senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, seeing). No one has ever observed another person’s thoughts, motives, intentions, feelings, emotions, desires, or personal experiences. What we can observe, and thus describe, are all of these things in ourselves.”

Interpersonally sensitive people can often correctly infer what is going on with a person even when the other person says nothing about what is going on. As we will see later in the section on validation, being able to “read” other people correctly from knowledge of who they are, things that have happened, and nonverbal communication is very important. However, even when we know people very well or know all that has happened with respect to a certain situation, we still must be open to being wrong. We can check the facts by asking questions and sometimes by watching how people react to what we say and do.

4. *Don't Question Others' Motives and Intent*

Another thing that can be very damaging to relationships is questioning other people's motives or intentions. People feel pushed away when we question their motives. The most common example is assuming that if words or actions have a certain effect, then that effect must have been intended. For example, it is all too easy to assume that “if I feel manipulated by what you said or did, then you must have intended to manipulate me,” or that “if I feel angry about what you did, then you intended to make me feel angry.”

Questioning other people's motives is also common in people who have trouble trusting others. Mistrust of specific people without good reasons, however, delays forming friendships and gets in the way of intimacy and closeness.



5. *Give Others the Benefit of the Doubt*

Giving other people the benefit of the doubt is a very effective skill for maintaining relationships. Even when there is some justification for inferring that another person has some negative intention, usually there is at least some small chance of another possibility. Remembering to give the benefit of the doubt can make it easier to follow up with checking the facts. As with opposite action, it is important to give the benefit of the doubt all the way—that is to really open up to the possibility that your thoughts about the other person's intentions could really be wrong and that there could be other benevolent motivations.²²



Discussion Point: Elicit from participants situations where they inferred that someone else had a negative intention, only to find out later that they were mistaken. Have participants consider whether others have afforded them the benefit of the doubt.

6. *Allow Others to Earn Your Trust*

Many individuals who struggle with trust have mistaken notions about the process of building trust. For example, some will insist that building trust takes time, as if time itself leads to increased trust. In reality, trust is built when one takes risks with others by choosing to give them opportunities to prove themselves trustworthy; when such individuals act in trustworthy ways, then trust is earned. Without mindfulness, it may take months or even years before opportunities to earn trust are given, reinforcing the notion that trust “takes time.” On the other hand, participants can actively practice choosing to allow others to earn their trust. Of course, when others respond in untrustworthy ways (e.g., deliberately taking advantage), then decisions to stop trusting them are reasonable.



Discussion Point: Have participants reflect on examples in which either they gave others opportunities to earn trust and examples in which they did not. Elicit also examples of others' giving them a chance to earn their trust.²²

Too little and too much trust can both be problems. Paranoia is the persistent belief that others are out to harm us or manipulate us, when there is little or no objective evidence that this is so. Clearly, paranoia does not bode well for building close personal relationships. The opposite of paranoia, however, can be thought of as “trust disorder.” This involves believing everything that

people tell us and never doubting them or their motives, despite evidence that they might not be trustworthy.

Entering relationships naively with untrustworthy or dishonest people can also interfere with finding friends and building closeness and intimacy. Once we are hurt by someone like this, it can be difficult to start over again in a new relationship. Mindfulness does not require being naive to the facts of human nature, discounting negative information about someone, or ignoring warning signals that a relationship may not turn out as well as we hope.

✓ **D. Participating with Others**

In regard to mindfulness of others, participating means “jumping into the relationship.” In other words, it means completely “buying into” or throwing ourselves completely into a conversation, group activity, or relationship. It means letting go of standing outside a group or relationship.

✓ **1. Throw Yourself into Interactions**

We can throw ourselves into a conversation or completely “buy into” it without simultaneously throwing ourselves into an ongoing relationship. Staying in the present means participating in the present.

2. Go with the Flow

We need to “go with the flow” of the other person in an interaction or of a group activity, rather than trying to control every activity, decision, and interaction as if our lives or well-being depended on it.

Going with the flow does not mean giving up control of everything. When relationships are abusive, or when groups want us to do things that violate our morals or that make us feel extremely uncomfortable, staying in control of at least what we do is important.

Having at least some control of what others do can be very important when those others are our children, children in our care, or people who report to us whose work we are responsible for. Having some control can also be important with people who could potentially hurt us (such as those who spend our money, take or dispose of our property, write untrue things about us online, etc.).

3. Become One with Group Activities and Conversations

Once we have become involved in a conversation or group activity, we need to “become one” with the interaction by letting go of self-focus and resisting efforts to pull back after we throw ourselves in.



Practice Exercise: Give Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 12a: Identifying Mindfulness of Others to participants, and explain the task. Give participants time to check the more mindful response for each pair. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants if they have other situations where it is not clear to them what would be the more mindful course of action between two options.

Correct responses for Handout 12a are as follows: 1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7B, 8B, 9B, 10A, 11B, 12B.

XIII. HOW TO END RELATIONSHIPS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 13–13A)

Main Point: Ending destructive relationships and those that interfere with pursuing important goals can sometimes be more difficult than forming relationships in the first place.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13: Ending Relationships. The skills for ending relationships

described on this handout are drawn from mindfulness (wise mind), emotion regulation (problem solving, cope ahead, opposite action), and interpersonal effectiveness (DEAR MAN, GIVE FAST) skills. The only new skill is that of practicing safety first when ending abusive or life-threatening relationships. The key to teaching these skills is to make them relevant to participants by discussing relationships they have ended, ones they are considering ending, or ones they wish they had already ended.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13a: Identifying How to End Relationships (*Optional*). You can use this handout if you have extra time in the session, or give it out as homework and then discuss it in the next session. It can also be skipped. Correct responses are listed at the end of this section's teaching points, as well as at the end of this chapter's introduction.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 10: Ending Relationships (*Optional*). Assign this worksheet only to those thinking about ending a relationship. If they are trying to leave an abusive or dangerous relationship, review it with them and highlight the necessity of calling a domestic violence hotline (either a local one or, in the United States, the National Domestic Violence Hotline; see the end of this section). As with previous worksheets, remind participants to use the mindfulness "what" skill of describing (see Mindfulness Handout 4) when describing events and what they or others have said or done. Spend some time helping participants figure out how to concisely state the core problems leading to their wish to leave a relationship.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Interpersonal Skills (*Optional*). This worksheet can also be used in teaching this skill set.

✓ **A. Ending Important Relationships Requires Clear Thinking and Interpersonal Finesse**

Important relationships come in all varieties: friendships, marriages or other committed life partnerships, parent–child relationships, sibling relationships, work relationships, and psychotherapy or counseling relationships, to name a few of those ordinarily most important. Each of these relationships can vary in the degree to which they enhance or reduce the quality of our lives.

✓ **B. Decide to End Relationships in Wise Mind, Never in Emotion Mind**

Even in a good relationship, it is not uncommon to have momentary wishes to end it when we are frustrated, angry, or otherwise unhappy. Ordinarily these feelings pass and we forget them. Unfortunately, many people end relationships in emotion mind. If they had waited until the emotion passed, the value of the relationships might have looked very different.

1. Strong Negative Emotion Can Lead to Rash Actions in Interpersonal Situations

When we are highly aroused, our behavior is likely to be mood-dependent, and our ability to take a balanced long-term view of our relationships deteriorates. In addition, our ability to think clearly, communicate effectively, or problem-solve issues in our relationships becomes limited. High negative arousal can also fuel judgmental thinking, which can then further escalate conflict. With conflict escalating, we may find ourselves walking out of a relationship in a fit of extreme anger or frustration. In retrospect, we may regret leaving. It may also be impossible to resurrect the relationship.

2. Think Through the Reasons for Ending a Relationship before Ending It

It may be useful to write out the pros and cons of staying versus ending the relationship before making a decision.

3. It Makes Sense to End Destructive Relationships

Tell participants: “A relationship is destructive when it destroys either the quality of the relationship or aspects of yourself, such as your physical body and safety, your self-esteem or sense of integrity, or your ability to find happiness or peace of mind.”

4. It Makes Sense to End a Relationship That Seriously Interferes with Your Quality of Life

Continue: “A relationship interferes with your quality of life when it blocks or hinders your pursuit of goals that are important to you, your ability to enjoy life and do things you like, your relationships with other persons (which a very jealous partner or friend may resent), or the welfare of other people you love.”

5. It Makes Sense to Stay in a Relationship When the Cost of Leaving Is Greater Than the Cost of Staying

An example of a relationship in which the cost of leaving might be greater than that of staying might be this: One person is caring for a partner who has a degenerative brain disorder, which results in a complete change of personality. The partner who was once loving is now angry, frequently out of control, incapable of self-care, and unable to recognize the caregiving partner. The caregiver may regard staying within such a relationship as a moral duty, and ending the relationship may result in intense remorse and guilt. In such a situation, however, it will be important for the caregiver to find ways to create sufficient separation to maintain some quality of life both within and outside of the relationship.

6. It Is Important to Differentiate between Justified and Unjustified Guilt in Deciding Whether to End a Relationship

“Justified guilt” is feeling guilty when a completed or intended action violates our important moral values. “Unjustified guilt” is feeling guilty for something that does not in reality violate our moral values. Unjustified guilt is often a result of paying attention to what we believe others will think, rather than to what we ourselves think. (See Emotion Regulation Handouts 8a and 11.)

✓ C. Try Problem Solving to Repair a Difficult Relationship

Problem solving may be effective in repairing a relationship when the relationship is important and there is reason for hope.

1. Problem Solving May Involve Doing Some Serious Work on the Relationship

Tell participants: “In a relationship with a friend, partner, or other person you are very close to, the two of you may need to do some serious work on the relationship. To get started with problem solving, review the problem-solving steps in Emotion Regulation Handout 12. Using a relationship workbook or other set of guidelines may be helpful here also. For example, *The High-Conflict Couple*, a book written for couples by Alan Fruzzetti,²³ gives many guidelines that can be useful in any high-conflict relationship.”

2. Problem Solving May Require Getting Other People Involved to Help

In a marriage or a committed partnership, problem solving may require couple counseling. In a relationship with a relative, it may require asking other relatives to help out. In a work setting, it may require working with a mediator. When the decision is to maintain the relationship, but also to increase personal time and separation, joining a support group may be of help.

✓ **D. Use Cope Ahead Skills to Plan How to End a Relationship**

See Chapter 9, Section XVI, and Emotion Regulation Handout 19 for further details on cope ahead.

1. Decide Whether to End the Relationship in Writing, on the Phone, or in Person

Tell participants: “The decision about how to end the relationship will depend greatly on the type of relationship you have, how long you have had the relationship, and the degree of intimacy with the other person.”

2. Write a Script in Advance

Say to participants: “Write out ahead of time exactly what you want to say and how you want to explain your decision. If you are ending the relationship in writing, such as through a resignation letter at work or by e-mail with a long-distance e-mail friend, ask someone you trust to read what you have to say before sending it. It is very easy for judgmental, condescending, or insensitive comments to creep into writing, despite your best efforts to send a different message. A second reader can often pick this up for you.”

3. Practice What to Say

Continue: “If you are going to end the relationship on the phone or in person, practice in your imagination what you will say, how you will say it, and when you will tell the other person you want to end the relationship. Practice in front of a mirror saying what you want to say. Practice with close friends and get their feedback on how you sound.”

4. Troubleshoot Ahead of Time

Tell participants: “Troubleshoot ahead of time what you will say or do in response to what the other person might say or do. It is important here to try to predict what the other person will actually say or do, and then be prepared with a variety of responses.”

✓ **E. Be Direct: Use DEAR MAN, GIVE FAST Skills**

Important relationships ordinarily cannot be ended with a simple DEAR MAN, GIVE FAST statement as outlined in Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills Handouts 5–7. However, these steps can guide how a conversation about ending a relationship is approached.

1. DEAR

Say to participants: “Most important at first is to be direct and clear. Describe the relationship problems that have led you to want to end the relationship. Express clearly how you feel about it, and assert that you now want to end the relationship. Have the other person confirm his or her understanding that the relationship is over, and if possible, reinforce by letting the other person know how ending the relationship will be good for both of you. If this is not the case, focus on how a good ending will be in both your interests.”

2. MAN

Encourage participants: “Stay mindful, and appear confident. If you are sure that ending the relationship is in your interests, it is important not to give in to entreaties to stay in the relationship. This may be particularly important if you are more important to the other person than he or she is to you. Be careful not to go to extremes, however, unless you really do want to end all contact with the person. For example, if you want to get a divorce, end a sexual relationship, or move out of a place you share with a roommate, you may still want to be friends. Thus it is important to not burn any more bridges than you have to. Although you may not be willing to

negotiate whether to end the relationship or not, be ready to negotiate *how* to end it, if that is at all possible.”



3. GIVE

The person ending a relationship is generally the person in the high-power position. Thus the GIVE skills are particularly important in these situations. Tell participants: “Be gentle. Inhibiting attacks, threats, judgments, and condescending words and expressions can be extremely helpful in smoothing an ending to the relationship. This can be very difficult to do when guilt about ending can easily lead to blaming and judging the other person. Although you may know that you will end the relationship no matter what the other person says, listen to and validate the person’s point of view. This can make it easier for both of you to work out an ending that causes the least hurt for the other person.”

4. FAST

Say to participants: “Finally, be fair, and make no apologies. Leaving a relationship with your self-respect intact requires you to be truthful about the problems (even if you are tactful about how you frame them) and not to sacrifice your values or integrity. This can be particularly difficult when the reason for ending is that you have changed, rather than that the other person is doing things that make the relationship impossible for you.”



F. Practice Opposite Action for Love If Needed

Tell participants: “Even though you may know that a relationship must end, at times that does not coincide with an end of love. This is often the case when you love a person but finally realize that the relationship is either destructive or incompatible with your life goals. Incompatible values, career demands, the well-being of children, unwillingness to move to distant locations, and many other considerations may make an alliance impossible between two people, even though there is great love.”

Continue: “The central question here is whether or not loving the other person enhances or damages your life. Many times, continuation of love is life-enhancing. At other times, it is not. For example, a woman addicted to drugs who loves a drug addict may need the relationship to get her own drugs. Even though her partner may pimp her out to other men to make drug money, she may still love him and find it very difficult to end the relationship. This also happens often in relationships with abusers. Being mistreated does not always end love. In these situations, to keep from returning to destructive relationships, opposite action for love (as described in Emotion Regulation Handout 11: Figuring Out Opposite Actions) may be called for.”



G. Practice Safety First!

Emphasize to participants: “It is very important to realize that in a physically abusive relationship or one where you fear for your life, it is very important to get appropriate advice about how to leave the relationship safely. In many abusive relationships, the time of ending and leaving the relationship is a time fraught with danger. Thus the threat of danger should not be taken lightly if your partner in a relationship has been physically abusive or has threatened your life. In these cases, safe housing and a plan for safely leaving the relationship may be necessary. Call the local domestic violence hotline in your city or county for help. It is also important to get advice from a professional who is trained and experienced in working with individuals in abusive relationships.”

Note to Leaders: In the United States, you can also refer participants to the National Domestic Violence Hotline website (www.thehotline.org/tag/safety-planning). You can find non-U.S. hotlines via your search engine. In addition, if you are not trained and experienced in working with abused and battered individuals in relationships, it is important to refer participants to an expert who has such training and experience (or to get consultation from such a person).



Practice Exercise: Give Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 13a: Identifying How to End Relationships to participants, and explain the task. Give participants time to check the more effective response for each pair. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants if they have other situations where it is not clear to them what would be the more effective course of action between two options.

Correct responses for Handout 13a are as follows: 1B, 2B, 3B, 4A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8B.

XIV. OVERVIEW: WALKING THE MIDDLE PATH SKILLS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 14)¹

Main Point: This set of skills helps participants effectively manage themselves and their relationships through (1) dialectics, or balancing acceptance and change; (2) validation, or working on acceptance; and (3) behavior change strategies, or working on change by managing cues and consequences.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 14: Overview: Walking the Middle Path. Briefly review this overview handout. Stay on it longer if you are using it to review skills already taught. If you are only teaching some of the skills on this handout, consider skipping it entirely. Do not teach the material while covering this handout unless you are skipping the related handouts.

Worksheet: None.

✓ A. Walking the Middle Path

The middle path is one of harmony with reality as it is. The middle path requires the fine-tuning of opposites that in turn produce life's movement, speed, and flow—for example, accepting reality, and also working to change reality; validating ourselves and others, and also pointing out errors; working and resting; or tightening and loosening strings on a violin.

Walking the middle path does not mean 50% of one point of view and 50% of another. Nor does it mean a centerpoint between two extremes. To walk the middle path is to move away from extreme emotional responses, actions, and thinking, and toward balanced and integrative responses to life situations. Walking the middle path allows moving to an extreme and then returning to a state of balance.

B. Dialectics

Dialectics teaches us that all things are interconnected and in a constant state of change. It paves the way to the middle path—that is, the path of balancing extremes.

C. Validation

Validation skills are necessary in all relationships. They communicate that a person's feelings, thoughts, and actions are understandable, given the person's past or current situation. On the other hand, validation does not validate the invalid. The skills taught here review and add more detail to the validation skills taught earlier in this module as part of the relationship effectiveness skills. In other words, they involve increasing the V in GIVE.

A corollary of the point above about validation is that experiencing high levels of *invalidation* can be traumatic. When that happens, self-validation is needed for recovery.

✓ D. Behavior Change Skills

Behavior change skills use behavioral principles of contingency management (i.e., use of consequences) and stimulus control to increase desired behaviors or to decrease undesired behaviors.

XV. DIALECTICS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 15–16C)¹

Main Point: A dialectical stance is essential for walking the middle path, because it decreases a sense of isolation, conflict, and polarities.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 15: Dialectics. This handout briefly outlines the basics of a dialectical perspective.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16: How to Think and Act Dialectically. This is an extension of Handout 15 and gives examples of specific ways to act dialectically.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16a: Examples of Opposite Sides That Can Both Be True (Optional). This handout can be very useful for in-session discussion to demonstrate how opposites can indeed both be true.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16b: Important Opposites to Balance (Optional). This handout can be very useful during a discussion of how to balance life patterns and in doing homework to identify what life patterns need better balance.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16c: Identifying Dialectics (Optional). Use this handout if you have extra time, or give it out as homework and then discuss it at the next session. The correct responses are listed at the end of this section's teaching points, as well as at the end of this chapter's introduction.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 11: Practicing Dialectics; Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 11a: Dialectics Checklist; Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 11b: Noticing When You're Not Dialectical. These worksheets offer three different formats for recording dialectics practice. Worksheet 11 asks participants to practice their dialectical skills only twice between sessions. Worksheet 11a instructs participants to practice and gives multiple opportunities for each skill, as well as multiple check boxes for each skill. Worksheet 11b is aimed at increasing participants' awareness of *not* being dialectical in their interactions, and of the negative outcomes that often follow nondialectical behavior. This worksheet takes the place of a pros-and-cons worksheet, in that the objective is to motivate dialectical behavior.

✓ **A. Why Be Dialectical?**

- ✓ Dialectics helps us stay away from extremes and walk the middle path in our thinking and actions. It is a world view, and also a way of resolving disagreements and searching for the truth.

✓ **B. Dialectics: What Is It?**

There are four main ideas in the dialectical perspective.


✓ **1. The Universe Is Filled with Opposing Sides and Opposing Forces**

For everything that exists, there is an opposite. If there is a box, there is a “not box”; if there is light, there is dark; if there is up, there is down; there is fat and there is thin; there is male and there is female; there is a positive electrical charge and a negative charge; there is something and there is nothing; physicists trying to identify the most fundamental element of existence found matter, and then they found antimatter. Every part has a whole, and every whole has a part. It is impossible to understand something without knowledge of its opposite.

Everything that exists is made of opposing forces that both hold things together and create constant change. Without gravity, we would fly away from the earth. Electrons are bound together to the nucleus of an atom by electromagnetism.

- ✓ Dialectics tells us that opposing points of view can both be true. When we consider what is left out of our own point of view (i.e., when we consider opposing points of view), we can find

a synthesis of both perspectives. This is how we can get unstuck from where we are and change occurs.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss with participants the idea that everything in the universe includes an opposite.



2. *Everything and Every Person Is Connected in Some Way*

Dialectics reminds us of our connection to the universe. Understanding the interconnectedness of all things increases our understanding of our influence on others and theirs on us. It becomes easier to understand and validate both others and ourselves.

This statement can be taught from three different perspectives, described below.

a. **We Are All Connected to Each Other Physically**

To make this point, ask participants to notice that the air they are breathing in and out is in turn being breathed in and out by others. Ask them to notice that their feet are touching the floor that is touching every other person in the room. This floor is also touching the hallway; the hallway is touching the steps down to the street; the street is touching blocks far away, which in turn are touching roads going to mountains; the mountains in turn are touching the sky; and so on. The idea is that we can make a direct link between ourselves and the farthest star.

b. **Each of Us Has Parts, and Each Is Part of a Greater Whole**

Each of us has parts (e.g., arms, legs, blood vessels, cells), and each of us is part of a greater whole (e.g., a family, a workplace, a city). The parts participate in creating the whole (e.g., the leg contributes to the whole body), and simultaneously the whole body (e.g., blood vessels, hip bone) contributes to the parts.


Example: It is not possible for the participants of the skills training program to avoid altering the program within which they interact. The program would not exist without them. It is certainly also the case that they will simultaneously be affected by the program.



c. **Separation Is an Illusion**

Modern physics tells us that separation is an illusion produced by the tendency of our brains to perceive objects as separate. Quantum physics, for example, finds that when we get down to the very smallest molecule and keep going to even smaller bits of matter, we ultimately find that matter dissolves into emptiness.

Documented spiritual experiences suggest that from the beginning of recorded human history, individuals have had profound experiences of reality as a unity—of the universe as one.

 **Discussion Point:** Many individuals have had experiences of unity (i.e., of being one with their surroundings or with the entire universe). Sometimes these experiences take place in a spiritual context, but at other times they occur in definitely secular circumstances. Elicit from participants whether they have ever had such an experience. Discuss the impact, if any, of each experience on the life of the participant who had it.

Note to Leaders: It is important to validate experiences of unity or oneness. These can take many forms. The usual problem is that such an experience is invalidated or deemed unimportant by a participant. Frequently the person may not have told anyone about the experience. Remind participants with such experiences to remember these. Thinking about the experiences can remind them that, indeed, they are not alone and are not unconnected to others and to the universe. For characteristics of spiritual experiences, look at the criteria outlined in Mindfulness Handout 7: Goals of Mindfulness Practice: A Spiritual Perspective.

✓ 3. *Change Is the Only Constant*

Dialectics helps us radically accept the changes that are continually occurring. This in turn helps us become more flexible. Such flexibility makes it easier for us to go with the flow, which in turn makes peak experiences more likely.

Everything in the universe is always changing. Indeed, reality itself is a process of continuous transformation. Some changes are fast (such as light waves moving through the air, or our abdomens going in and out as we breathe); others are very slow (such as the wearing down of a river rock as water washes over it, or mountains being pushed up out of the earth). Each day is either shorter or longer than the day before. Flowers come up, bud, bloom, die, and decay. Stars move slowly across the sky. The earth moves around the sun.

✓ *Example:* We are all older than we were a second ago. Our bodies are in a constant process of change: Cells are falling off; new air with new particles is entering our bodies; food we have eaten is being digested; the position of our teeth in our mouths is changing, even if very slightly. If we had a powerful magnifying device, we would see the components of the molecules in our bodies flying around. Our brains are changed with each new experience we have; neurons are constantly firing and sending messages along the neural network, thus permanently changing the overall network.

💬 **Discussion Point:** Discuss the sayings “You can’t step in the same river twice” and “Even one vote changes the outcome.”

Meaning and truth also evolve over time. What was true for a person in the past may no longer be true, simply because both the person and the environment are changing over time. What existed yesterday, last year, or 5 years ago does not exist now in exactly the same way. From what exists now, something new will emerge. Reality itself evolves transactionally over time. Truth is neither absolute (and never changing) nor relative (and dependent only on who is looking at it). Instead, it evolves over time.

✓

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*This example (Mary, Helen, and Judy) and the next one (Mark, Howard, and George) are adapted from Basseches, M. (1984). *Dialectical thinking and adult development*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. Copyright 1984 by Ablex Publishing Corporation. Adapted by permission of ABC/CLIO.

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Example: Adults often look back on the hard work and sacrifices they made when young to get ahead, and then they impose the same hard work and sacrifice on the young people around them now. For these adults, the meaning of hard work and sacrifice was learned over time in specific circumstances. Its meaning for those who are younger will also evolve over time in specific circumstances, and it is likely to be different, particularly if sacrifices are forced upon them.



4. *Change Is Transactional*

Dialectics helps us analyze how we are being influenced by our environment and how we are influencing our environment. This in turn leads to a better understanding of our own behavior and or our relationships. Dialectics leads to understanding, not to blame.


The world is one large system with many interacting parts. The sun, the trees, the water, the fruit, the farmer, the grocer, the teacher, the friend, the parent, the sibling—these things are all interconnected and influence one another. So at any given moment, things are never the same as the moment before or the moment after.

Each individual influences his or her environment, just as each environment influences the individual. Reciprocity is the key word here. A affects B, which alters B, which in turn alters A, and so forth. Each person has a completely different “family” that has a unique impact on his or her life. The “family” can consist of partners, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, peers, therapists, coaches, and others. The impact that these people in the environment have on the individual is just as varied as the impact the individual has on those in the environment.

Example: A relatively new and successful school teacher gets a new student who has a learning disability. Not having had much experience with this, she does a lot of extra work to figure out how best to teach him, and he progresses well through her class. The student comes out of the class not only learning the material, but also feeling more secure in his abilities. At the same time, the teacher has evolved from the experience and is now much better prepared for teaching the next student she encounters with a similar learning disability, and feels more secure in her ability to learn about different learning styles. Student and teacher have both grown and evolved as a result of the experience.²⁴

Emotion dysregulation is a good example of the transactional nature of change and of learning. Two functions of emotions are to activate behavior and to communicate to others so that they

will respond. When the functions are discouraged or blocked by the environment, the emotions may escalate. This in turn can lead to stronger efforts by the environment to block the emotions. After a time, a vicious cycle can occur.

 **Discussion Point:** Describe the following situation: Mom takes Catalina (age 6) to a Yo-Yo Ma concert with seats in the center of the orchestra section. As Yo-Yo Ma plays the cello, Catalina looks up at the stage and thinks she sees a small fire behind the stage. She whispers to Mom that there is a fire. Mom looks and does not see it. [Ask participants what they think Mom will say back to Catalina.] Mom whispers back that there is no fire. Catalina looks again and sees the fire again. [Ask participants what they think Catalina will do now.] Catalina whispers louder, “There’s a fire!” Mom still does not see the fire. [Ask participants what they think Mom will do now.] Mom whispers even louder, “No, there is not!” Seeing it again [ask, “What will Catalina say?”], Catalina says loudly, “Mom! Fire!” Mom says [ask, “What and how?”] loudly, “BE QUIET!” After a few more rounds, Mom scoops Catalina up and carries her out of the concert hall. She feels safer and calms down. [Ask, “Did Mom reinforce Catalina for escalating?”] Alas, Mom has just reinforced Catalina for escalating. [Ask, “Did Catalina calming down reinforce Mom for escalating when she took her out of the concert hall?”] Catalina has reinforced Mom for the escalated action of taking her out of the concert.

C. How to Think and Act Dialectically

Review Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16 with participants.

Note to Leaders: At either the beginning or end of discussing this handout, it can be helpful to ask participants to check off which dialectical strategies they most need to work on. Or you can ask them to circle those skills they are most interested in practicing. The list of strategies is quite long, and it is not necessary to go over every one. Select and focus on those giving the most trouble to participants.




1. *There Is Always More Than One Side to Anything That Exists; Look for Both Sides*

a. Ask Wise Mind: What Am I Missing?

Example: Demanding adherence to rules that were correct when a person was a child misses that the person is no longer a child.

Example: Following guidelines for appropriate behavior set by one’s previous employer misses that appropriate behavior may be different in another company or at a higher rank in the same company.

Example: Screaming at a boyfriend, “You never think about me! You only care about yourself!” when he turns on a TV football game instead of talking to her.


 **Discussion Point:** Ask group members to consider what’s being left out in the third example above. Generate more balanced alternative explanations for the boyfriend’s turning on the football game. If the group fails to generate any examples, you may choose to give the following: The woman realizes that football is her boyfriend’s passion, and that watching one game does not mean he does not care for her. She also remembers that her boyfriend does think about her quite often. This “both–and” perspective synthesizes the “either–or” stance so commonly held by emotionally dysregulated individuals. (See “Move Away from Extremes,” below.)

b. Ask “Where Is the Kernel of Truth in the Other Side?”: Find the Truth in Both Sides

Say to participants: “Practice looking at all sides of a situation and all points of view. Remember that no one, including you, has the absolute truth. There is wisdom to be gained from examining the truth in opposite perspectives.” You can use the examples on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16a (e.g., “You are tough, AND you are gentle”) as illustrations.

Each person has unique qualities, and different people have different points of view. This point normalizes and accepts differences among people, rather than seeing differences as cause for conflict. Some people believe that anything that deviates from their own point of view is wrong.

Example: On a driving vacation to Europe, Mary wants to get up early in the morning to go out exploring and see everything. Bill wants to sleep in and enjoy the free breakfast the hotel provides. The truth from Mary's perspective is that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see Europe, and they can always sleep and eat breakfast at home. Sleeping is wasting time on the trip. The truth from Bill's perspective is that he is mentally fatigued from his full-time job and responsibilities at home, and that sleeping in and relaxing over breakfast are what vacations are all about.


 **Discussion Point:** If you have time, ask each participant to check off the dialectical oppositions on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16a that they have the most trouble with. Also ask participants to write in any other oppositions they have trouble with. Discuss how to find the syntheses of each of the opposites.



c. Move Away from Extremes


Encourage clients to let go of seeing the world in “black-or-white,” “all-or-nothing” ways. Many individuals think in extremes and rigidly hold to a single point of view. Life is black or white, viewed in dichotomous units. Such people often have difficulty receiving new information; they search instead for absolute truths and concrete facts that never change. The goal of dialectics is not to get participants to view reality as a series of grays, but rather to help them see both black and white, and to achieve a synthesis of the two that does not negate the reality of either.

Example: A man was extremely concerned about his wife's habit of running up debt on their joint credit cards. He was afraid that she would run up so much debt that they would go bankrupt. The first thing he thought to do was to try to take away her credit cards. But doing that would alienate his wife, and this would only increase his distress. So he started to ignore the topic of money completely, in order to avoid his emotional distress—the opposite extreme of trying to keep her from having any access to credit cards. Rather than opting for either one of these two extreme positions, he decided to consider both. This led him to find a third option, a “middle path” synthesis: to speak calmly to his wife about how to create a budget for both of them that they could monitor together.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss the role of emotions in making extreme statements, such as when a teenage boy comes home after curfew, and his father tells him, “You're grounded for the rest of the school year!” Ask participants for other examples of extreme behavioral responses.

d. Balance Opposites

Say to participants: “Work to balance the opposites in your life. For instance, validate yourself as well as others. Accept reality, but also work to change it. Hold someone close, while also letting the person go.”


 **Discussion Point:** If you have time, review Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16b, and ask participants to check off the dialectical oppositions that they have the most trouble balancing. Also ask participants to write in any other dichotomies they have trouble balancing. Discuss.



e. Make Lemonade Out of Lemons

Making lemonade out of lemons is the art of taking something that seems apparently problematic and turning it into an asset. From another perspective, it is finding the silver lining in


the darkest cloud. For example, suffering can enhance empathy and allow one to understand others who are suffering. Problems in everyday life are an opportunity to practice skills. Indeed, from the point of view of learning new skills, not having problems would be a disaster, since there would be nothing to practice on! The key idea here, of course, is not to act as if the lemon was actually lemonade all along. Such a position is invalidating and oversimplifies the difficulties of turning something very painful and difficult into something valuable or useful.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have been able to make lemonade out of a lemon. What personal difficulties have they had that they learned from or that somehow influenced them in a positive way? Discuss.



f. Embrace Confusion

Embracing confusion, or entering the paradox, is entering into the world of “yes and no” or “true and not true” and allowing it to be what it is. It is becoming comfortable with paradox and confusion. Say to participants: “It is possible for a person to want you to be happy, but also refuse to do what you want. I can be right that it is too cold, and you can be right that it is too hot. I can do my best and still do better.”

 **Discussion Point:** Read over and discuss the opposites that can both be true on Handout 16a at this point, or come back to this point when you teach the handout. If you are not using the handout, elicit from participants paradoxes in their own lives.

g. Play Devil’s Advocate


Playing devil’s advocate is arguing against a cause or position simply for the sake of argument or to determine the validity of the point of view. Using this strategy can make it easier to find the truth in both sides of an argument. Tell participants: “When you are working with your own sets of beliefs, it can be helpful to use the two-chair technique. Put two chairs near each other. Sit in one chair to make one side of the argument; sit in the other to take the opposing view; and switch back and forth until clarity is obtained about both points of view.” (See Chapter 7 of the main DBT text for a fuller discussion of this strategy.)



Practice Exercise: Elicit from participants various dilemmas or conflicts they have had in their lives. Select one to use as a practice case, and ask the person to play the devil’s advocate for both sides of the dilemma, using the two-chair technique. Discuss.

h. Use Metaphors and Storytelling


Metaphors and stories have been used throughout history to convey complex events that can have multiple meanings. Stories are also an avenue of clarifying what a person is leaving out in his or her understanding of something. For example, a person may be focused on not wanting to come to the skills training group and decide that skills are not needed to get to his or her goals. You can point out that this is like getting in a boat to go across a river when the boat has no bottom on it. Trying to be what others want a person to be is like a tulip’s trying to be a rose just because it happens to have been planted in a rose garden. Finding a tulip garden is an alternative. Learning acceptance is like a gardener’s learning to love the dandelions that come into the garden year after year, no matter what the gardener does to keep them out. Moving slowly across a mountain ledge without looking down can be both life-threatening and the only way to survive when edging across the ledge is the only route to safety.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants any stories they have been told or have heard that have helped them hold complexity and opposites in their mind at once. Discuss.

✓ **2. Be Aware That You Are Connected**


✓ **a. Treat Others As You Wish Them to Treat You**

Tell participants: “Remember that if you are harsh, critical, or invalidating, you are likely to be treated the same way.”

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss the sayings “What goes around comes around,” and “The waves and the ocean are one.” Discuss how awareness of connection fits with the values of the “golden rule.” Discuss how using GIVE skills over time is like investing in a bank that will pay dividends—even if there is no immediate return on every act of kindness.


b. Look for Similarities among People Instead of Differences

It is easy to feel separate from people when we think they are different from us. It is also much easier to be judgmental and critical of those we see as very different from ourselves. We tend to feel closer to people who seem to be like us.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants people they feel close to and people they feel distant from. Ask, “Are you more similar to people you feel close to or people you feel distant from?” Discuss.

c. Notice the Physical Connections among All Things


Say to participants: “Once you actually pay attention to the physical world, you find that everything is indeed connected to everything. Each part of your body is connected to another part, your body is connected to the floor, which is connected to the outside (even if by being connected to many things in between), and so on and so on.”

 **Practice Exercise:** This can be a good time to do the “Acceptance by the Chair” mindfulness exercise. For a description, see Section VI, Part E (the final exercise there) in Chapter 7 of this manual.

✓ **3. Embrace Change**


a. Throw Yourself into Change

As long as change is a fact of life, we might as well not only allow it, but also embrace it by throwing ourselves into it.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have allowed change, even when it was difficult. When has it been easy to embrace change? Discuss.


b. Practice Radical Acceptance of Change

Tell participants: “When people and relationships begin to change in ways you don’t like, practice radical acceptance of those changes. Allow those you care about to grow, develop, and change over time. Be patient with gradual changes; prepare for sudden changes.”

 **Discussion Point:** Many individuals have trouble with change. Elicit from participants what types of change they have difficulties with. Discuss how to radically accept change. (See Distress Tolerance Handout 11.)

c. Practice Getting Used to Change

Encourage participants to get used to change by purposely making changes in small ways. Note that for people who don’t like change, this will be practicing opposite action. (See Emotion Regulation Handouts 9–11.) The idea is to get comfortable with change by practicing it.

 **Discussion Point:** Ask who likes change and who does not. For those who do not like change, discuss how they could get more comfortable with it.


✓ **4. Remember That Change Is Transactional**

a. Observe How Everything Affects Everything Else

Say to participants: “Pay attention to the effects of what you do and say on others, and to how what they do and say affects you. Notice how your mood affects others around you, and how others’ moods affect you. Seeing your own and others’ behaviors as arising from transactions occurring over time can help you let go of blame.”

✓ **b. Practice Letting Go of Blame**

Encourage participants to remind themselves that all things are caused by many interactions over time. Dialectics is incompatible with blame, primarily because it focuses on how all things are caused and how those causes are transactional over time. Note also how this is similar to what is taught in nonjudgmentalness.

 **Practice Exercise:** If you have time, give Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16c: Identifying Dialectics to participants, and explain the task. Give participants time to check the most dialectical response in each group. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants if they have other situations where it is not clear to them what would be the most dialectical course of action between two or more options.

Correct responses for Handout 16c are as follows: 1A, 2B, 3B, 4B, 5A, 6C, 7B, 8B.

XVI. VALIDATION SKILLS (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUTS 17–19A)¹

Main Point: Validation of others’ feelings, beliefs, experiences, and actions is essential in building any relationship of trust and intimacy. To recover from invalidation, we can use the same skills to validate ourselves, along with checking the facts and acknowledging that invalidation hurts.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 17: Validation. The handout reviews the reasons for validation, what validation is, what is most important to validate, and cautions about validation. It is important to address these issues, but unless there is misunderstanding of validation, this handout can usually be reviewed rather quickly.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18: A “How To” Guide to Validation. Spend most of your time on this handout. It is very important to have participants practice the different types of validation and discuss problems in validating others. This handout is based on the six levels of validation that are taught to therapists and skills training leaders. The skills can also be taught to participants as a review of the GIVE skills.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18a: Identifying Validation (Optional). Use this handout if you have extra time, or give it out as homework and then discuss it at the next session. The correct responses are listed at the end of Section E below in the teaching points, as well as at the end of this chapter’s introduction.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19: Recovering from Invalidation. Review the main points on this handout. If you do not have time to review this handout, give as one of the homework assignments Interpersonal Worksheet 3, and instruct participants to use the same validation strategies they learned to validate others with themselves.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19a: Identifying Self-Validation (Optional). Use this hand-

out if you have extra time, or give it out as homework and then discuss it at the next session. The correct responses are listed at the end of Section F below, as well as at the end of this chapter's introduction.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 12: Validating Others. Participants are to fill out this worksheet whenever they have an opportunity to practice their validation skills, even if they did not validate. The first section of the worksheet asks participants to check off what validation skills they practiced "on purpose" with others. The phrase "on purpose" is emphasized, so that participants will put some effort into actually trying out the skills with others. The next part of the worksheet asks participants to write down validating statements they made to others, as well as any invalidating statements they made. The ability to notice invalidating statements that participants make themselves is every bit as important as the ability to craft and make a validating statement. The worksheet also asks participants to describe a situation where they practiced validation, including writing down exactly what was said, the interpersonal outcome of what was said, and how they felt after the interaction. The worksheet then asks participants to rehearse validating statements by writing down what they would do differently next time (if anything). Remind participants that they are unlikely to remember exactly what they did and said in a situation if they don't write it down near the time of the interaction.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 13: Self-Validation and Self-Respect. As with Worksheet 12, remind participants to fill this sheet out whenever they have an opportunity to practice their self-validation skills, whether or not they actually practiced. Adapt the instructions for Worksheet 12 for self-validation.

✓ A. What Is Validation?

✓ 1. Validation Is Finding the Kernel of Truth in Another Person's Perspective or Situation

When we validate others' experiences, emotions, thoughts, words, or actions, we are verifying the facts of the situation.

Example: If a friend says his arm hurts, we can sympathize with him or offer help—validating that indeed his arm does hurt.

Example: If a person feels intensely sad following the death of her dog, we can both acknowledge her feelings, and also verify that it makes sense and is reasonable to feel so sad following the death of a beloved dog.

Example: When we are going out for dinner, if one person says he doesn't have much money to spend, we can validate that we hear and understand this by suggesting an inexpensive restaurant for a meal.

Example: If a knowledgeable person is taking us on a tour, we can follow her, validating that she knows what she is doing and where she is going. Her behavior makes sense.

✓ 2. When We Validate, We Communicate That We Understand the Person's Perspective

We acknowledge that all emotions, thoughts, and behaviors have a cause, even if we don't know what the cause is.

Example: If George forgets an appointment with Mike, Mike can acknowledge that it is understandable, given how much is going on in George's life right now.


Example: If Sara drops and breaks something very valuable that Ruth owns, Ruth can acknowledge that it was an accident.

Example: If Dave has an alcohol problem and keeps relapsing, his friend Keisha can communicate that she understands that urges to drink can feel irresistible, and that it can be really hard to get off of alcohol.

✓ **3. Validation Does Not Equal Agreement**

Validation does not necessarily mean liking or agreeing with what the other person is doing, saying, or feeling. It does not mean agreeing with what you do not agree with. It means understanding where the other person is coming from.

Example: A friend had two beers at a concert; then, when driving home an hour after the second one, he was stopped and given a DUI citation. We might say, “I understand how it made complete sense to you to think you would be safe driving after waiting an hour.”

 **Discussion Point:** How can we validate without agreeing? Many people get this point confused. Elicit ideas from participants for how to validate the other person in the following situations, or in situations the individuals bring up. (1) In a political discussion, a person says something we strongly disagree with (e.g., “I can see you and I come from very different political sides”). (2) A person wants to go to a movie we don’t want to go to (e.g., “I see why you would want to go to that movie. I am really hoping we can go to this other movie”).

✓ **4. Validation Does Not Mean “Making” Something Valid**

Validation does not mean endorsing or verifying that which is invalid.

Example: “If someone is angry at you for eating the last piece of cake, and you did not eat it, you might validate that the person is angry, but you would not validate that you actually ate the cake.”

B. Why Validate?

1. Validation Improves Our Interactions with Others

It shows that:

- We are listening and understand.
- We are being nonjudgmental.
- We can see the facts or truth of a situation.


2. It Improves Interpersonal Effectiveness

It reduces several obstacles to effectiveness:

- Pressure to prove who is right.
- Negative reactivity.
- Anger.


3. It Makes Problem Solving, Closeness, and Support Possible


It also makes others more receptive to what we have to say.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit times when participants have felt invalidated, and contrast those with other times when they felt validated. How were the two times different? How did they feel each time? How did it affect their behavior each time?

4. Invalidation Hurts

✓ *Example:* Bill is sitting in an important meeting, listening to a presentation by a visitor to his company, when he accidentally knocks his notebook computer off the edge of the table, making a loud noise on the floor. His team leader stops, turns, and says, “Geez, stop multitasking! We’ve got an important guest.” Bill feels extremely embarrassed and angry, since he’d been paying close attention to the talk and was using his computer to take notes for the team. He later recounts the story to his partner when he gets home, who replies, “Why do you keep doing this to yourself? You’re never going to get a promotion at this rate.”

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants what they think Bill must be feeling after his team leader's and partner's responses. Why are these responses so hurtful? What is missing from their responses? Highlight that what is missing is any understanding of Bill, his behavior, and his feelings.

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants what would be a validating thing the team leader could do. A reasonable response here would be for the team leader simply to ignore the dropping of the computer, since ignoring it would imply that it is insignificant and nondeliberate. Next, ask, "What would be a validating response Bill's partner could give?" If group members have trouble generating a validating response, then offer an example of one, such as "Oh, Bill, that must have been so upsetting and frustrating for you, especially since you were doing everyone a favor by taking notes." If participants say that this sounds too "sappy," encourage them to put into words a validating response they would welcome from someone.

✓ C. Important Things to Validate

✓ 1. Validate Only the Valid

Validating only what is valid is very important, because when we validate something we are not only verifying it; we are also reinforcing the experiences, emotions, thoughts, words, or actions that we validate.

2. Validate the Facts of a Situation

3. Validate a Person's Experiences, Feelings/Emotions, Beliefs, Opinions, or Thoughts

✓ *Example:* If Antwan says his arm hurts and therefore he should not go to school on an important testing day, Mom might validate the pain in the arm, but invalidate the idea that staying home is necessary.

Example: If Maria feels intensely afraid of going to bed without her shoes on, Emma may validate that it makes sense (given that Maria was attacked by an intruder in her bed), but not validate that going to bed without shoes on is dangerous.

Example: If Jorge is upset, saying he failed an important exam, Juan may look at his passing score and validate that he didn't do as well as he wanted to, but invalidate that he failed the exam.

4. Validate Suffering and Difficulties

In the three examples above, Mom, Emma, and Juan all validate the other person's suffering or difficulties.

✓ D. How Can You Tell What Is Valid?

Something is valid when it is any or all of the following.

1. Relevant and Meaningful to the Case or Circumstance

Example: When asked whether you think Bill Jones has been a good leader, it is relevant and meaningful to discuss Bill Jones' leadership skills and beliefs; ignoring Bill Jones and talking instead about how terrible you think Susan Smith is as a leader is irrelevant.

✓ 2. Well Grounded or Justifiable (in Terms of Empirical Facts, Logically Correct Inference, or Generally Accepted Authority)

Example: It is valid to say it is raining when it in fact is raining, but not when the sky is clear.

✓ **3. Appropriate to the End in View (i.e., Effective for Reaching the Individual's Ultimate Goals)**

Example: If Joanne (who has a drinking problem) says that drinking makes her feel better immediately, we can validate the fact that alcohol has this effect, but also invalidate that drinking to solve problems will be effective when Joanne wants to go up the corporate ladder.

✓ **E. How to Validate**

The levels of validation below and on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18 are the same as those that therapists use in individual DBT treatment, and that all team members use on DBT teams. For the most part, they build on each other. At each subsequent level from 1 to 6, the validation is stronger.

Note to Leaders: Review Handout 18 and read the examples. If time permits, ask participants for other examples.

✓ **1. Pay Attention**

Tell participants: “When you pay attention, you treat the individual and what he or she is saying or doing as relevant and meaningful—as requiring serious attention. It communicates that the person, in the moment, is visible, seen, and important to you. Be mindful of your own nonverbal reactions in order to avoid invalidation—for example, rolling your eyes, sucking your teeth, walking away, or saying, ‘I don’t care what you say.’”

As noted in the discussion of the mindfulness-of-others skills (see Section XII, above), one of the most important characteristics of a good relationship is that people pay attention to each other. People will stop bringing us flowers if we ignore them when they do. People will stop wanting to be around us if we ignore them when they are around.

Even when we disagree or don’t understand, we need to pay attention to people’s behavior, beliefs, and feelings. How would we ever learn anything new or get to know others if we ignored them whenever we disagree?

Emphasize to participants that paying attention is *not* agreeing or approving of a person’s activities, emotions, beliefs, or other experiences. It simply says that the person is alive and counts.

When we *ignore* a person, we communicate that the person’s activities, feelings, beliefs, or experiences are not relevant, meaningful, or important to us. Although in the grand scheme of things all beings are important, much of what people do and say is either unimportant, irrelevant, or ineffective. When this is the case, it makes sense to ignore them temporarily, particularly if we want them to stop what they are doing or saying.

Examples: We might ignore people when they throw a tantrum and only pay attention to them when they ask for what they want. We might ignore a person who is insulting us rather than attack back. If a person keeps changing topics or changing his or her mind about something, we might ignore that also and just keep doing whatever we are doing. If a TV commentator is known for exaggerating facts, we might ignore that show and watch something else.



Practice Exercise: If this has not already been done, use the exercise for paying attention described in the GIVE skills (see Section VI, B, 2, “[Act] Interested”).

✓ **2. Reflect Back without Judgment**


Say to participants, “The goal at the next level of validation is to communicate that you have accurately heard what the other person has said. Be open to correction. It is important not to add your own assumptions and interpretations.”


Example: A person might say in a desperate voice, “She hates me.” To validate, we might say,

“So you are feeling desperate and really certain that she hates you . . . ” (leaving off the statement “That’s silly, because you should know by now that she does not hate you”).

Emphasize to participants that reflecting back does *not* imply approval or encouragement. Nor does it imply evaluation of effectiveness or value. To validate does not mean that we necessarily agree or think that this is the only perspective possible. Validation at this level does not require us to add, in word, deed, or nonverbal response, that the other person’s responses correspond to the empirical facts when they may not.

Example: We can validate that a person thinks someone is threatening them without agreeing that they are actually being threatened. We can validate that a person feels angry without agreeing on what the person is angry about.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when others have not heard what they had to say accurately. How did it feel? Discuss.

 **Practice Exercise:** Pair participants up. Ask one person in each pair to describe a situation in the last week from his or her life or skills practice. Instruct the other person to listen and then reflect back to the talker. At first, the person’s reflecting should try to offer an accurate understanding of what was said. Then halfway through, they are to reflect back a misunderstanding of what the person said. Instruct the talker to keep going, trying to explain the situation to the listener. After some time, ask participants to switch roles and have the listener talk and the talker listen. Discuss how it felt to be understood and to be misunderstood.



3. “Read Minds”

Explain to participants: “Level 3 validation is figuring out what is going on with a person without his or her telling you in words.

In everyday language, this is known as ‘interpersonal sensitivity.’ There are a number of ways to read what is going on with another person. Voice tone and body language, including facial expression, can communicate aspects of experience that a person has not put into words. Observe the person’s posture, face, and behavior. Put that information together with what is happening and what you already know about the person. At times just knowing the situation, such as when a loved one has died suddenly or a person has just gotten engaged, may be enough to enable you to read what is going on with the person. Then express how you think the person may be feeling, wishing, or thinking. When someone knows how you feel or think without your having to tell them directly, it is almost always experienced as validating. At a minimum, such validation communicates that you know the other person—that you are validating the individual as him- or herself.”

To practice this level of validation, ask participants to find a word to describe the feeling they are seeing in the other person, and then tell the other person what they see, as in these examples.

Example: “I can see you are really excited about this idea.”

Example: “I’m so sorry you didn’t get the loan for the mortgage on that wonderful house. That must be really disappointing.” (This is more validating than paying attention without saying anything or saying only, “I’m sorry about that.”)

Example: “You must be wondering what is going on with us changing the schedule so radically.”


a. Use Caution and Be Open to Correction

Level 3 validation can be fraught with danger and can have the potential for great harm. The chief danger is that an incorrect or only partially correct description of the other person’s private experiences will be shoved down the person’s throat. Say to participants: “Do not use consequences or observed functions of behavior as proof of another’s private intent. If

you feel manipulated by what someone says or does, do not assume that the intention was to manipulate you. If a friend is late picking you up, do not assume the person doesn't care about you. Effective Level 3 validation requires you to accept that you might have misread the other person."

b. Offer a Reading of the Other Person a Little Tentatively

It is a good idea to offer a reading of another person as a hypothesis or guess—for example, "I'm guessing that you were really disappointed about that," instead of "You're really feeling disappointed about that." Remind participants: "Remain open to being corrected by the other person. Remember, no one can actually observe another's internal thoughts and feelings."

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when others asked them for something or said no to a request, with no apparent understanding of how it would affect the participants. How did it feel? What do they wish others had said or done differently? Discuss.



4. Communicate an Understanding of the Causes

Say to participants: "Look for how the feelings, thoughts, and actions of a person make sense, given the other person's history and current situation, even if you don't approve of the behaviors, emotions, or actions themselves. The goal is to communicate to the person that his or her behavior is understandable in light of previous events or circumstances. In essence, you are saying, 'Given your history of X, how could your experience/behavior be other than Y?'"

The important point to make here is that all behavior is ultimately understandable and sensible if we consider the causes.

a. Learning History

We can communicate that a person's behavior makes sense because of the person's learning history, even if it does not make sense in terms of current events.

Example: We can say that it makes sense to be afraid of walking down an alley if a person was assaulted in a dark alley last week, even if this particular alley is well lighted, it is daytime, and the neighborhood is a safe place to walk.

Example: We can say to a recent immigrant to the United States that it makes sense that the person makes a lot of mistakes in English if he or she never spoke English before.

Example: We can tell someone we understand the person's anger at us, given that someone told the person we stole his or her money, even when we are not the ones who stole it.

Example: We can communicate that it makes sense to be somewhat hopeless about a new weight loss program if every program the other person has tried before failed.

b. A Previous Event

We can communicate that a person's behavior makes sense because of a previous event, even if it does not make sense in terms of present facts.

Example: We can say that it makes sense to carry an umbrella walking to work if the weather report said it will be raining today, even if it is sunny and bright all day.



Example: A friend hears that others got invitations and went to another friend's birthday party and he did not. We can say it makes sense for him to wonder whether he was left out on purpose. This makes sense even if the facts are that (unknown to both of you) his invitation was eaten by the dog.

c. A Mental or Physical Disorder

We can communicate that a person's behavior makes sense because of a mental or physical disorder, even if it does not make sense in terms of facts.

Example: We can say it makes sense that another person would get tired easily (and much more tired than others) after even light exertion if the person is just getting over cancer treatments.

Example: We can say it makes sense that a person would feel hopeless if the person has depression, even if the situation is not hopeless.

Example: We can tell someone that his or her interpretation that we are angry makes sense, given our gruff voice tone, even if we are anxious instead of angry.



5. Acknowledge the Valid

Level 5 validation is communicating that a person's experiences make sense because they fit the present facts, are well grounded, are logically correct, or are effective for their ultimate goals. This level of validation is at the heart of DBT. It is the answer of yes to the question "Can this be true?" It involves looking for how the person's behavior makes sense because it is a reasonable or normative response to a current situation.

Example: Sharon is sometimes shy in groups. Now she is attending a DBT skills training group. When she occasionally speaks up in the group, John on the other side of the table gives her an angry, threatening look. After one group session, Sharon says to a friend in the group with her, "John was giving me really mean looks. I don't want to sit anywhere near him next time." A response that would validate Sharon in terms of what actually happened would be "Boy, I really understand, and I wouldn't want to sit near him either if I were you. He gave you quite a look when you spoke up."



Tell participants: "At Level 5, also *act* on what you view as valid. Often *not acting* on what a person says or does is invalidating. For example, a person is screaming for help in a house on fire; the responding firefighter just looks up and says, 'I see you need saving,' but doesn't try to save the person. This would be enormously invalidating."

Examples: "If you are criticized for not taking out the garbage on your day, admit that it is your day and take it out. If someone presents a problem, help the person solve it (unless they just want to be heard). If people are hungry, give them food. Acknowledge the effort a person is making."

Again, however, caution is needed. We can insult and invalidate a person if we try to validate something because of past causes or personal characteristics, when the present circumstances make a response valid.



Example: "You are criticized for not taking out the garbage on your day, and you respond by saying, 'You are just upset with me because you had a bad day,' or you say that the other person's upset is due to events in childhood. These are both Level 4 validation. But using such personal or past events avoids acknowledging that it is reasonable for the other person to want you to take out the garbage when it is your turn." Not only is it not validating, it is often insulting as well.



6. Show Equality

Say to participants: "Respond to the other person as having equal status with yourself and as being entitled to equal respect. Level 6 validation is the opposite of treating the person in a condescending manner or as overly fragile. It is responding to the individual as capable of effective and reasonable behavior, rather than assuming that he or she is either inadequate or superior. It implies being your genuine self within the relationship."



Practice Exercise: One at a time, have each participant briefly describe a difficult or frustrating part of his or her day or week; have the person to their left say something validating (and brief) to the speaker. Then that person shares with the person to his or her left, who in turn says something validating, and so on. Continue until all participants (including the leaders) have shared and been validated. Then list on the board all the validating behaviors people noticed, and match them with the methods of validating listed on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18.

Continue: “It can be very hard to validate when you do not understand the other person’s point of view, or when the other’s feelings or behaviors make no sense to you. In these situations, you can do one of two things: Either validate the person’s feelings or point of view but not what the person does; or admit that you don’t understand but want to understand. This is an example of being authentic and treating the person as an equal.”

Example: Some people might say that they cannot understand why a person engages in dysfunctional behavior. The key here is to recognize that most dysfunctional behavior is a response to emotional pain when a person cannot find another way to reduce the pain. In these situations, a validating response could be “I can see that you are obviously in a lot of pain.” In this case, we are validating the emotion, though not the behavior.

Example: An alternative strategy that can be very effective is to say, “I know you want me to understand this, and, believe me, I want to understand this, but I just can’t get it. Let’s keep talking. Tell me again.” This alternative strategy, presented in a nonjudgmental way, communicates that our lack of understanding is the problem in the conversation, not the invalidity of the other person’s emotions or behavior. It also communicates deep interest in the other’s difficulties.



Practice Exercise: If you have time, distribute Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 18a: Identifying Validation, and explain the task. Give participants time to check the more effective validating response for each pair. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants if they have other situations where it is not clear to them what would be the more effective validating course of action between two options.

Correct responses for Handout 18a are as follows: 1B, 2A, 3A, 4B, 5A, 6B, 7B, 8B.

F. Recovering from Invalidation

Review Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19: Recovering from Invalidation with participants.


Begin by saying: “Recovering from invalidation can be just as important as validating others. There are several types of invalidation. Some are helpful and some are harmful.”

1. Helpful Invalidation

Say to participants: “When your opinions, beliefs, or behaviors are invalidated, and they are in fact based on false or inaccurate information, then invalidation can be helpful. When done with respect, these interactions are usually not distressing and may even be sought. For example, giving and receiving corrective feedback and engaging in debates about opinions can be critical to intellectual stimulation and personal growth.”


a. Corrective Feedback

Continue: “Corrective feedback is information that clearly shows that your facts are wrong, or your beliefs don’t make logical sense in terms of the facts, or your behavior is not effective for reaching your goals. When the feedback is correct and given in a nonjudgmental manner that is open to discussion and to your point of view, you may agree, change your mind, feel fine, and go forward.”

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have been told that their facts are incorrect (and they actually were incorrect). Elicit times when they have been shown that their opinion on something does not make logical sense.

b. Opinion Debates

Go on: “Opinion debates can occur when a person disagrees with your opinions or beliefs, such as a political point of view, religious beliefs, philosophical positions, or other beliefs that another person could reasonably disagree with. The person may argue strongly against your point of view. Whether you feel invalidated usually depends on whether the other person treats your views with respect and listens to you even when disagreeing. It is easy to feel fine after a hearty but respectful discussion or debate and continue on your way.”

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants times when they have heated political debates with friends, family members, or colleagues. Discuss who disagreed with them and how they felt about it.

2. Corrosive Invalidation

Say to participants: “But invalidation can be exceptionally distressing when your point of view is disregarded while the other person’s validity is unquestioned. How distressing this is depends on the importance of the person invalidating you and the importance of your own position to your self-respect and ability to trust yourself. There are as many levels of harmful invalidation as there are levels of validation. Here are several examples of harmful invalidation.”

a. Being Ignored

“Others do not pay attention to what you do or have to say, even when what you are doing or want to say is valid and relevant. You are treated as an unimportant and irrelevant person. This is particularly harmful if this pattern is persistent and long-lasting. The problem is that you can easily start feeling unimportant and irrelevant.”

b. Not Being Understood

“Others don’t understand what you have to say, what you think, or how you feel, even when you keep trying to tell them. What you say about yourself or your experience simply does not get through to the other person. It may be that the person is insensitive, unable to ‘get’ where you are coming from, or has his or her own opinions about you, no matter what you say or do.

The problem is that you may start to question your ability to communicate to others. You can even begin to worry that they are right about you and you are wrong.”

c. Being Misread

“Others not only misread you, but are insensitive to what is going on with you unless you spell it out for them in clear A-B-C language. The problem is that in these cases, it is easy to feel as if you and your responses must be very different from others. You may also start to believe that the other persons are sensitive to you but just don’t care about you. This can lead to believing that you are inadequate or that there is something wrong with you.”

d. Being Misinterpreted

“Other persons give understandable but incorrect causes for your behavior and your experiences. You say how you feel, and the other persons say, ‘No, you don’t feel that way.’ Or they may misinterpret with great certainty your intent for doing or saying things. Their inferences about your intent are often pejorative and hurtful, and may be based on how your behavior

affects them: ‘I feel manipulated; therefore, you must have intended to manipulate me.’ Your reasons for doing or not doing things are misconstrued often in ways that make you look motivated to be incorrect, ineffective, or otherwise problematic. Valid reasons for your behavior, such as previous learning or biological characteristics, are ignored. It is assumed that if you wanted to be different, you would be different. The problem is that it is hard to feel accepted and cared about when people often misinterpret you.”

e. Having Current Facts Ignored or Denied

“Facts that explain your reasonable behavior are discounted, rendered unimportant, or distorted. For example, you are late because of traffic, and your friend responds, ‘Oh, you are always late; don’t give me that.’ Responses that make perfect sense under present circumstances are explained in terms of the past. For example, a current boss who repeatedly fails to come through with promised support says, ‘You mistrust me because your previous boss made promises she didn’t keep.’ The problem is that when current facts are ignored or denied, it can sometimes lead to serious consequences—for example, when you are abused but the abuser denies it, or you are innocent but are found guilty of a crime.”

f. Receiving Unequal Treatment

“Others treat you as very different from them in essential ways, even when you are not so different. You are treated as inferior, a child, fragile, or unable to really understand the other person. The problem is that when you are treated as different from others, it is hard to feel that you are part of the group.”

3. Traumatic Invalidation

Note to Leaders: The following discussion is particularly appropriate for groups of clients who have suffered from physical or sexual abuse or other traumatizing events, and/or who have a formal diagnosis of PTSD. Personalize the discussion as appropriate for a particular group.

Traumatic invalidation is extreme or repetitive invalidation of individuals’ significant private experiences, characteristics identified as important aspects of themselves, or reactions to themselves or to the world. Traumatic invalidation can be focused on individuals’ perceptions of themselves and of their environment, sensory experiences, thoughts and beliefs, emotions and desires, and/or actions. There is frequently a violation of the persons’ familiar ideas about themselves and the world, and of the integrity of their own perceptions about themselves and their environments.

Typically, traumatic invalidation comes from a very important person, group, or authority whom an individual is or was dependent on for his or her sense of personal integrity and well-being. It can occur only once, as when a mother refuses to believe that her daughter is telling the truth when she reports sexual abuse by her father, or when a witness falsely testifies that a person committed a crime. Or it can be an accumulation of oversights and misreadings of emotions, motives, and actions by an important person or institution, or by part or all of a family or other important group, that leads to psychological exclusion or perception of the individual as an outsider.

The problem with such extreme or pervasive invalidation is that it results in a threat to the person’s psychological integrity and a confused sense of internal veracity and credibility, putting the person in a state of pervasive insecurity. Common sequelae of such invalidation include intrusive thoughts and memories; reexperiencing of the invalidation; intense shame, confusion, anger, and defensiveness; markedly increased interpersonal sensitivity to subsequent invalidation; intense efforts to get validation from the invalidator, as well as persistent efforts to obtain validation from others; and avoidance of contact with invalidators and difficulties in trusting other people.

4. Recovery from Harmful Invalidation

Give Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19 to participants. Say to them: “There are many things you can do to recover from harmful invalidation. Here are some of them.”



a. Check the Facts

“Check *all* the facts in a nondefensive way. Check them out also with another person you can trust to validate the valid. This is a critical step after invalidation, so that you do not reexperience invalidation.”

b. Acknowledge and Work to Change Your Invalid Responses

“If your responses were incorrect or ineffective, admit it and try to change what you are thinking, saying, or doing. Also, stop blaming; it rarely helps a situation.”

c. Drop Judgmental Self-Statements

“Even if you did make a mistake or believed something that is not correct, it does not mean you are ‘stupid’ or even to blame for not knowing the facts. Remember that there are often many valid reasons for invalid behavior.”

d. Remind Yourself That All Behavior Is Caused

“It is also important to remind yourself that all behavior is caused, and that this is true of your responses also. Remember that you are and have always been doing the best you can, given the circumstances and your personal history.”

“Admit that it hurts to be invalidated by others even if they are right.”

e. Be Compassionate toward Yourself. Practice Self-Soothing. Admit That It Hurts to Be Invalidated by Others Even If They Are Right.

“Keeping a stiff upper lip may be needed while around the person invalidating you, but on your own, there is every reason to be compassionate and self-soothing. It does hurt to be invalidated.”

f. Remind Yourself That Invalidation, Even When You Are Right, Is Rarely a Catastrophe

“Keep in mind that invalid responses—either someone else’s or your own—are generally not the end of the world.”

g. Acknowledge Your Valid Responses

“If your responses were valid under the circumstances, acknowledge that you are correct, or that your responses are reasonable and normal for the situation. Self-validation can take a lot of work and a lot of verbal processing with others. But it is well worth the effort.”

h. Describe Your Experiences and Actions in a Supportive Environment

“Describing your experiences and behaviors can be vital in letting go of invalidation. The describing process is similar to exposure therapy for trauma and anxiety disorders. Through the experience of nonreinforced shame and personal invalidity evoked in describing, you can gradually learn that your responses are understandable and valid in important ways.”



Practice Exercise: Ask participants to check off on Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19 each set of behaviors they have difficulty with. Then read each one and ask who checked it off. Consider using this information to give homework assignments for the week.



i. Use All the Steps for Validating on Yourself

“Validating yourself may seem like a very simple point, but people often forget this. Each level of validation we have talked about can be used on yourself.”

- “*Pay attention* to your own behavior (thoughts, feelings, and actions).”
- “*Reflect* by describing to yourself your own private (thoughts and feelings) and public (actions) behaviors.”
- “*Be mindful of your own emotions and situation*. Be sensitive to what your emotions and the situation may be telling you about what you need.”
- “*Try to understand* your deepest thoughts and feelings. Again, recognize that all of your behavior is caused, and therefore inherently understandable. Remember that you are doing the best you can.”
- “*Acknowledge the valid* by standing up for yourself when your behavior is valid, even if others don’t see it.”
- “*Treat yourself with respect*. See yourself as equal to others.”



j. Practice Radical Acceptance of Yourself

“Practicing radical self-acceptance requires acknowledgment that being invalidated by others hurts. It requires compassion toward yourself and self-soothing. It will ultimately be much easier if you can also practice radical acceptance of the person who has invalidated you.” Encourage participants to use some of the reality acceptance exercises in Distress Tolerance Handout 11b: Practicing Radical Acceptance Step by Step and Distress Tolerance Handout 14: Half-Smiling and Willing Hands. For example, imagining the invalidating person with a half-smile and willing hands can be very useful.



Practice Exercise: If you have time, distribute Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 19a: Identifying Self-Validation, and explain the task. Give participants time to check the more effective validating response for each pair. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants if they have other situations where it is not clear to them what would be the more effective validating course of action between two options.

Correct responses to Handout 19a are as follows: 1A, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5A, 6B.

XVII. STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING BEHAVIOR (INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS HANDOUT 20–22A)¹

Main Point: There are very effective strategies for increasing behaviors that we want in ourselves or others (reinforcement, shaping) and for decreasing behaviors that we do not want (extinction, satiating, punishment). The secret to being effective at behavior change is to learn these strategies and put them into action.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 20: Strategies for Increasing the Probability of Desired Behaviors. Review the main points on this handout. It is important that participants understand the concepts of reinforcement (a consequence that increases behavior), shaping (reinforcement of small steps leading to a larger change), and intermittent reinforcement (occasional reinforcement that makes a behavior persist).

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 21: Strategies for Decreasing or Stopping Undesired Behaviors. This handout teaches extinction, satiation, and punishment. It is very important to teach clearly the distinction between extinction and punishment.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22: Tips for Using Behavior Change Strategies Effectively. This handout outlines important issues in selecting and implementing consequences.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22a: Identifying Effective Behavior Change Strategies (Optional). Use this handout if you have extra time, or give it out as homework and then discuss it at the next session. The correct responses are listed at the end of this section's teaching points, as well as at the end of this chapter's introduction.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 14: Changing Behavior with Reinforcement; Interpersonal Effectiveness Worksheet 15: Changing Behavior by Extinguishing or Punishing It. It is important that participants actually try the behavior change strategies they are learning in this module. Be sure to assign one or both of these worksheets as homework. Review the instructions on the worksheet with participants and carefully review their homework in the next session. These skills are often difficult for therapists and skills trainers to learn. It may also take some time for participants to learn and use them.

Note to Leaders: One of the best and easiest books to read on behavior change is a book titled *Don't Shoot the Dog*,²⁵ which lists both effective and ineffective ways to promote change. The examples are very good, and assigning this book can be very helpful. It is routinely assigned for parents in our adolescent DBT programs. Many of the adolescents also read it.

A. Strategies for Increasing the Probability of Desired Behaviors



1. What Is Reinforcement?

Reinforcement is *any* consequence that increases the frequency of a behavior. All human beings, as well as other animals, are influenced by the consequences of their behaviors.

Note to Leaders: It is essential that participants get the main point here: Reinforcement is a consequence that increases a behavior. Have them repeat it to you. Tell participants to memorize this definition. Throughout teaching these skills, periodically ask them to tell you what reinforcement or a reinforcer is.



Discussion Point: Ask participants what behavior of their own they would like to increase. Suggest writing it down on the line at the top of Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 20.



a. It Is Not Necessary for People to Be Aware That Their Behavior Is Being Influenced by Consequences

What is required for a reinforcer to work is that an individual is aware of the reinforcing event's having occurred (e.g., sounds would not reinforce a deaf person; visual pictures would not reinforce a blind person). What is *not* required is that the person be aware of the connection between the reinforcer and his or her own behavior.^{26, 27}



b. People Commonly Reinforce Others' Behavior without Realizing That They Are Doing It

Example: "If every time a person gets angry and attacks you, you give the person what he or she wants, you will see that over time the tendency of the other person to get angry goes up."

Example: "If whenever you bring up a painful topic, a friend of yours with an alcohol problem starts feeling an intense urge to have an alcoholic drink and tells you of the urge, and then you immediately sidestep talking about the painful topic, you can predict that the friend's urges to drink will become more frequent when you start discussing painful topics the friend wants to avoid."

c. Reinforcement Is the Most Effective Way to Increase the Frequency of a Behavior

Reinforcement tells a person what will be rewarded in specific situations (and what will not be rewarded).

If a maladaptive behavior is being reinforced, it is very common for others to believe that the person behaves this way on purpose to get the reinforcer. This is based on the premises that individuals know what is reinforcing their own behavior, and that reinforcement of behavior is associated with behavioral intent. Neither of these is necessarily true; however, these beliefs are the genesis of much pain and suffering. Crying, suicide attempts, tantrums, and pouting are written off as attempts to get attention. Anger, tiredness, anxiety, and fear are written off as attempts to avoid doing what is needed. A cry for help is viewed as manipulative, and so on. Alas, such inferences are pejorative, often wrong, and very hurtful.

We need to remember the point made above: **People are often not aware of what reinforcers are actually controlling their behavior.** Although an individual has to experience a reinforcer, the individual does not have to be aware of the connection between the consequence and his or her own behavior for reinforcement to work. Statements about what is controlling one's own behavior are opinions. Alas, opinions can be based on many things other than the facts.



2. Why Reinforce?

Some people think that behavior should occur on its own—that we should not have to reinforce to get individuals to do the “right” thing. This is a basic misunderstanding of human (and animal) behavior. One of the most important tasks of rearing children, for example, is systematically reinforcing effective behaviors. In essence, knowing what is “right” is learned. Doing the right thing is also learned. Reinforcement is an important way that we learn. The idea that people “should” do the right thing just because it is right ignores the fact that all behavior is caused.

Note to Leaders: This point can be very controversial. Discuss with participants. Use as many examples as needed to get the points across. If necessary, bring up a lot more examples. If you find it useful, go to very extreme examples of how effective reinforcement can be, such as in “brainwashing.”



3. Two Types of Reinforcement

a. Reinforcement as Reward

Reinforcement as reward (sometimes called “positive reinforcement”) increases the frequency of behavior by adding a positive consequence.

Examples: Praise, frequent flyer miles on an airline, an earned privilege, money, a smile, or a satisfying outcome to an interpersonal situation can each increase behavior when it occurs as a consequence of a specific behavior.



Discussion Point: Ask participants what things would be rewards or positive consequences for the behavior they have chosen to increase. That is, what would make them more likely to engage in the behavior? Suggest writing down individual reinforcers on the handout.

Note to Leaders: Guide participants to keep reinforcers realistic, safe, and appropriate for the goal behavior. For instance, a new car is not a realistic reinforcer for exercising 5 days a week for a month; drinking alcohol, using drugs, and letting go of responsibilities are not effective; going to Africa on a safari may be unrealistic. Also encourage participants to search for meaningful reinforcers beyond just money, such as time spent with a parent, a child, or a friend.

b. Reinforcement as Relief

Reinforcement as relief (sometimes called “negative reinforcement”) increases the frequency of behavior by removing an unpleasant condition.

Examples: “A headache goes away if you take an aspirin; your boss stops nagging you when you get your reports in on time; people stop bothering you for information if you throw a tantrum; an annoying noise stops when you buckle your seatbelt in your car; feelings of sadness and fear lessen when you drink a lot of alcohol; a back pain gets relieved when you get a massage.”



Discussion Point: Elicit from participants consequences of specific behaviors that provide relief in their lives. Suggest writing these down on the handout. Ask what kinds of behaviors—their own or others’—are maintained by ending unpleasant and/or painful conditions.

Note to Leaders: Negative reinforcement can be a touchy topic to discuss in a group setting. Often dysfunctional behaviors, such as self-cutting, drinking, using drugs, or lying, are reinforced by subsequent relief of emotional suffering. Telling someone, “I am suicidal,” can be reinforced by the listener’s responding with greater sympathy or switching from a painful topic of conversation to focusing on the suicide ideation.

Discussion Point: Ask participants to identify negative situations or sources of discomfort that they would like relieved or removed.

Example: A teenage girl might mention a parent’s nagging her to clean her room. What new behavior might help reduce this discomfort? For instance, if the teen’s cleaning her room led to a reduction in the parent’s nagging, the adolescent might be more likely to pick up after herself in the future. Elicit one or two other examples from the group.

Discussion Point: Elicit from participants times when they have given people they love much more time when the loved one is in trouble than when the person is not.

**4. What Is Shaping?**

Shaping is reinforcing small steps that lead toward a bigger goal. Each successive step toward a larger goal needs to be reinforced until the new behavior is stable. This increases the chances of continuing to work toward the goal.




Example: “You can take small, reinforced steps toward finding a job. Apply online for one job on Monday and reinforce that. Apply for two jobs on Tuesday and reinforce that. Continue until a good part of every day is spent looking for a job.”

Example: “If your goal is to get up early five mornings a week to exercise for half an hour, you can first reinforce yourself for getting out of bed early, then reinforce yourself for exercising for 10 minutes, then 20 minutes, and so on.”

5. Why Use Shaping?

Shaping is useful because some behaviors are very difficult to learn in one step, particularly behaviors that are complex and require a lot of steps.


Discussion Point: Ask participants whether they or family members have ever been frustrated with themselves for not starting a large project until the night before. How would shaping apply? Elicit examples. Examples for writing a report might include deciding on these steps: Step 1 would be to sit down and outline the report the week before the due date and then, once that’s done, to allow some TV time. Step 2 would be to write the introduction and provide a small reinforcement for that, and so on.

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants to identify one or two steps on the way to changing a behavior of their own that they want to change.

✓ 6. *Timing Counts in Reinforcement*

Tell participants: “Reinforce immediately following the desired behavior. If you wait too long, the reinforcer won’t be connected with the behavior.”

✓ *Example:* “You are trying to improve your backhand in tennis, and your coach is observing 30 swings. Would you prefer your coach to tell you, ‘That’s the swing! Nice job!’ immediately after you use the right form, or would you prefer the coach to wait until you are done and then say, ‘Your 14th swing—I liked that one?’

 **Practice Exercise:** Play the “clicker game.” To play this game, you need to bring a loud clicker (or whistle) to the skills training group. You then ask one person to volunteer to play the role of the learner (which we call the “dog”) and one person to play the role of the “dog trainer.” The task of the dog will be to learn new behaviors taught by the trainer. Once a person is selected to play the dog, that person goes out of the room. The trainer’s task is to teach the dog new behaviors by reinforcing successive steps toward the behavioral sequence that is being taught. Before bringing the person playing the dog back into the room, the group decides on what sequence of behaviors to teach the dog. Examples might be for the dog to walk to a whiteboard, turn around two times, and then go sit down, or for the dog to walk in and then go to a window and close the blinds. An easier task might be to train the dog simply to turn around or just walk to the window. Do not make the task too easy or too hard. Instruct the person who is playing the dog that when he or she comes into the room, the trainer is going to try to teach him or her new behaviors by clicking the clicker every time he or she is engaging in the behaviors wanted. The task of the trainer is to click the clicker (or blow the whistle) immediately after every time the dog takes a step toward the desired behavior. The trainer should *not* use the clicker or whistle when the dog is not engaging in the correct sequence of behaviors. If the person playing the dog gets off track, the trainer can ask the dog to go back to the door and start over. Starting over can be done multiple times in one game. Once the game is over, discuss how it went and what participants learned.

Note to Leaders: It is essential that you practice playing the clicker game before you teach it.

7. *Reinforcement Schedules*

Say to participants: “When and how often a behavior is reinforced are very important if you want the behavior to persist without your having to reinforce it every time it occurs. There are several different types of reinforcement schedules.”

✓ a. *Continuous Reinforcement*

Say: “In continuous reinforcement, every instance of a designated behavior is reinforced. This can be important at the beginning when you are trying to shape and establish a new behavior. Continuous reinforcement will get a behavior to occur at very high frequency. However, if that is all you do, the behavior will disappear quickly as soon as you stop reinforcing it.”

✓ *Example:* “If your car starts every time you turn the ignition key but one day it does not, you may try to get it going a few times, but you will quickly stop. If you have a car that often does not start but usually does after many tries, you may keep trying for a really long time.”

Example: “If your sick mother always answers the phone but does not today, you may drop everything and run over to her home. If she only intermittently picks up the phone, you may keep calling her for several days.”

- ✓ *Example:* “Putting money into a vending machine ordinarily produces the soda you want. Once the vending machine does not work once or twice, you are unlikely to keep trying that machine.”

b. Intermittent Reinforcement

Continue: “In intermittent reinforcement, the designated behavior is reinforced only some of the time. You can make a behavior almost indestructible (that is, impervious to change) by putting it on an intermittent reinforcement schedule and then gradually lengthening the number of responses required for reinforcement or increasing the length of the interval before responses are reinforced. This is particularly likely to work if you make the length of time between reinforcements variable (and therefore unpredictable). Behaviors that are otherwise incomprehensible can often be explained by principles of intermittent reinforcement.”

- ✓ *Example:* Addiction to gambling occurs because of intermittent reinforcement.

Example: Staying with and feeling love for an abusive partner are often on a very thin intermittent reinforcement schedule; the abusive partner perhaps reciprocated love frequently in the beginning of the relationship, and then gradually lengthened the time between expressions of love.

Example: A parent can inadvertently put a child on an intermittent reinforcement schedule by responding to tantrums only episodically.

B. Strategies for Decreasing or Stopping Undesired Behaviors

Review Interpersonal Handout 21 with participants.

✓ 1. What Is Extinction?

Extinction is the reduction of a behavior by removing ongoing reinforcement.

Example: “When attention is reinforcing an unwanted behavior, you instead ignore it.”

Example: “When your child’s demands are reinforced by your giving in to the demands, you instead do not give in.”

Tell participants: “Extinction works best when an alternative behavior replaces the unwanted behavior. In particular, you can extinguish a behavior and at the same time soothe.”

Example: “Your child throws a tantrum to get you to take him with you on a walk. You can say, ‘I know this is hard for you, and I am sorry you are so distressed, but you will have to stay home and I will be home before long.’ Then leave the child at home and go out for a walk.”

a. Be Aware of the “Behavioral Burst”

When a behavior has been reinforced and then reinforcement is stopped, the behavior will initially increase; that is, there will be a “behavioral burst.” (If there is not a behavioral burst, the wrong reinforcer may have been withheld.) If the reinforcement remains stopped and is not restored, the behavior will decrease over time.


- ✓ *Example:* If a little girl begins to throw a tantrum in the supermarket because she wants Cocoa Puffs cereal, a parent is likely to give in to stop the escalation of the tantrum. Giving in, however, reinforces the tantrum and makes it more likely to occur during the next supermarket visit. By contrast, if after reinforcing tantrums repeatedly the parent withholds reinforcement—that is, does not buy the Cocoa Puffs—the tantrum is likely to escalate in the moment (making everyone unhappy!). However, if the parent holds the line by not giving in during this and subsequent shopping trips—that is, tolerates the behavioral burst of the escalating tantrum—the tantrum behavior is likely to extinguish over time. Extinc-

tion is helped along by positively reinforcing any efforts by the little girl to walk calmly through the store.

b. Beware of Intermittent Reinforcement

If the parent in the example above says no the first three times, but the fourth time gives in and buys the Cocoa Puffs, then the parent has created a much bigger problem. The tantrum is now on an intermittent reinforcement schedule. As noted previously, an intermittently reinforced behavior is the most difficult to extinguish. So it is important not to give up in the face of a behavioral burst, but instead to ride it out.

Emphasize to participants: “If you are trying to change someone else’s behavior rather than your own, **be sure to orient the person whose behavior you are changing**. Explain that you are beginning to work to extinguish the behavior, so that it does not seem arbitrary or punitive. And don’t forget to reinforce alternative, adaptive behaviors.”

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit examples from group members of behaviors that might be reduced or eliminated through extinction. Ask each participant to state what reinforcer will be eliminated or given to the individual at times not connected to the behavior (i.e., noncontingently).



2. What Is Satiation?

Satiation is providing a reinforcer before it is needed.

Example: “A baby who cries when hungry will not cry if you give the baby food before he or she cries.”



Example: “Giving more attention to the baby when he or she throws tantrums might be reinforcing the tantrum behavior. Giving just as much attention when the baby is not throwing a tantrum will lessen that impact.”

Example: “If you talk to your sister longer when she is lonely, you might be reinforcing her feelings of loneliness. You can stop having that impact by talking to her for just as long when she is not lonely.”

Example: “A spouse who gets angry if you forget to buy the toothpaste will not get angry if you keep the toothpaste on hand.”

a. How Satiation Works


When the reinforcer is given before the unwanted behavior occurs, it reduces motivation for the behavior and thus the behavior decreases in frequency.

b. An Advantage of Satiation over Extinction

Tell participants: “An advantage of satiation over extinction is that you do not get the behavioral burst you get with extinction. A disadvantage is that you must provide more potential reinforcers than you may want to provide.”

c. The Use of Satiation in DBT

The concept of satiation is why DBT therapists take phone calls even when their clients are not in a crisis. DBT therapists want clients to recognize that they do not have to be suicidal to get attention from their therapists. This is important because if clients have to be suicidal to talk to their therapists, it would make sense that the clients who very much want to talk with their therapist would, despite their best efforts, get more suicidal.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit examples from group members of behaviors that might be reduced or eliminated through satiation with the reinforcer *before* the problematic behavior occurs. Discuss the pros and cons of this strategy versus extinction.




3. What Is Punishment, and How Is It Different from Extinction?

Punishment is adding a consequence that decreases a behavior. The consequence can be adding something negative (e.g., time out for a child, traffic tickets, verbal criticism) or taking away something positive (but not previously a reinforcer of the behavior). The difference between this and extinction is that extinction involves taking away a reinforcer for a behavior, while punishment involves taking away something unrelated to reinforcement.

Example: “Let’s say that your sister harasses you to spend more time taking care of your mother, who is sick. Your sister does this by nagging, criticizing, or ‘guilt-tripping’ you. So far, you have given in and spent more time with your mother. Extinction of this harassment would involve defining this behavior for your sister as unwanted and unhelpful, and then never, ever agreeing to spend more time helping out with your mother when your sister harasses you. Punishment might involve withdrawing warmth, refusing to meet with your sister, calling your sister names, bringing up past transgressions, and making her feel criticized and guilty.”

Example: “Your son throws tantrums when you tell him he has to go to bed. Usually, in the face of tantrums, you give in and let him stay up for a little more time. Extinction would be to not give in and not let him stay up when he throws a tantrum—that is, removing the reinforcer. Punishment would be taking away an hour of TV every time he throws a tantrum—a consequence not related to your previous reinforcing behavior.”

Note to Leaders: Emphasize that punishment may make a person stay away from the punisher, hide a behavior, or suppress the behavior when the punisher is around. Punishment may at times be necessary, but it is essential to keep it specific, time-limited, and appropriate to the “crime,” as well as to reinforce an alternative behavior. Otherwise, punishment will not work. Punishment by itself does not teach new behavior, and it may even lead to self-punishment.

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants some examples of behaviors that appear necessary to punish rather than extinguish. For each example, debate the possible advantages versus disadvantages of punishment.

a. The Relative Ineffectiveness of Punishment

Punishment is one of the least effective ways to change behavior over the long term. Punishment suppresses the punished behavior when the person punishing is nearby, but the behavior tends to recur when the punisher is not present. It also doesn’t teach any new behaviors to replace the punished ones.

b. The Need for Alternative Behaviors

When punishment is used, alternative behaviors must be reinforced to replace the behavior being extinguished. Neither extinction nor punishment teach new behaviors. People cannot unlearn old behaviors. It is not in any person’s (or animal’s) evolutionary interest to be able to wipe out old behaviors easily. One never knows whether behavior that is problematic now will be very useful in some new, as yet unimagined context. Thus, although punishment can get a person to stop behaving a particular way, the capability for the behavior is always present. In sum, people can learn new behaviors, but they can’t unlearn old behaviors.

c. Overcorrection

Research Point: A form of punishment called “overcorrection” has been found in several studies to stop various types of dysfunctional behaviors.²⁸ Overcorrection is both a form of punishment and a form of repair that fits the “crime.” Studies have found that overcorrection is more effective than correction

alone.²⁹ Instructions need to be explicit; the rationale of overcorrection needs to be clearly stated; and there should be positive consequences for engaging in the overcorrection, which are also clearly laid out. The required corrective behavior is thus dialectically related to the problem behavior.

There are three steps in overcorrection when it is used as a punishment following the occurrence of a problem behavior.

- *First, the person punishing withholds something the punished person wants, or adds an unpleasant consequence.* The most effective consequence is one that expands a natural but undesirable (from the punished person's point of view) effect of the behavior.
- *Second, the punisher requires the person to engage in a new behavior that both corrects and overcorrects the harmful effects of the problem behavior.* (This requires, of course, that the person figure out clearly what harm was actually done.)
- *Third, once the new "overcorrecting" behavior occurs, the punisher immediately stops the punishment by undoing the negative conditions or stopping the withholding.* Thus the punished person has a ready way to terminate the behavior. The challenge, of course, is to devise outcomes and overcorrection behaviors that are undesirable enough, without being trivial or unrelated to the behaviors the punisher wants to teach.

Example: "Your son has friends over when you are gone, and they leave the living room a mess. You then withhold permission for his friends to come over, and also for his going out with friends. The required correction is to clean up the living room completely, and overcorrection is to clean up the entire downstairs. As soon as this is done, his friends can come over again, and he can visit his friends."

Example: Several clients left a group session early and trashed the entrance to our clinic. This damaged not only the clinic entrance, but also my ability to be relaxed about leading a group if someone left early. The consequence I put on them was that they could not come back to the group until they organized and paid for repairs; the overcorrection was to make it more beautiful than before. Correction and overcorrection to my loss of faith were to hire and pay for a person to sit in the clinic's reception area during group sessions until the clients were out of the group.

Example: "A person spills something on your floor. Correction would be to clean it off the floor, and overcorrection would be to clean the entire floor."

Example: "If a couple is persistently late for dinner engagements, they could correct by finding a way to meet you on time, and overcorrect by offering to pick you up or pay for your parking."

Example: "You drop and break a vase at your friend's house. Correct by replacing the vase. Overcorrect by filling it with beautiful flowers."

C. Tips for Using Behavior Change Strategies Effectively

Review Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22 with participants.

1. Summarize Behavior Change Strategies Learned So Far

Go over the strategies participants have learned thus far, particularly reinforcement, extinction, and punishment.



2. Not All Consequences Are Created Equal

The power of something to be a reinforcer or a punishment depends on a number of things—for example, the intrinsic value of the consequence to the person, the setting, and how sated or deprived the person is of something desired.

a. The Value to the Person Counts

“One person’s poison can be another person’s passion.” A reinforcer is something a person will change his or her behavior to get (positive reinforcement) or get relief from (negative reinforcer). If the person does not care one way or the other about a consequence, it will not work as a reinforcement.

Example: A fresh plate of broccoli normally won’t do it for most people. Some examples of motivating reinforcers might include a nice dinner in a special restaurant, time with a really special friend, or downloading some new music after the completion of a major project.

Observing what happens when various consequences are applied is the best strategy for figuring out what will work as a consequence. Observing as a strategy, however, can be difficult, since changing consequences can take a lot of time and effort, and it is not always possible to start and stop. An alternative is to ask the person what consequences he or she would work to get (reinforcement) or work to avoid (punishment).

b. The Context Counts

It is also important to assess the potency of consequences in different situations. A reinforcer in one situation (hugging a teenager at home) may be punishment in another (hugging a teenager in front of a group of friends). Bringing chocolates to a person on a diet can be punishing, but can be reinforcing when a person is not dieting. Money is a reinforcer for working, but not for love given.


c. The Quantity of a Reinforcer Counts

Satiation, or having a desire for something satisfied completely, can make people feel as though they have had too much. This can make something unpleasant that would otherwise be reinforcing.

Examples: “Food is not a reinforcer after a really big meal; affection is not a reinforcer if you receive plenty of that. Something is only a reinforcer if it is given in appropriate doses. This is also true with praise.” (Elicit other examples from participants.)

If people are deprived of something they like, it is more likely to be an effective reinforcer than something they can have whenever they want it.

Examples: “Water may not be a reinforcer if you have enough, but it is definitely a reinforcer if you have been in the heat without liquids for a long time. Food is a reinforcer when you have not had any for a long time. If access to a cell phone or a computer has been taken away, getting it back can be a reinforcer. An opportunity to spend time with a close friend you have not seen in a long time is more reinforcing than time with a friend you see every day.”

 **Discussion Point:** Finding powerful reinforcers can be a problem. Many people already have most of what they want or need—or if they do not, they cannot afford to get it even as a reinforcer. In these cases, an effective strategy is to take something away (e.g., access to a cell phone) for a period of time and then restore its use following the desired behavior. Something else can then be taken away (e.g., coffee in the morning, shoes other than the pair hated the most) and then restored following the desired behavior. Participants can keep changing what they are depriving themselves (or another person) of, or can rotate through two or three different things over time. This approach works best if the participants know (or the other person knows) the expected deprivation and reinforcement schedule. The key idea is first to use deprivation to make an item highly desirable, and then to use it as a reinforcer. Discuss with participants how they might use this strategy on themselves or others.

d. Natural Consequences Are More Effective in the Long Run Than Arbitrary Consequences

Natural consequences can be reinforcing or punishing. One type of effective punishment is to let natural negative consequences happen. For example, a nasty hangover is a natural consequence of drinking too much. Staying up very late at night may cause a person to be too tired to focus at work, and then to get in trouble for slacking off. If a behavior doesn't have natural consequences or the natural consequences are too dangerous, then arbitrary consequences may be necessary. A teen who violates curfew one weekend may be grounded for the following weekend. Although it is common for parents to ground children for various infractions, staying at home on a weekend is not a natural outcome of staying out late on a previous day or weekend. In these cases, punishment should be specific, should be time-limited, and should fit the "crime."

Example: "If you're an employee who misses a deadline, you might be punished by losing the chance to present a report to your supervisor because you don't have it ready in time—a natural consequence of missing the deadline. In contrast, an ineffective punishment is one that isn't specific, lasts too long, and/or doesn't fit the behavior. For instance, if you miss a deadline, your boss may give you a bad evaluation, move you to a new work group, and remind you of the missed deadline constantly."

In a similar manner, natural positive consequences can be powerful. Preparing well for job interviews at a law firm can result in a job offer; smiling at people on the street can result in an immediate smile back; approaching people at parties can lead to interesting conversations, cleaning up the kitchen can result in a hug or thank-you; dieting can result in losing weight.

**3. Behavior Learned in One Situation May Not Happen in Other Situations**

New behaviors have to be learned in all relevant contexts. Learning is highly associated with situations. We learn, for example, that we might be punished for talking while in church, but are likely to be rewarded for talking in social situations. We learn that when a certain person is present, we might be punished for a specific behavior; when that person is absent and other people are present, we might be rewarded, or the behavior might be ignored. Behaviors reinforced at work may not be rewarded at home. Behaviors rewarded at home may be punished at work.



Discussion Point: Elicit from participants behaviors of theirs that are rewarded in one situation and ignored or punished in other situations.

To change our own or another person's behavior, we need to pay attention to the situation. It is very important when learning or teaching a new behavior not to assume that if behavior is learned in one situation, it will transfer to another situation. It is easy to be judgmental of people who can do something in one context, but then can't do it in another. For example, we might find it easy to strike up conversations with people we know, but be completely stumped about doing it with strangers. Playing the piano might be easy when we are alone, and very difficult when others are listening. A person might be able to abstain from drinking too much at home, but not when out with friends.



Practice Exercise: If you have extra time, distribute Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 22a: Identifying Effective Behavior Change Strategies. Explain the task, and give participants time to check the more effective response for each pair. Discuss answers. If time permits, ask participants if they have other situations where it's not clear to them what would be the more effective change strategy.

Correct responses to Handout 22a are as follows: 1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5B, 6B, 7B, 8A.

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