

Orientation and General Skills

Teaching
Notes

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General Skills: Orientation and Analyzing Behavior

There are two sets of general skills. The first set focuses on orientation to skills training, including a handout on the biosocial theory of emotion dysregulation. The second set focuses on how to analyze behavior so that a client can figure out the causes or events that influence the behavior. This allows the client to problem-solve how to change the behavior or how to prevent it in the future.

Orientation

An orientation to skills training takes place during the first session of a new skills group. The purposes of this orientation are to introduce members to one another and to the skills training leaders; to orient members to the structural aspects of skills training (e.g., format, rules, meeting times); to orient them to the leaders' approach and goals; to sell the skills as worth learning and likely to work; and to generate enthusiasm for learning and practicing the skills. This chapter provides an outline of topics to be covered, but their content can be easily modified to reflect your particular circumstances (e.g., format, timing, fees, rules, use of the telephone). An optional section for teaching the biosocial theory of how emotion dysregulation develops is included.

As discussed in Chapter 4, orienting is a skills trainer's chief means of selling the skills to group members. Therefore, important tasks for skills trainers are to highlight the usefulness of the skills, to elicit participants' specific personal goals, and then to link these goals to the skills modules. Specific goals for the skills training you are conducting will depend on the skills that you plan to teach. The

specific goals listed on General Handout 1 and in the teaching notes are general enough to cover most of what might be taught in the average group. Optional goals are noted. Skills training guidelines, or rules, are presented and discussed along with skills training assumptions.

In the teaching notes, I have put a checkmark (✓) next to material I almost always cover. If I am in a huge rush, I may skip everything that is not checked. In the handouts and worksheets (see www.guilford.com/dbt-manual), I have put stars (★) on the standard handouts I almost always use.

After the first orientation session, reorientation may be reviewed with members, or abbreviated if there are no new members starting the group. Make an effort not to skip it, as review can be useful to remind participants of assumptions and guidelines, and it is a good time to discuss whether new guidelines should be added. If there are new members, leaders should try to get old members to conduct as much of the orientation as possible. In either case, if orientation is concluded before the session ends and the optional handouts are not being taught, leaders should proceed to the material for the core mindfulness skills in Chapter 7.

Diary Cards

Diary cards (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4) provide spaces for logging practice of all relevant skills. These are usually introduced and reviewed by a client's individual DBT therapist. However, clients who are not in DBT individual treatment should be introduced to the diary card in the orientation session. If the diary card, which includes use of skills, is not

Thanks to Anita Lungu, Debra Safer, Christy Telch, and Eunice Chen.

being reviewed by a participant's individual therapist, the skills portion of the card can be reviewed weekly as part of the homework practice review, in addition to any assigned skills practice worksheets. If only the previous week's homework is reviewed, there is a danger that skills taught previously will drop off the client's radar and not be practiced.

Biosocial Theory

The biosocial theory is often reviewed in individual DBT sessions, and in some programs it is taught in adolescent and multifamily skills programs. The theory is particularly relevant for individuals meeting criteria for BPD and for individuals with pervasive emotion dysregulation. It is important, if you are treating another population, such as one with emotion overcontrol or other disorders, that you teach a biosocial theory appropriate to the population you are treating. The idea that all behavior is a joint product of biology and environment, however, applies to everyone. If group members or individual therapists have reviewed this theory, there may be little to gain by reviewing it again.

Analyzing Behavior

Because many DBT therapists teach their clients how to conduct their own analysis of problematic behaviors, I have added a supplementary set of skills that teach participants how to analyze and problem-solve dysfunctional ineffective behaviors ("chain analyses") and how to identify effective behaviors that are needed but missing ("missing-links analyses"). The chain analysis has been widely used in DBT. I developed the missing-links analysis at the request of both adolescents and parents in our multifamily group.

Chain Analysis

Conducting chain analyses of problem behaviors is a critical part of DBT. There are many ways to teach clients how to do this, and there are many places and times to teach it in the course of therapy. In standard DBT treatment programs, individual therapists teach their clients how to do a chain analysis in the course of individual therapy. DBT treatment teams employ abbreviated chain analyses to assess team-interfering behaviors of team members. In my treatment teams, we always do a brief chain analysis with individuals who are late for team meetings. It is often taught in residential and inpatient treatment programs. It is an important part of skills training for eating disorders¹ and can also be very useful in substance use disorder programs. When participants are not in individual therapy, teaching chain analysis can be incorporated into skills training when there is time and it appears useful. Inclusion of the chain analyses in skills training per se is optional.

Missing-Links Analysis

Whereas a chain analysis breaks down problem behaviors, missing-links analysis is used to identify effective behaviors that are missing. It consists of a systematic set of questions and was originally developed for therapists to conduct rapid assessments of failures to do assigned skills homework in group settings, where there is often limited time to review homework. When missing-links analysis was used for homework review in adolescent multifamily skills groups, parents immediately wanted to learn how to do it to analyze their children's missing effective behaviors. Teens also wanted to use it to analyze their parents' missing behaviors. From there, it became clear that it could be a useful strategic set of questions for any missing effective behavior.

Teaching Notes

I. THE GOALS OF SKILLS TRAINING (GENERAL HANDOUTS 1–1A)

Main Point: The overall goal of DBT skills training is to help individuals change behavioral, emotional, thinking, and interpersonal patterns associated with problems in living.

General Handout 1: Goals of Skills Training. Use this handout to get clients to think about how they could personally benefit from skills training, to identify which areas they are most interested in, and to identify specific personal goals of behaviors to increase and decrease in their own skills training. For clients who have taken other skills training modules and been through orientation before, this is an opportunity to evaluate the progress they have made on their personal goals since the beginning of the previous module. The idea is to generate some enthusiasm for learning and practicing the skills.

Research on DBT is moving very fast, and data suggest that DBT skills training may be effective for a large variety of goals. If General Handout 1 does not fit the goals of your group or individual client, feel free to adapt or develop an entirely new list of goals for your client(s).

General Handout 1a: Options for Solving Any Problem (*Optional*). This optional handout can be used at the start of a skills module, or it can be used at another point when you believe it would be useful. The handout was designed as a reply to participants who responded to offers of help in solving life's problems with a "Yes, but . . ." attitude. It can be particularly helpful to review this handout in those situations. This handout describes the three effective responses to any problem and shows what categories of skills are needed for each. It also serves as a reminder that the only response that needs no skillful behavior is the last option: "Stay miserable."

General Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Skills (*Optional*). This optional worksheet is designed to help participants decide whether they have anything to gain from practicing their DBT skills. It is particularly useful when they are feeling willful or apathetic and don't want to practice. It can be reviewed rather quickly if participants already know how to fill out a pros-and-cons worksheet. If not, review the principles of doing pros and cons. Be sure to instruct participants to fill out pros and cons for both the option of practicing skills and the option of not practicing. It can be useful, if there is time, to have participants fill this out at least partially during the sessions. Suggest that participants carry the sheet with them or post it somewhere at home, so they can easily review it as needed.

A. Introductions


To ease into a first session for newcomers, you can try going around the room and asking members to give their names, tell how they heard about the group, and provide any other information they would like to share. As the group leaders, you should also give information about yourselves and how you came to lead the group.

B. General Goal of Skills Training

The overall goal of skills training is to learn skills for changing unwanted behaviors, emotions, thinking, and events that cause misery and distress.

✓ C. Behaviors to Decrease

Ask participants to read General Handout 1 and check each set of behaviors they would like to decrease. If there is a behavior on a particular list they do not have trouble with, they can cross it out. Alternatively, they can circle the behaviors they think are most important to decrease.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss and share what is checked and circled. Ask participants to fill out personal goals at the bottom of the page. Discuss and share personal goals, including behaviors to decrease and skills to increase.

Note to Leaders: The goals below are organized first by specific module and include supplemental skills that you may or may not be teaching. You can skip describing and discussing supplemental skills if you are not teaching them. In general, these notes are guidelines and should be adapted as needed to fit the specific skills you plan to teach and the characteristics of the people you are working with.


✓ **D. Skills to Increase**

✓ **1. Mindfulness Skills**

Mindfulness skills help us focus attention on the present moment, noticing both what is going on within ourselves and what is going on outside of ourselves and become and stay centered. Mindfulness as a practice has now become widespread, with courses taught in corporations, medical schools, and many other settings.

Present the **mindfulness goals** by types of skills you are teaching:

- **Core mindfulness skills (the mindfulness “what” and “how” skills)** teach us how to observe and experience reality as it is, to be less judgmental, and to live in the moment with effectiveness.
- **(Supplemental) Mindfulness skills from a spiritual perspective (including wise mind from a spiritual perspective and practicing loving kindness)** focus on experiencing ultimate reality, forming an intimate connection with the entire universe, and developing a sense of freedom.
- **(Supplemental) Skillful means: Balancing doing mind and being mind**
- **(Supplemental) Wise mind by walking the middle path**


 **Discussion Point:** Discuss goals of mindfulness skills training. Get feedback about individual goals. Ask participants to write down their individual goals on General Handout 1.

✓ **2. Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills**

Interpersonal effectiveness skills help us maintain and improve relationships both with people we are close to and with strangers.

Present the **interpersonal effectiveness goals** by types of skills you are teaching:

- **Core interpersonal effectiveness skills** teach us how to deal with conflict situations, to get what we want and need, and to say no to unwanted requests and demands—all this in a way that maintains our self-respect and others’ liking and respect for us.
- **(Supplemental) Building relationships and ending destructive relationships.** These skills enable us to find potential friends, get people to like us, and maintain positive relationships with others. They also show how to build closeness with others on the one hand, and how to end destructive relationships on the other.
- **(Supplemental) Walking the middle path.** These skills help us to walk a middle path in our relationships, balancing acceptance with change in ourselves and in our relationships with others.


 **Discussion Point:** Discuss goals of interpersonal effectiveness skills training. Get feedback about individual goals. Ask participants to write down their individual goals on General Handout 1.

✓ **3. Emotion Regulation Skills**

Emotion regulation includes enhancing control of emotions, even though complete emotional control cannot be achieved. To a certain extent we are who we are, and emotionality is part of us. But we can get more control and perhaps learn to modulate some emotions.

Present the **emotion regulation goals** by types of skills you are teaching:

- **Understanding and naming emotions:** These skills enable us to understand emotions in general and understand and identify our own emotions.
- **Changing emotional responses:** These skills help us to reduce the intensity of painful or unwanted emotions (anger, sadness, shame, etc.), and to change situations that prompt painful or unwanted emotions.
- **Reducing vulnerability to emotion mind:** These skills enable us to reduce vulnerability to becoming extremely or painfully emotional, and to increase emotional resilience.
- **Managing really difficult emotions:** These skills help us to accept ongoing emotions and to manage extreme emotions.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss goals of emotion regulation skills training. Get feedback about individual goals. Ask participants to write down their individual goals on General Handout 1.




4. *Distress Tolerance Skills*

Distress tolerance is the ability to tolerate and survive crisis situations without making things worse. Also, these skills teach us how to accept and fully enter into a life that may not be the life we hoped for or want.

Present the **distress tolerance goals** by types of skills you are teaching:

- **Crisis survival skills:** These skills enable us to tolerate painful events, urges, and emotions when we cannot make things better right away.
- **Reality acceptance skills:** These skills permit us to reduce suffering by accepting and living a life that is not the life we want.
- **(Supplemental) Skills when the crisis is addiction:** These skills enable us to back down from addiction and live a life of abstinence.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss goals of distress tolerance skills training. Get feedback about individual goals. Ask participants to write down their individual goals on General Handout 1.

5. *Analyzing Behavior (Supplemental)*

Present these skills if you intend to teach Sections VI and VII of general skills (see below).

- **Chain analysis and missing-links analysis** are ways to figure out the causes of problem behaviors and plan for problem solving.

E. **Format of Skills Training**

1. *Order and Length of Skills Modules*

Review the order and length of skills modules, if this has not been discussed in a previous interview. The specifics here will depend on the nature of your particular skills training program and where in the cycle of modules the orientation session falls. (See also Chapter 3 of this manual.)



2. *Session Format*

Briefly review the overall session format: beginning ritual, review of skills practice since the last session, break, presentation of new material, and a closing wind-down.

F. **Options for Solving Any Problem**

Note to Leaders: If the optional General Handout 1a is used at orientation, highlight the role of DBT skills in each component of solving life's problems. Remind participants of the options if at a future point they reject all or most suggestions for solving a problem.

Tell clients: “The options for responding to pain are limited. There may be an infinite number of really painful things that can happen to you. But there are not an infinite number of responses you can make to pain. In fact, if you sit back and think about it, there are only four things you can do when painful problems come into your life: You can solve the problem, change your feelings about the problem, tolerate the problem, *or* just stay miserable (and perhaps even make it worse).”

1. *Solve the Problem*

Say to clients: “First, you can try finding a way to end or change the problem situation, or by figuring out a way to avoid the situation or get out of it for good. This is the first thing you could do—solve the problem.” Give these examples as needed:

Example: “If the distress comes from conflict in your marriage, one solution could be to avoid spending time with your spouse; another solution could be to get a divorce and leave the relationship; alternatively, you could get couple counseling and change the relationship so that the conflict is resolved.”

Example: “If the problem is that you are afraid of flying, you could solve this by avoiding flying; alternatively, you could find a treatment program aimed at reducing fear of flying.”

Give these examples of skills that can help with problem solving:

- Walking the middle path (from interpersonal effectiveness skills)
- Problem-solving skills (from emotion regulation skills)

2. *Feel Better about the Problem*

Tell clients: “A second way of responding to pain is by changing your emotional responses to it. You could work at regulating your emotional response to the problem or figure out a way to make a negative into a positive.” Give these examples as needed:

Example: “Remind yourself that conflict is a normal part of marriage and that it is nothing really to be distressed about. Alternatively, develop more positive relationships outside of your marriage, so that the negative aspects of conflict with you partner are not very important.”

Example: “Work on feeling better about having a fear of flying; alternatively, join a phobia support group.”

Give these examples of skills that can help with feeling better about the problem:

- Emotion regulation skills
- Mindfulness skills

3. *Tolerate the Problem*

Say to clients: “When you can’t solve the problem that is generating distress and you can’t feel better about it, you can still alleviate some of the distress.” Give these examples as needed:

Example: “In a marriage full of conflict, you might not be able to solve the problem through divorce or by improving the relationship. You might also not succeed in feeling better about the problem. But you will be less distressed and miserable about it if you practice radical acceptance of the problem.”

Example: “If you simply cannot get rid of your flying phobia and also can find no way to like it or feel good about it, then you can reduce the suffering it causes you by radically accepting it: It is what it is.”

Give these examples of skills that can help with tolerating the problem:

- Distress tolerance skills
- Mindfulness skills

4. *Stay Miserable*

Tell clients: “The fourth option is that you can stay miserable. You could, of course, also do something to make matters worse!”*

Give this example of how to stay miserable:

- Use *no* skills!

II. OVERVIEW: INTRODUCTION TO SKILLS TRAINING (GENERAL HANDOUT 2)

Main Point: Very briefly, describe the topics that will be covered. Let participants know if you are not going to cover the biosocial theory of emotion dysregulation. If you are not covering it, be sure to read it yourself and decide if you want to give the handout to participants. If you do give it out, you might want to suggest that participants read it before the next session, so that you can answer any questions at that time.

General Handout 2: Overview: Introduction to Skills Training. This overview handout can be reviewed briefly or skipped, depending on time. Do not teach the material while covering this page unless you are skipping the related handouts.

Worksheet: None.

This introduction is aimed at providing a good grasp of the guidelines and rules that are important for your skills training program as well as the assumptions that underlie skills training.

A. Guidelines for Skills Training

This is the first and most important topic. It covers the requirements and the expectations for skills training. This topic and its handout (General Handout 3) may not be as important if you are teaching skills in individual sessions.

B. Skills Training Assumptions

This topic and its handout (General Handout 4) describes the seven assumptions that underpin DBT skills training.

C. Biosocial Theory

This topic and its handout (General Handout 5) provide a detailed review of the biosocial theory that underpins our thinking about emotion dysregulation.

III. ORIENTATION TO SKILLS TRAINING (GENERAL HANDOUTS 3–4)

Main Point: For skills training to go smoothly, each participant should know and understand the guidelines and assumptions that underpin DBT skills training.

General Handout 3: Guidelines for Skills Training. When you are discussing these guidelines, it is necessary not only to present them, but also to address possible misconceptions about how to “get around” the guidelines. It is useful to ask participants to take turns in reading the guidelines and explaining how they understand and interpret them.

*The fabulous idea of adding on “you can make things worse” was sent to me in an e-mail from a person who had gone through DBT skills training. Unfortunately, I cannot find the e-mail to give proper credit to this person. I hope to hear from her for a correction in the future.

General Handout 4: Skills Training Assumptions. When you are introducing the assumptions of skills training, it is useful to make the distinction between the guidelines in General Handout 3 (which are behavioral standards to be followed while in skills training) and assumptions (which are beliefs that cannot be proved, but that all participants agree to abide by anyway).

General Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Skills. The worksheet is designed to help participants decide whether they are willing to practice and use the skills you are teaching them. Its major use is to communicate that the goal is to be *effective and skillful* in getting what participants want (i.e., in reaching their own goals). It is not about doing whatever participants want, 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 participants are overcome with emotions (e.g., when they want to yell, scream, catastrophize, or do something destructive instead of skillful). It can also be used as a teaching tool for how to figure out goals. Skip this worksheet if you also teach other handouts that have associated worksheets during this session.

If you are using a pros-and-cons worksheet for the first time with participants, begin by describing what is meant by “pros and cons.” Then put the basic 2 × 2 grid up on the board, and work through several examples of pros and cons with participants. With drug addictions, for example, make a list of pros and cons of using drugs, and then a list of pros and cons of stopping the use of drugs. Stress the importance of filling out each of the four quadrants. Instruct participants to keep a copy of the completed worksheet, since it can be very hard for them to remember why not to engage in crisis behaviors when they are in emotion mind. For more detailed instructions in teaching pros and cons, see the teaching notes for Distress Tolerance Handout 5: Pros and Cons (Chapter 10, Section V).

✓ A. Guidelines for Skills Training

Discuss the guidelines on General Handout 3, and get each participant to agree to them. This is an important part of the treatment process, not a precursor to the process. Also discuss possible misconceptions about how to “get around” the guidelines. It can be useful after discussion of the guidelines to go around the room and ask each group member for an individual commitment to abide by them. In an open group, the guidelines should be discussed each time a new member enters the group. Often it is a good idea to have old members explain the guidelines to new members. Although the term “rules” is ordinarily not used, the expectation is that the guidelines will be followed as if they are rules. Note that presentation of the guidelines in an authoritarian way will probably alienate some clients, especially those for whom issues of control are important.

1. Participants Who Drop Out of Skills Training Are Not Out of Skills Training

There is only one way to drop out of skills training: missing four consecutive skills training sessions. Clients who miss 4 weeks of scheduled skills training sessions in a row have dropped out and cannot reenter for the duration of the time in their treatment contract. For example, if a client has contracted for 1 year, but misses 4 weeks in a row during the sixth month, then he or she is out for the next 6 months. At the end of the contracted time, the person can negotiate with the skills trainer(s) and the group about readmission (if he or she was in a group and it is continuing). There are no exceptions to this guideline. This guideline is the same as the rule for individual DBT psychotherapy. Mention that although it is technically possible to repeatedly miss three sessions in a row and come to the fourth session, it would be a violation of the spirit of the rule.

The message to communicate is that everyone is expected to come to skills training sessions each week. Presentation of this guideline offers an opportunity to discuss what constitutes an acceptable reason for missing a session. Not being in the mood, non-serious illness, social engagements, fear, beliefs that “No one in the group likes me,” and so forth do not qualify. Serious illness, very important events, and unavoidable trips out of town do qualify as acceptable reasons.

2. *Participants Who Join the Skills Training Group Support Each Other*

There are many ways to be a supportive person when attending skills training sessions. As the group leaders, review with clients what is needed to be supportive.

a. Confidentiality

The importance of the confidentiality rule is self-evident. What may not be obvious is that the rule extends to “gossiping” outside sessions. The general notion here is that interpersonal problems between or among clients should be dealt with by the persons involved, either within or outside sessions. There are two exceptions to the confidentiality rule. First, clients can discuss what happens in skills training sessions with their individual therapists; this exception is important so that they can maximize the benefits of the therapy. But caution clients not to reveal other clients’ last names unless absolutely necessary. The other exception has to do with the risk of suicide. If one client believes that another is likely to commit suicide, he or she can and should summon help.

b. Regular Attendance

Regular attendance—especially coming on time and staying for the entire session—is supportive. It is very hard to keep coming to a group when other people in the group do not treat it as important by coming to each session on time and staying until the end.

c. Practicing between Sessions

It is hard to keep practicing skills in a group when you are the only one who routinely practices between sessions. It can make the practicing member feel different or feel guilty that one person’s practicing highlights others not practicing.

Note to Leaders: Developing a group norm of coming on time and practicing skills between sessions is very important, but such a norm can be hard at times to develop. Discussing the importance of building norms at the start of each new module can be very helpful. My experience is that most skills training members want such norms to develop. See Chapter 4 for ideas on how to reinforce coming on time and doing homework that is assigned.

d. Validating Each Other and Avoiding Judgments

e. Giving Helpful, Noncritical Feedback When Asked

Members need to make every effort to validate each other and give helpful, noncritical feedback. This can set a tone of trust and support at the very beginning. Discuss this guideline, as well as how hard it may be for some members. In subsequent sessions when these guidelines are violated, you leaders can step in with guidance on how to replace judgments with non-judgmental descriptions, critical feedback with helpful suggestions, and defensiveness with acceptance of other’s comments.

f. Accepting Help from a Person Who Is Called for Help

It is not acceptable for a client to call someone; say, “I am going to kill myself,” or “I am going to use drugs”; and then refuse to let that other person help. The inability to ask for help appropriately is a special problem for many individuals. Thus this rule begins the process in the skills training context of teaching how to reach out to peers for help when needed. Like the other rules, this rule is usually a relief to clients. The rule itself was suggested by one of our group clients.

Before this guideline was added, we occasionally had instances of a participant’s calling another participant in desperate emotional pain, obliquely threatening suicide or other dys-

functional behavior, extracting a promise of confidentiality from the one called, and then hanging up after no apparent progress was made in the call. The helper was left with a very difficult dilemma: If the helper really cared about the caller, he or she would do something to help. Yet the helper clearly had not been able to do anything, and if he or she asked for outside help it would be violating a confidence. The resulting helplessness and anguish were enormous.

One of the strengths of group skills training is that members often build a strong supportive community among themselves. At times, they are the only ones who can really understand their mutual experiences. Since everyone's problems are public in the group, members need not be ashamed to ask one another for help. Not only is the opportunity for problem solving helpful to the caller, but the helper has a chance to practice generating problem solutions and reasons for living. In addition—and this point should be made to clients—such calls offer group members a structured chance to practice observing their own limits on how much help they are willing to give.

3. *Participants Who Are Going to Be Late or Miss a Session Call Ahead of Time*

This rule serves several purposes. First, it is a courtesy for clients to let you skills trainers know not to wait for latecomers before starting. Although we have a general rule in our groups of starting on time, it is difficult not to hold off on important material or announcements for the first few minutes, in the expectation that missing clients will show up any minute. This is a special problem in those weeks where only one or two clients are present at the beginning. Second, it introduces an added response cost for being late and communicates to clients that promptness is desirable. Finally, it gives information as to why a client is not present.

In a group context, when a person does not come to a session and gives no explanation ahead of time, group members (including the leaders) almost always start worrying about the welfare of the absent member. Sometimes, however, clients miss for reasons having nothing to do with problems. Thus not calling causes unnecessary worry for the group members. Just the fact that others will worry is often news to some group members; for others, the worry is a source of emotional support and may reinforce not calling. In any case, the rule offers a vehicle for addressing the behavior. Presentation of the rule is an opportunity to discuss the need for courtesy and empathy to the feelings of other group members, as well as the responsibility of each member to contribute to group cohesion.

4. *Participants Do Not Tempt Others to Engage in Problem Behaviors*

a. *Participants Do Not Come to Sessions under the Influence of Alcohol or Drugs*

The value of not using drugs or alcohol before coming to a skills group is reasonably self-evident; there is little need for extensive discussion of it. However, it does offer an opportunity to discuss the emotional pain that skills training attendance is likely to cause much of the time. Accurate expectations are essential here to head off demoralization. Once again, you can suggest that as clients learn emotion regulation skills, they will be better able to cope with the stress of skills training.

b. *If Participants Have Already Used, They Should Come to Sessions Acting Clean and Sober*

If a client has used drugs or alcohol, it may not be so clear why he or she should come to skills training anyway and act as if clean and sober. The reason is that for clients with substance use disorders, a rule saying not to come to skills sessions when using just gives these individuals with poor self-regulation a good excuse for not coming. Instead, my position is that skills learning is context-dependent, and thus, for individuals with substance problems, learning and practicing skills when under the influence of drugs or alcohol are particularly important. That is definitely the time when skills are needed.

c. Participants Do Not Discuss Problem Behaviors That Could Be Contagious to Others

Descriptions of dysfunctional behaviors can lead to behavioral contagion. In my experience, communications about self-injury, substance use, bingeing or purging, and similar behaviors elicit strong imitation effects among individuals with disordered emotion regulation. These urges to imitate can be very difficult to resist. Use the example of a person addicted to drugs listening to another person talking about drugs, and most participants will get the point immediately: The drug user trying to get off drugs will immediately have an urge to use drugs. Just as in individual DBT, clients in skills training must agree not to call or communicate with one another *after* a self-injurious act. Our group members usually welcome this rule. Before I instituted this rule, clients often complained that once they had given up dysfunctional behaviors themselves, it was very scary to listen to others describing their episodes of these behaviors.

5. Participants Do Not Form Sexual or Confidential Relationships Outside Skills Training Sessions

The key word in the fifth rule is “private.” Clients may not form relationships outside the sessions that they then cannot discuss inside the sessions. DBT actually encourages friendships among group clients outside sessions. In fact, the support that members can give one another with daily problems in living is one of the strengths of group DBT. However, it also provides the possibility for interpersonal conflict that is inherent in any relationship. The key is whether interpersonal problems that arise can be discussed in the sessions (or, if that is too difficult or threatens to get out of hand, with you leaders privately). To the extent that such issues can be discussed and appropriate skills applied, a relationship can be advantageous. Troubles arise when a relationship cannot be discussed and problems increase to such an extent that one member finds it difficult or impossible to attend meetings, either physically or emotionally.

In presenting this rule, alert members that it is unacceptable for one member to demand complete confidentiality about problems from another member. This is especially crucial when it comes to plans for destructive behavior, important information that one person lies about in meetings, and other situations creating an untenable awkwardness for one member of the pair.

As discussed in Chapter 3, current sexual partners should be assigned to different groups at the onset. Thus this rule functions to alert group members that if they enter into a sexual relationship, one member of the pair will have to drop out of the group. To date, we have had several sexual relationships begin among group members; each created enormous difficulties for the partners involved. In one case, the initiating partner broke off the relationship against the wishes of the other, making it very hard for the rejected partner to come to group sessions. In the other, one member was seduced reluctantly, leading to trauma and tension in the group. Generally, this rule is clear to everyone involved. Without the rule, however, dealing with an emerging sexual relationship between clients is very tricky, since post hoc application of rules is unworkable with individuals who have disordered emotion regulation.

Note to Leaders: Exempted from the guideline above are skills training groups for friends and families, where couples, partners, and multiple family members often join. It is not reasonable or feasible to outlaw private relationships in these groups or in the multifamily skills groups commonly held with adolescents. In these situations, however, it is important to note that when relationship conflicts threaten the group, the leaders will approach the conflicts in a manner similar to that described above. That is, the topic will be discussed either in group (if it offers an opportunity to practice skills) or individually with one of the skills trainers (if the individuals having conflict do not have the requisite skills to address the conflict effectively within the group).

6. Additional Guidelines

Discuss any other guidelines you may wish to follow that are not on General Handout 3, and be sure that everyone writes them onto this handout.

7. Advanced Groups

In advanced groups, the DBT four-session-miss guideline may be modified. If so, discuss the criteria for determining whether an individual has or has not officially dropped out of skills training. For example, you may want to discuss what an “excused” session is (e.g., a session missed because of a physical illness, family emergency, vacation out of town, wedding, or funeral) and what an “unexcused” session is (e.g., a session missed because of fatigue, bad mood, psychiatric hospitalization, or a solvable problem).

✓ B. Skills Training Assumptions

An assumption is a belief that cannot be proved, but that all participants in skills training (clients and leaders alike) agree to abide by anyway.

1. People Are Doing the Best They Can

That is, given the multiplicity of causes in the universe (genetics, biological events, environmental events, consequences of previous behavior), each person at this one moment in time is what he or she is. Given who we each are and the fact that all behavior is caused, we are doing the best we can at this one moment, given the causes that have affected us.

2. People Want to Improve

This is similar to the Dalai Lama’s statement that the common characteristic of all people is that they want to be happy.²

3. *People Need to Be Better, Try Harder, and Be More Motivated to Change

The fact that people are doing the best they can, and want to do even better, does not mean that their efforts and motivation are sufficient to the task.

The asterisk at the start of this assumption indicates that this is not always true. In particular, when progress is steady and at a realistic rate of improvement with no let-up or episodic drop in effort, doing better, trying harder and being more motivated is not needed.

4. *People May Not Have Caused All of Their Own Problems, but They Have to Solve Them Anyway

This assumption is true for adults, because the responsibility for their own lives rests with them.

The asterisk before this assumption indicates that this is not always true. With children and adolescents, as well as some disabled persons, parents and other caregivers must assist them with this task. For example, young children or disabled individuals cannot get themselves to treatment if parents or caregivers refuse to take them.

5. New Behaviors Must Be Learned in All Relevant Contexts

Behaviors learned in one context often do not generalize to different contexts, thus it is important to practice new behaviors in all the environments where they will be needed. (This is one of the main reasons it is important for participants to practice new skills in their daily environments.)

6. All Behaviors (Actions, Thoughts, Emotions) Are Caused

There is always a cause or set of causes for our actions, thoughts, and emotions, even if we don’t know what these causes are.

7. Figuring Out and Changing the Causes of Behavior Works Better Than Judging and Blaming

This assumption is very much related to the previous one. When we agree that all behavior is caused, this leads to the understanding that blaming and being judgmental (“This should not be”) are not effective in changing that situation or behavior.

Note to Leaders: It is important to point out that our culture often encourages and models being judgmental, and so it’s easy to respond in a judgmental manner. It is also important not to judge the judging. Letting go of judging is likely to get us to our goals of changing behavior more effectively.

C. Committing to Learning Skills

It is important to remember that you can never get too much commitment from clients to learning skills. Commitment in skills training is particularly important, because learning skills requires a fair amount of homework practice, and such practice not only takes time but can be difficult to do. Even if you have met individually with participants and worked on commitment, if time permits it can be very useful to review commitment in the group. The aim here is to focus attention on whether participants are still committed to coming to skills classes, doing the homework practice and generally putting substantial effort into learning new, skillful ways to solve problems and work toward their individual goals.

Discussion Points:

1. Ask participants whether they are still committed to skills sessions and practice. Is there anyone who was never committed in the first place? If yes, ask, “Are you willing to commit to coming and practicing now?” Discuss.
2. Ask about difficulties participants may encounter with transportation, coming on time, and staying until the end of sessions. Troubleshoot difficulties with the group.
3. Ask about fears and concerns about coming to the group. Ask, “Who thinks it will be too difficult to share their homework with others? Who will be reluctant to ask questions when learning new skills?” Discuss.

✓ D. Diary Cards

1. What Is a Diary Card?

The DBT diary card is designed to track behaviors that clients are trying to decrease, as well as skills they are trying to increase. For the most part, the top half of the card tracks behaviors to be decreased, and the bottom half tracks skills to be practiced and increased. The top half is designed primarily for review in individual sessions. Because it is also important for individual therapists to track use of skills, clients rate the skills they use (“Used Skills”) on a 7-point scale in one column on the top half. The bottom half, in contrast, lists the most important DBT skills taught. Participants are instructed to circle the skills they use each day. See Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4 for a sample diary card.

Only the bottom half of the card (pertaining to skills) is reviewed in skills training sessions. If you are conducting a skills-training-only program, and participants are either getting individual therapy elsewhere or are not in any individual therapy, give out only the bottom half of the card. In our friends-and-family skills program, we give out only the bottom half of the skills card. We do the same with parents in the adolescent multifamily skills program. The teens, however, have the complete card, which they review with their individual therapists. An exception here should be made if the skills trainers are also providing case management and/or crisis intervention to skills participants, in which case it makes sense to give them the complete card. Ask each participant to bring the diary card every week to the skills training session, but review only the

bottom part of the card for even those who bring a complete card. My thinking on this issue (to block sharing of information on the top part of the card) is summarized in Chapter 3 in the discussion of the fourth skills training guideline: Participants do not tempt others to engage in problem behaviors.

2. *Does the Diary Card Have to Be Printed on Card Stock?*

The first diary cards were printed on card stock with a front and a back. It soon became clear, however, that card stock was very hard to fold up and keep somewhere inconspicuous when clients were homeless or when they were out in public (such as at work or at school). So we changed it to standard 8.5 × 11 paper. There are now many versions of our DBT diary cards online and also in computerized apps. Look up “DBT diary card” in your search engine and you will find them. As you will see, there are many variations.

3. *How Is the Diary Card Used?*

Go over the instructions in Chapter 4, Table 4.2, for filling out the diary card. In addition, do the following:

- Tell clients to check each skill and circle it each day if they make any attempt to practice the skill. Degree of skill practice (front of card) is rated according to the scale at the bottom of the card. Thus participants should rate their use of the skills they are learning. Note that maladaptive coping or problem solving (e.g., drinking, self-cutting) do not count as using skills.
- Emphasize that clients need to practice skills already taught and learned, not just new ones. This is crucially important in learning and change.
- Troubleshoot problems in filling out the cards. Engage in problem solving for difficulties.
- Stress the confidentiality of cards. Discuss ways to keep the cards confidential. Give out alternative cards with only acronyms if necessary. Suggest that participants not put their real names on cards, and that they use numbers or pseudonyms instead. Some participants do not want to use diary cards that can be understood by anyone else if they are found. In these instances, diary cards can be revised to use acronyms instead of the names of skills.

IV. BIOSOCIAL THEORY OF EMOTION DYSREGULATION (GENERAL HANDOUT 5)

Main Point: Biosocial theory is an explanation of how and why some people have so much difficulty with emotion regulation and behavioral control.

General Handout 5: Biosocial Theory. This handout covers both the biological and the social aspects of emotion regulation and behavioral control. In standard DBT, the information on this handout is ordinarily covered in individual therapy. In adolescent treatment it is discussed with both parents and teens. It is an optional handout for a skills-only program. For a more detailed review of the biosocial theory, see Chapter 1 and the references at the end of that chapter.

Worksheet: None.

Note to Leaders: As you will see, the biosocial theory puts a large emphasis on biology and on the behavior of others in the participants' social environment. Almost everyone will be comfortable with the emphasis on biology as an important factor in emotion dysregulation and behavioral dyscontrol. However, if not handled skillfully, the emphasis on the social environment can make many participants uncomfortable, and it can make those involved in their caregiving or others in their current environment particularly uncomfortable or defensive. Great care, empathy for others, and sensitivity are needed in

working with individuals who may not have been effective parents, or others who might fit into the invalidating category. That said, I have never watered down the theory to soothe parents or caregivers in a participant's social environment. Because I have not judged those in the social environment, I have generally found that parents, relatives, and others are grateful for the understanding and the guidance the theory gives them.

✓ **A. Biological Factors and Emotional Vulnerability: The “Bio” in Biosocial**

1. Characteristics of Emotionally Vulnerable Individuals

Individuals who are emotionally vulnerable:

- Are more sensitive to emotional stimuli.
- Experience emotions more often than others.
- May feel like emotions hit them for no reason, out of the blue.
- Have more intense emotions than others—emotions that feel like being hit by a ton of bricks.
- Have long-lasting emotions.


2. Biological Influences on Vulnerability


This vulnerability to high emotionality is highly influenced by biological factors:


- Genetics.
- Intrauterine factors during pregnancy.
- Brain damage or physical disorders after birth.

3. Individual Variation in Emotionality

Some people are just more emotional than others.

- ✓  **Discussion Point:** Ask participants to check off characteristics of emotional vulnerability that fit them. Discuss.

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants whether they have siblings or family members who have been markedly different in emotionality ever since (it seems) they were born. Discuss how this is probably due to biological differences.

 **Discussion Point:** Individuals with serious brain disorders, traumatic brain injuries, and some other serious physical disorders that they acquired after birth will often have much more difficulty managing emotions than they had before the injury or disorder.

B. Biological Factors and Impulsivity

1. Characteristics of Impulsive Individuals

Individuals who are impulsive:


- Find it hard to inhibit behaviors.
- Are more likely to do things that get them in trouble.
- Have behaviors that often seem to come out of nowhere.
- Have moods that get in the way of organizing behavior to achieve goals.
- Have trouble controlling behaviors that are linked to their moods.


✓ **2. Biological Influences on Impulsivity**


Genetics and other biological factors also influence impulsivity.

✓ **3. Individual Variation in Impulsivity**

Some people are just more impulsive than others.

- ✓  **Discussion Point:** Ask participants to check off characteristics of impulsivity on General Handout 5 that fit them. Discuss.

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants whether they have siblings or family members who have been markedly different in impulsivity ever since (it seems) they were born. Discuss how this is probably due to biological differences.

 **Discussion Point:** Individuals with serious brain disorders or traumatic brain injuries often will have much more difficulty managing impulses to act without thinking than before the injury or disorder. Discuss.

✓ **C. The Invalidating Environment: The “Social” in Biosocial**

1. Characteristics of the Invalidating Environment

The invalidating environment is characterized by:

- ✓  Intolerance toward expressions of private emotional experiences, particularly those not supported by observable public events.

Example: Telling a child, “Nobody else feels like you do, so just stop being a crybaby.”

-  Intermittent reinforcement of extreme expressions of emotion, while simultaneously communicating that such emotions are unwarranted.

Example: Ignoring screams for help when a child falls off a tricycle until the screams get on the adult’s nerves too much, and then responding in a cold and stern manner.

-  Communications that specific emotions are invalid, weird, wrong, or bad.

Example: Telling a child, “That is such a dumb thing to say!”

-  Communications that emotions should be coped with without support.


Example: Saying, “If you are going to keep crying, go to your room and come down when you get control of yourself.”

- ✓  Not responding to emotions that call for a response or action.

Example: Saying, “I can see you are upset about losing your textbook for tomorrow’s exam,” but not doing anything to help find the book.

-  Confusing one’s own emotions with the emotions of others.

Example: Saying, “I’m tired; let’s all go to bed.”

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants other examples of invalidation in their own lives. Discuss.

✓ **D. The Ineffective Environment: A Second “Social” in Biosocial**

Note to Leaders: I am using the term “parent” here, but it can mean “nonparental caregiver.”

1. Reasons for Ineffective Parental Teaching

For several reasons, parents may be ineffective at teaching children emotion regulation and behavioral control.

a. No Parent Is Perfect at Effective Parenting

Most parents go through periods with their children where for a limited time it appears that they must be ineffective parents. This is normative in parenting. At these times, many parents get professional help in parenting.

b. Many Parents Simply Do Not Know How to Be Effective Parents

Many parents may not have had effective parenting themselves, and thus never learned what to do—how to discipline a child, and how to attend to and reinforce positive behaviors. These parents may not be aware that their parenting style does not fit what their children need.

**c. Parents May Be Perfectionists**

Parents may be so perfectionistic or so highly concerned about appearances that they overemphasize internalizing all emotions and characterize impulsivity as a character flaw that can be remedied only if there is sufficient motivation. This is rarely sufficient alone.

**d. Some Parents Have Serious Disorders**

Parents who have serious physical or mental disorders may not be able to attend to their children. They may themselves be highly emotionally dysregulated and impulsive.

**e. Parents May Be Overstressed**

Some parents may be so overwhelmed that they cannot give their children the attention and coaching the children need. Severe illness in other family members, high-stress jobs, insufficient financial resources, multiple children, the absence of a second parent, and many other factors can interfere with the most caring parent's being able to give a child what is needed.



Discussion Point: Ask participants if their parents have (or had) any of these characteristics. Ask parents if any of these descriptions fit them. Discuss.

2. Reasons for Ineffective Adult Environments

Sometimes adults get in environments that are ineffective and sometimes even destructive. Examples include:

a. Work Environments


Adults' work environments often excessively punish behaviors that don't meet the workplace standards, fail to reinforce effective behaviors, and fail to communicate respect. Any or all of these factors can lead to high emotionality in a vulnerable person. Although impulsive behaviors may not show up in the work setting, the stress of the workplace may lead to excess impulsivity outside work.

b. Adult Relationships

Many adult relationships can lead to high emotionality. This is particularly the case when partners or friends ignore effective behaviors and excessively punish unwanted behaviors. For many individuals who are vulnerable, an environment without nurturing and caring can lead to extreme sadness, loneliness, shame, and other extreme emotions. At times, sadness may spark high anger as well.

**c. Insensitive Individuals**

Insensitive individuals who are very important to a person who is overly sensitive to invalidation can set off extreme emotional reactions when they invalidate the person's core beliefs, hopes, goals, accomplishments, or personal characteristics.

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants whether they have been or are currently in any of the ineffective environments. Discuss.

✓ E. It's the Transaction That Counts

1. Escalation of Communication

A primary function of emotions is to communicate. When the communication is not received, the sender ordinarily escalates the communication. The more important the communication, the more the sender escalates it.

2. Escalation of Invalidation

At the same time, however, if the receiver does not believe the communication, each time the individual tries to communicate the same thing, the receiver will escalate invalidation.

3. Further Escalation of Both

As emotions escalate, invalidation escalates further—and as invalidation escalates further, emotions and their communication escalate further in turn.

4. What the Transaction Looks Like

A transaction looks like Figure 6.1, where A communicates to B and then B responds to A, who then communicates to B, and so on. In other words, each party in a transaction influences the other. A and B can represent two individuals, an individual and his or her environment, or two environments. The key idea is that over time, both sides influence each other.

Note to Leaders: Describe the following scenario in as dramatic a fashion as possible. Act it out. It can also be helpful to put it on the board as you are acting it out.

✓

Example: Invalidation looks a lot like the following interchange.

SENDER: There's a fire.

RECEIVER: You're overreacting. What's wrong with you? There's no fire.

SENDER: Um, *there's a fire here!*

RECEIVER: You're crazy! *Just blow it out!*

[After many cycles of being invalidated for describing the situation, the sender responds in one of two ways:]

SENDER: OK, there's no fire. (What's wrong with me??)

RECEIVER: Good job!

[Or, when the sender is really desperate:]

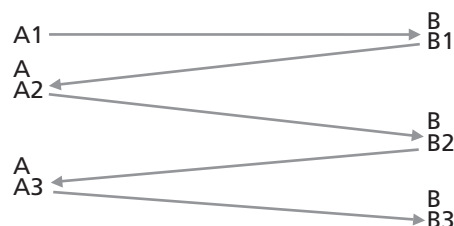




FIGURE 6.1. Transactional change diagram.

SENDER: FIRE!!! FIRE!!! HELP!!!

RECEIVER: Oh, no!! What can I do to help?

 **Discussion Point:** Ask participants to describe a transaction like this that has occurred in their lives. Probe for examples where participants were calling out “Fire!” when there was one, and situations where they themselves were invalidating someone else’s cry of “Fire!” Discuss.

 **Discussion Point:** Often people who have been invalidated learn to exaggerate their communications to be sure the other person pays attention. Alas, once someone gets in this habit, the environment ordinarily gets in the habit of ignoring the person’s communications. Elicit times when participants have exaggerated, and times when those they interact with have done so. Discuss ways to reduce the tendency to exaggerate.

5. Summary

In summary, highlight that each of us is influenced by our biological makeup, which then influences our behavior, which then influences our environment, which in turn reacts to and influences us in a never-ending transactional relationship over time. Such a transactional point of view is largely incompatible with blame, although it is not incompatible with identifying important causal factors in our own and others’ behavior.

Caution: Remember that this biosocial theory fits individuals with very high emotion dysregulation. DBT skills, however, are effective for many other disorders, and it is important to provide a biosocial model that fits the disorder.

V. OVERVIEW: ANALYZING BEHAVIOR (GENERAL HANDOUT 6)

Main Point: The ability to analyze our own behavior allows us to determine what causes it and what maintains it. Knowing this is important for any of us if we want to change our own behavior.

General Handout 6: Overview: Analyzing Behavior. This overview handout can be reviewed briefly or skipped, depending on time. Do not teach the material while covering this page unless you are skipping the related handouts.

Worksheet: None.

This section is aimed at helping clients develop the ability to analyze and understand ineffective, problematic behaviors and to identify missing effective behaviors that are needed.

A. Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior

A “chain analysis” is a series of questions to guide clients through figuring out what factors have led to problem behaviors and what factors might be making it difficult to change those behaviors.

B. Missing-Links Analysis

A “missing-links analysis” is a series of questions to guide clients through analyzing the factors associated with not engaging in effective behaviors that are needed or expected.

VI. CHAIN ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM BEHAVIOR (GENERAL HANDOUTS 7–7A)

Main Point: Changing behavior requires us to understand the causes of the behavior we want to change. A behavioral chain analysis guides understanding of the chain of events leading to and following specific behaviors.

General Handout 7: Chain Analysis. The ability to conduct a chain analysis of problem behaviors is a critical skill in DBT for both therapists and clients. The skill can be taught in a group setting as part of your standard curriculum, or it can be taught by individual therapists. Conducting chain analyses of problem behaviors by using General Worksheet 2 (see below) is a critical part of DBT. However, there are many ways to teach it, and there are many places and times to teach it in the course of therapy. In many treatment programs, individual therapists teach their clients how to do it in the course of individual therapy. It is ordinarily taught in residential and inpatient treatment programs.^{3, 4} Inclusion of the chain analyses in skills training per se is optional. When participants are not in individual therapy, teaching chain analysis can be incorporated into skills training when there is time and it appears useful.

General Handout 7a: Chain Analysis, Step by Step. This handout gives step-by-step instructions on how to do a chain analysis. It is important to review this handout in detail and link it closely with General Worksheet 2.

General Worksheet 2: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior. This is the worksheet for doing a chain analysis. Review this worksheet with participants, and link each item on it to the same item on Handout 7 or 7a. Note that two pages are given for listing behavioral links in the chain of events. Participants should use only as much space as needed and one page is often sufficient.

General Worksheet 2a: Example: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior. This is a sample, completed chain analysis worksheet.

✓ A. What Is Chain Analysis?

Any behavior can be understood as a series of linked components. These links are “chained” together, because they follow in succession one after the other; one link in the chain leads to another. For behaviors that are well rehearsed (practiced a lot), it may appear that the episode cannot be broken down into steps—that it “all happens at once.” A “chain analysis” provides a series of questions (e.g., what happened before that, what happened next) for unlocking these links that sometimes feel stuck together.

The purpose of a chain analysis is to figure out what the problem is (e.g., being late for work, impulsively quitting a job); what prompts it; what its function is; what is interfering with the resolution of the problem; and what aids are available to help solve the problem.

✓ B. Why Conduct Chain Analyses?

A chain analysis is an invaluable tool for assessing a behavior to be changed. Although performing a chain analysis requires time and effort, it provides essential information for understanding the events that lead up to a particular problem behavior (i.e., behaviors participants want to change). Many attempts to solve a problem fail because the problem at hand is not fully understood and assessed.

By conducting repeated chain analyses, a person can identify the pattern linking different components of a behavior together. Figuring out what the links are is the first step in finding solutions to stopping the problem behavior. When any of the links of the chain can be broken, the problem behavior can be stopped.

✓ C. How to Do a Chain Analysis

Note to Leaders: Following are two examples you can use to help participants see how to do a chain analysis. Chain analysis is better taught by example than by going over the steps below didactically.

Ordinarily it is not a good idea in a group setting to demonstrate chain analysis by using a problem from the participants, as it may be very complicated and you may not have time to finish. You can use the

completed example on General Worksheet 2a. If you end before completing it, participants should read the example as a homework assignment. If doing chain analyses is an important part of your treatment, make reviewing and correcting them in sessions part of homework review.



Example 1: Ask participants to go to General Worksheet 2a (the completed example of behavioral chain analysis). Review this example step by step, noting what information is being asked for, and highlighting how the information helps in understanding and ultimately changing the problem behavior. Point out that the questions on the worksheet correspond to the stepped descriptions in General Handout 7 and to the step-by-step instructions on General Handout 7a. Discuss the process and any difficulties participants have with the instructions and worksheet.

The chain analysis is structured to identify the critical pieces of information necessary to understand and solve a problem behavior. Steps 1–5 are about understanding the problem. Steps 6–8 are about changing the problem behavior. Going from the beginning of General Handout 7 to its end, ask participants to identify:

1. What exactly was the problem behavior?
2. What event in the environment started the chain of events (prompting event)?
3. What were the vulnerability factors for that particular day?
4. What was the chain of events, link by link, that led from the prompting event to the problem behavior?
5. What were the consequences of the behavior in the environment?

The next steps are these:

6. Identify skillful behaviors to replace problem links in the chain, and so to decrease the probability of this behavior's happening again.
7. Develop prevention plans to reduce vulnerability to prompting events and to starting down the chain.
8. Repair the negative consequences of the problem behavior for the environment and for oneself.



A special note on Step 8: When one is repairing negative consequences, it is extremely important to first figure out what has actually been harmed. This is very hard for many individuals to do. For example, someone who betrays a person and says mean, untrue things about the person may try to repair by bringing flowers or candy, as if the damage done was to remove the person's flowers or candy. The repair that is necessary is to apologize, retract what was said, and also refrain from gossip in order to rebuild the person's trust.

A detailed description of each of these steps is given in General Handout 7a.

Note to Leaders: In the beginning, it may be very difficult for participants to identify separate steps that are part of a problem behavior. In other words, it is difficult for them to identify the steps that took place between Point A (when they were *not* engaging in the problem behavior) and Point B (when they were). With patience, a chain analysis can break this down into separate links.

Example 2: Give participants a clean copy of General Worksheet 2 (the blank worksheet for chain analysis). Go through the following example, and ask participants to track on the handout where they would put the information. At the end, discuss the value of the worksheet.

Step 1. The problem behavior: I yelled at my partner and stormed out of the room, slamming the door.

Step 2. The prompting event: I came home from work and my boyfriend was on the couch asleep [beginning of the chain of events leading to yelling and slamming the door].

Step 3. What made me vulnerable: The night before he had come home really late and was

tired. He and I had not gone out together after work in a really long time and I got him to agree to go out the next night. I was really looking forward to going out when I got home.

Step 4. The specific behaviors and events that were links in the chain:

1st. When I saw him asleep I thought, “He is sleeping again. We’re not going out.”

2nd. I thought, “He does not love me.”

3rd. I got furious right away.

4th. I wanted to hurt him like he hurt me.

Step 5. The consequences of the behavior—the harm my behavior caused:


a. **In the environment:** He was very hurt that I assumed he did not love me.

b. **For myself:** I felt guilty. I realized that I had ruined the evening for both of us.

Step 6. I can check the facts next time, since when I finally did in this situation, I found out he had taken a nap so that we would be able to have a really good time together.

Step 7. I can check the facts in my relationship with my partner when I start thinking he does not love me.

Step 8. Plans to repair, correct, and overcorrect the harm: I will make every effort to treat my partner as if he constantly loves me. I will also apologize to him and to make up our evening out that I ruined, I will plan an evening together for both of us that he will really like.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss other ideas for some or all of the questions as you go through the example.

Note to Leaders: Convey to participants the importance of not getting “hung up” by trying to do the analysis perfectly and identify all the parts of the chain exactly right. What is most important is that participants start using the chain analysis, as opposed to feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of doing it perfectly. Point out to participants that doing a chain analysis is a skill like any other, which means that practice matters and that people get better at doing the skill quickly. In our experience, conducting chain analyses over time leads participants to increased awareness of their thoughts and feelings.

Note to Leaders: When completing a chain analysis, participants should focus on identifying the key dysfunctional links (thoughts, events, actions) that seem to contribute most to linking the prompting event with the problem behavior. One way to determine quickly whether a particular link is key is to imagine the probability of the problem behavior’s occurring if that link had not been there. It is important to point out that links in a chain can be functional or dysfunctional, depending on whether the client responds to that link by moving farther away or closer to doing the problem behavior.

VII. ANALYZING MISSING LINKS (GENERAL HANDOUT 8)

Main Point: Sometimes the problem is not the presence of problem behavior, but the absence of effective behavior. Analyzing missing links helps us identify what is interfering with effective behaviors that are expected or needed.

General Handout 8: Missing-Links Analysis. This handout gives step-by-step instructions for how to do a missing-links analysis.

General Worksheet 3: Missing-Links Analysis. This is the worksheet for analyzing missing links. It can also be used during sessions to analyze missing homework as a way to teach the skill. If it is not used as a teaching tool during a session, review the worksheet to be sure participants understand its use.

✓ A. What Is Missing-Links Analysis?

A “missing-links analysis” is a series of questions to help a person figure out what got in the way of behaving effectively. Its purpose is to show where in the chain of events something happened (or failed to happen) that interfered with effective behavior when it was needed or expected.

Two types of effective behaviors can be missing.

1. Expected Behaviors

Expected behaviors are ones you have agreed to do (e.g., get to work on time), have been instructed to do (e.g., skills training homework), have planned to do (e.g., clean your room), or have desperately hoped to do (e.g., exercise in the mornings).

2. Needed Behaviors

Needed behaviors are skillful behaviors that constitute effective responses in a specific situation (e.g., skillful interpersonal behavior to calm down a stressful interaction) or to address specific problems (e.g., getting up on time when your alarm clock is broken).

B. When Is Missing-Links Analysis Used?

Missing-links analysis and problem solving are likely to be sufficient when the problem is not knowing what was expected or needed, unwillingness to do what was expected or needed, or never having the thought enter your mind to do what was needed or expected.

Missing-links analyses together with chain analyses may be useful in figuring out the problem when you know what the effective behavior is but still do not do it. See below for an example.

C. Why Bother?

A missing-links analysis can be an invaluable tool for assessing situations when effective behaviors are repeatedly missing. As noted in discussing chain analysis, attempts to solve a problem often fail because the problem at hand is not fully understood and assessed.


An advantage of the missing-links analysis is that the questions can usually be asked and answered very rapidly.

✓ D. How to Do It

Tell clients: “Answer the questions on General Handout 8 until further questions would not be helpful or don’t make sense. As soon as you get to that point, start problem solving.”

For example, if a person did not know that an effective behavior was needed or expected, it is pointless to ask whether he or she was willing to do what was needed or expected. If a person is willful right from the start and decides not to engage in effective behavior, solving that problem is more important than asking whether the person thought about engaging in the behavior at a later point. If the thought of doing something effective never came to mind, asking what got in the way of effective behavior (other than never thinking of it) would not be very useful.

General Worksheet 3 (the missing-links analysis worksheet) is structured to identify the critical pieces of information necessary to understand and solve the missing behavior.

- ✓  **Practice Exercise:** Ask one participant to volunteer to have a missing behavior analyzed, and go through the questions and problem solving described on General Handout 8 and listed below. If time allows, do several examples.

1. “Did you know what effective behavior was needed or expected?”

If no, ask, “What got in the way of knowing?” Then stop questions and move to problem solving for what got in the way.

If yes, move to Question 2.

2. “Were you willing to do the needed or expected effective behavior?”

If no, ask, “What got in the way of willingness to do an effective behavior?” Then stop questions and move to problem solving for lack of willingness.

If yes, move to Question 3.

3. “Did the thought of doing the needed or expected effective behavior ever enter your mind?”


If no, stop questions and move to problem solving for a way to get the thought to enter the participant’s mind.


If yes, move to Question 4.


4. “What got in the way of doing the needed or expected effective behavior right away?”

Move to problem solving for what got in the way.

Make a concerted effort to generate a wide range of possible solutions. This can take more time than simply asking and answering questions. In a group setting, ask group members to help generate solutions. Refer to the problem-solving skill in the Emotion Regulation module if necessary (see Chapter 9, Section XI of this manual, and Emotion Regulation Handout 12: Problem Solving).

 **Discussion Point:** Elicit from participants patterns of effective behaviors that are missing in their lives—or, if they cannot yet articulate a pattern, instances when they did not do something that was really important to do.

 **Practice Exercise:** Ask one participant to volunteer to have a missing behavior analyzed, and ask another group member to volunteer to practice analyzing the missing behavior. Coach the person doing the analyzing. When doing so would not be disruptive to a group, encourage participants to analyze each other’s missing homework behaviors.

 **Practice Exercise:** When a person comes to skills training without doing all the homework assigned, hand out copies of General Worksheet 3 to each participant and have them fill it out as you ask the missing-links questions.

VIII. MISSING-LINKS ANALYSIS COMBINED WITH A CHAIN ANALYSIS (GENERAL HANDOUTS 7–8)

A complete analysis of missing behavior requires that you combine a missing-links analysis with aspects of a chain analysis of the same behavior. This should happen when the factors that contribute to you not doing something are complicated or are somehow preventing you from doing what is needed even when you know what that is. When this is the case, you start with a missing-links analysis and after question 4 switch to a chain analysis. Use the example below or one of your own to teach this.

Example 3: Missing behavior: I missed 45 minutes of a 1-hour weekly meeting at work that started at 8:30 A.M.

(Start with question 1 on General Handout 8 here.)

1. Did I know what effective behavior was needed or expected? Yes
2. Was I willing to do what was needed? Yes
3. Did the thought of doing what was needed or expected ever enter my mind? Yes
4. What got in the way of doing what was needed or expected right away? A chain of events.

(Start with question 2 on General Handout 7 or 7a here.)

Step 2. Describe the prompting event that started the chain of events: After I got up on time and

made a cup of coffee, I brought in the morning newspaper. On the front page, there was an article about a scandal in our city that I was interested in and wanted to read [**beginning of the chain of events leading to being late**].

Step 3. What made me vulnerable: I had gone to bed late the night before. I had gotten little sleep, was very tired and moving slowly, and had little resistance to temptation.

Step 4. The specific behaviors and events that were links in the chain:

- 1st. As I was turning to the second page of the article, I glanced at the clock and saw that I did not have a lot of time.
- 2nd. I thought “Oh, well, I will dress really fast and get there on time.”
- 3rd. The second page was really interesting, so I sat down for just a minute to read it.
- 4th. I was thinking I still had time.
- 5th. Just as I looked up at the clock and realized I really had to get a move on, . . .
- 6th. . . . the phone rang and it was my mother.
- 7th. I picked up the phone and started talking to her.
- 8th. Mom started chatting about something going on at home.
- 9th. I started worrying about getting off the phone to get to the meeting on time. (I still had time if I really put some energy into getting dressed, out of the house, and into the car to drive to work.)
- 10th. I felt guilty getting off the phone with Mom so fast.
- 11th. I stayed on the phone for 10 minutes (time I didn’t have) listening to Mom.
- 12th. I finally did get off the phone.
- 13th. I saw the clock and realized I would be late by at least 10 minutes.
- 14th. I decided since I was going to be late anyway, I might as well not hurry.
- 15th. I finished reading the article.
- 16th. Then I dressed and left for work an hour after I usually leave.

Step 5. The consequences of the behavior—the harm my behavior caused:

- a. **In the environment:** It took up the time of the people in the meeting who had to tell me what happened; it took time waiting to see whether I would be coming at the beginning; it made people feel less like I am a team player. People at the meeting were distressed that I was so late.
- b. **For myself:** I felt guilty, and it also took a lot of my time to find out what had happened in the meeting.

Step 6. Skills to replace problem links:

- 2nd. Replace “Oh, well, I will dress really fast,” with “I’d better dress now to be on the safe side; remind myself that when I read the paper before work, I am often late.”
- 3rd. Don’t sit down in the kitchen in the morning when I am tired.
- 7th. When I am running late, don’t pick up the phone.
- 10th. Practice interpersonal skills to tell Mom I will call her later (and then call her!).
- 14th. Do pros and cons about giving up and giving in to being more late than necessary. Rush to get to work just a little bit late, rather than writing it off, relaxing, and being very late.


Step 7. Ways to reduce my vulnerability in the future:

- Go to bed earlier to get more sleep (to reduce vulnerability).
- Call Mom once a week, if only for a really brief chat (to reduce vulnerability).

Ways to prevent precipitating event from happening again:

- Stop taking the newspaper.
- Pick the paper up off the porch, but do not open it before work.

Step 8. Plans to repair, correct, and overcorrect the harm: I can apologize to my colleagues for being late, tell them I realize it is distressing when I come late, and let them know I will work harder at being on time in the future. I can be early for the weekly meetings of this group for the next 2 months, and I can offer to be the person who follows up on providing information to others who are late or miss a meeting. I can also offer to help other staff members out with tasks, and/or say yes when asked to help others out.

 **Discussion Point:** Discuss other ideas for some or all of the questions as you go through the example.

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