

Understand How Thoughts
Affect Emotions and Behaviors



Navigating your thought life can feel overwhelming. You might be aware you have negative thought patterns, overwhelming emotions, and unhealthy relational skills, but where do you start? How do you rewire your brain?

We know that God calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). With the help of the Holy Spirit, that is possible! There are also psychological tools that can help us on our journey toward mental peace. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a highly beneficial, scripturally-backed form of therapy that aids us in this process.

What is DBT?

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a type of therapy that helps people understand how thoughts affect emotions and behaviors. It provides ***practical skills*** to help ***rewire your brain, change the way you think, and empower you with tools to help improve your thought life and relationships.***

- To limit behaviors that get in the way of productive therapy.
- To help you reach your goals and improve your quality of life by addressing what's blocking your progress, such as mental health conditions or relationship issues.
- To help you learn new skills to replace unhelpful behaviors.

What can I learn from DBT Skills?

Mindfulness: This is the practice of being fully aware and focused in the present instead of worrying about the past or future.

Isaiah 30:15 NLT

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength."

Distress tolerance: This involves understanding and managing your emotions in difficult or stressful situations without responding with harmful behaviors.

James 1:2 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.

Interpersonal effectiveness: This means understanding how to ask for what you want and need and setting boundaries while maintaining respect for yourself and others.

1 Peter 3:8 NLT

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

Emotion regulation: This means understanding, being more aware of and having more control over your emotions.

Matthew 11:29 NLT

Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

DBT SKILLS

These are just a few DBT skills you can implement to help rewire your brain and find peace, emotional control, and joy.

SKILLS FOR REGULATING YOUR THOUGHTS:

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS BY OBSERVING THEM

1. Notice thoughts as they come into your mind. As a thought comes into your mind, say "a thought has entered my mind." Label the thought as a thought, saying, "The thought [describe thought] arose in my mind." Use a gentle voice tone.
2. As you notice thoughts in your mind, ask, "Where did the thought come from?" Then watch your mind to see if you can see where it came from. Was it from your flesh? The enemy? Does it align with God and the Bible?
3. Step back from your mind, as if you are on top of a mountain and your mind is just a boulder down below. Gaze at your mind, watching what thoughts come up when you are watching it. You are not your thoughts! Do not let your thoughts consume you!
4. Replace the negative thought with scriptural truth.

Proverbs 4:20-22 NLT

My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS OF THOUGHTS WITH OPPOSITE ACTION

We know the enemy wants to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). He can attack our thoughts and to combat him, we must respond with **opposite action**. When our thoughts turn dark, we must fix them on Jesus.

1. Relax your face and body while imagining accepting your thoughts as only thoughts-sensations of the brain. Your thoughts are *not* your identity.
2. Imagine things you would do if you stopped believing everything you think and instead believe what God says to be true of you.
3. Rehearse in your mind the things that you would do if you did not view your thoughts as facts.

1. OBSERVE YOUR THOUGHTS.

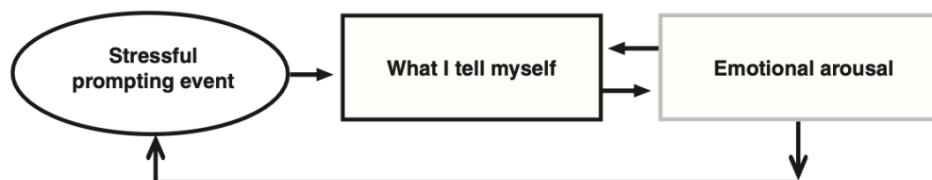
- As waves, coming and going.
 - Not analyzing thoughts.
 - Not suppressing thoughts.
 - Practicing willingness.
 - Not judging thoughts.
- Stepping back and observing.
- Acknowledging their presence.
- Not keeping thoughts around that are harmful.

2. ADOPT A CURIOUS MIND.

- Ask, "Where do my thoughts come from?" Try to pinpoint the source.
- Notice that every thought that comes also goes out of your mind.

3. REMEMBER: YOU ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS.

- Do not necessarily act on thoughts.
- Remember times when you have had very different thoughts.
- Remind yourself that catastrophic thinking is not from The Lord
- Remember how you think when you are not feeling such intense suffering and pain.



Step 1. Write down the prompting event that is often related to distressing emotions and that you want to work on reducing your emotional reactions to.

Step 2. Ask: "What must I be telling myself (that is, what are my interpretations and thoughts) about the event that causes such distress and arousal?" Write these down.

Examples:

"He hates me," "I can't stand this!" "I can't do this," "I'll never make it," "I'm out of control!"

Step 3. Rethink the situation and its meaning in a way that counteracts the thoughts and interpretations producing stress and distressing emotions. As you rethink the situation, write down as many effective thoughts as you can to replace the stressful thoughts. Write down what God says to be true.

Step 4. When you are not in the stressful prompting event, practice imagining the stressful event:

A. At the same time, while breathing in, repeat to yourself truth from God.

B. When breathing out, say "Relax" while intentionally relaxing all your muscles.

Matthew 11:28 NLT

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS:

Emotions are God-given, important and shouldn't be ignored, but they should not rule over us. If you are struggling to regulate your emotions, here are some skills that can help.

Romans 15:13 NLT

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT EMOTIONS DO FOR YOU

EMOTIONS MOTIVATE US FOR ACTION

- Emotions motivate our behavior.
- Emotions prepare us for action. The action urge of specific emotions is often “hard-wired” in biology.
 - Emotions save time in getting us to act in important situations.
- Emotions can be especially important when we don't have time to think things through.
- Strong emotions help us overcome obstacles—in our minds and in the environment.

EMOTIONS COMMUNICATE TO AND INFLUENCE OTHERS

- Facial expressions are hard-wired aspects of emotions.
 - Facial expressions communicate faster than words.
- Our body language and voice tone can also be hard-wired. Like it or not, they also communicate our emotions to others.
- When it is important to communicate to others, or send them a message, it can be very hard to change our emotions.
 - Whether we intend it or not, our communication of emotions influences others.

EMOTIONS COMMUNICATE TO OURSELVES

- Emotional reactions can give us important information about a situation. Emotions can be signals or alarms that something is happening.
- Gut feelings can be the Holy Spirit speaking to us—a response to something important about the situation. This can be helpful if our emotions get us to check out the facts.
- **CAUTION:** Sometimes we treat emotions as if they are facts about the world: The stronger the emotion, the stronger our belief that the emotion is based on fact. (Examples: “If I feel unsure, I am incompetent,” “If I get lonely when left alone, I

shouldn't be left alone," "If I feel confident about something, it is right," "If I'm afraid, there must be danger," "I love him, so he must be okay.")

- If we assume that our emotions represent facts about the world, we may use them to justify our thoughts or our actions. This can be trouble if our emotions get us to ignore the facts.

Galatians 5:22 NLT

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

CHECK THE FACTS

Many emotions and actions are set off by our **thoughts** and **interpretations** of events, not by the events themselves.

Event → Thoughts → Emotions

Our emotions can also have a big effect on our thoughts about events.

Event → Emotion → Thoughts

Examining our thoughts and checking the facts can help us change our emotions.

HOW TO CHECK THE FACTS

1. Ask “What is the emotion I want to change?”

2. Ask: “What is the event prompting my emotion?”

Describe the facts that you observed through your senses. Challenge judgments, absolutes, and black-and-white descriptions.

3. Ask: “What are my interpretations, thoughts, and assumptions about the event?”

4. Think of other possible interpretations.

Practice looking at all sides of a situation and all points of view. Test your interpretations and assumptions to see if they fit the facts.

5. Ask: “Am I assuming there’s a threat?”

Assess the probability that the threatening event will really occur. Think of as many other possible outcomes as you can. The enemy brings a spirit of fear, and you don't have to listen!

6. Ask: "What's the catastrophe?"

Imagine the catastrophe really occurring.

Imagine coping with God's presence (through problem solving, coping ahead, and relying on the Holy Spirit)

7. Does my emotion and/or its intensity fit the actual facts?

Check out facts that fit each emotion. Ask the Holy Spirit if your emotions line up with reality.

Ephesians 4:14 NLT

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

OPPOSITE ACTION

Use opposite action when your emotions **DO NOT** fit the facts or when acting on your emotions is not effective.

EVERY EMOTION HAS AN ACTION URGE.

CHANGE THE EMOTION BY ACTING OPPOSITE TO ITS ACTION URGE.

Consider these examples:

<u>EMOTION</u>	<u>ACTION URGE</u>	<u>OPPOSITE ACTION</u>
Fear	Run away/avoid	Approach/don't avoid
Anger	Attack	Gently avoid/be a little nice
Sadness	Withdraw/isolate	Get active
Shame	Hide/avoid	Tell the secret to people who will accept it

HOW TO DO OPPOSITE ACTION

1. Check the facts to see if your emotion is justified by the facts.
2. Check also whether the intensity and duration of the emotion fit the facts.

(Example: "Irritation" fits the facts when your car is cut in front of; "road rage" does not.) An emotion is justified when your emotion fits the facts.

3. Ask the Holy Spirit *"Is acting on this emotion effective in this situation?"*
4. Identify opposite actions to what your emotions want you to do.
 5. Act opposite to what to your emotion urges you to do.
6. React opposite to your emotional urges until your emotion changes.

FIGHTING FEAR

2 Timothy 1:7 ESV

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Fear FITS THE FACTS of a situation whenever there is a THREAT to:

- A. Your life or that of someone you care about.
- B. Your health or that of someone you care about.
- c. Your well-being or that of someone you care about.

Follow these suggestions when your fear is **NOT JUSTIFIED** by the facts or **NOT EFFECTIVE**:

OPPOSITE ACTIONS WHEN FACED WITH FEAR

Do the OPPOSITE of your fearful action urges. For example:

1. Do what you are afraid of doing...**OVER AND OVER.**
2. **APPROACH** events, places, tasks, activities, and people you are afraid of.
3. Do things to give yourself a sense of **CONTROL** and **MASTERY** over your fears.
4. **RELY** on God and **REMEMBER**: God has not given you a spirit of fear.
5. Keep your **EYES AND EARS OPEN** and focused on the feared event.

Look around slowly; explore.
6. Take in the information from the situation (*i.e., notice that you are safe*).
6. Change **POSTURE AND KEEP A CONFIDENT VOICE TONE**. Keep your head and eyes up, and your shoulders back but relaxed.
7. Adopt an assertive body posture (e.g., knees apart, hands on hips, heels a bit out).

8. Change your **BODY CHEMISTRY**.

For example, do paced breathing by breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly.

9. Stand in the **TRUTH** that God is with you in your fear. Don't let the enemy get a foothold!

Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

FIGHTING JEALOUSY

James 3:16

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Jealousy FITS THE FACTS of a situation whenever:

- A. Someone is threatening to take a very important and desired relationship or object away from you.
- B. An important and desired relationship is in danger of being damaged or lost.

Follow these suggestions when jealousy is **NOT JUSTIFIED** by the facts or **NOT EFFECTIVE**:

Proverbs 14:30

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

OPPOSITE ACTIONS WHEN FACED WITH JEALOUSY

Do the OPPOSITE of your jealous action urges. For example:

1. **LET GO** of controlling others' actions.

2. **SHARE** the things and people you have in your life.

3. **STOP SPYING** or snooping.

Suppress probing questions (*"Where were you? Who were you with?"*).

4. Fire your "private detective."

5. **NO AVOIDING.** Listen to all the details. Focus on sensations. Keep your eyes open; look around. Take in all the information about the situation.

5. CHANGE YOUR POSTURE.

Unclench hands with palms up and fingers relaxed. Relax chest and stomach muscles.
Unclench teeth. Relax facial muscles. Half-smile.

6. CHANGE YOUR BODY CHEMISTRY.

For example, do paced breathing by breathing in deeply and breathing out slowly.

7. **CONFESS** your envy and **TURN AWAY** from the sin. **GIVE IT TO GOD.**

Titus 3:3

Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

FIGHTING SADNESS

2 Corinthians 6:10 NLT

Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.

Sadness FITS THE FACTS of a situation whenever:

- A. You have lost something or someone permanently.
- B. Things are not the way you want or expected and hoped them to be.

Follow these suggestions when sadness is **NOT JUSTIFIED** by the facts or **NOT EFFECTIVE**:

OPPOSITE ACTIONS WHEN FACED WITH SADNESS

Do the OPPOSITE of your sadness action urges. For example:

1. Get **ACTIVE**; approach.
2. **AVOID AVOIDING**
3. **BUILD MASTERY**: do things that make you feel competent and self-confident.
4. **INCREASE PLEASANT EVENTS.**
5. **PRACTICE GRATITUDE.**
6. Live in the **PRESENT**. Stop dwelling on the **PAST**.

Be mindful of your environment—each detail as it unfolds. experience new or positive activities you are engaging in.

7. Change your posture. (adopt a “bright” body posture, with head up, eyes open, and shoulders back). Keep an upbeat voice tone.

8. **CHANGE YOUR BODY CHEMISTRY.**

For example, increase physical movement (run, jog, walk, or do other active exercise). This increases endorphins and gets you out of your head.

Psalms 34:18 NLT

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

FIGHTING SHAME

Romans 8:1

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

Shame FITS THE FACTS of a situation whenever:

- A. You will be rejected by a person or group you care about if your personal characteristics or behavior are made public.

Follow these suggestions when shame is ***NOT JUSTIFIED*** by the facts or ***NOT EFFECTIVE***,
but GUILT IS JUSTIFIED :

OPPOSITE ACTIONS WHEN FACED WITH SHAME

Do the OPPOSITE of your shame action urges. For example:

1. **AVOID HIDING**, and **MAKE PUBLIC** your personal characteristics or your behavior.
2. If you've sinned, **CONFESS** your sin to another believer and bring it into the light.
3. **APOLOGIZE** for your behavior.
4. **REPENT** and **TURN AWAY** from your sin.
3. **REPAIR** the transgressions, or work to prevent or repair similar harm for others.
4. **COMMIT** to avoiding that mistake in the future.
5. **ACCEPT** the consequences gracefully.
6. **FORGIVE** yourself. Acknowledge the causes of your behavior.
7. **LET IT GO. ACCEPT GOD'S GRACE.**

1 John 1:9

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.