

National Capacity Building Project: Technical Assistance
of the Survivor of Torture Programs

Vicarious Trauma & Provider Burnout: Self-Care and DBT Skills for Distress Tolerance and Emotional Regulation

Presented on January 20, 2026



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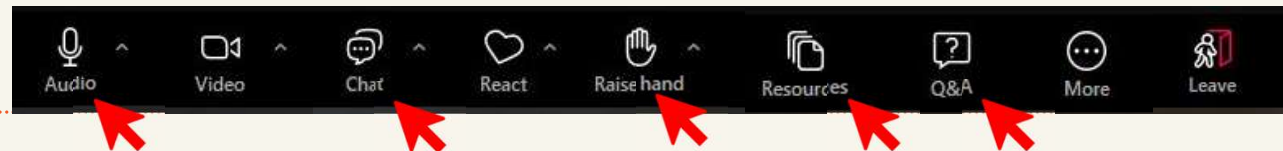
Overview

- This webinar is brought to you today by the The National Capacity Building Project is a project of the Center for Victims of Torture in partnership with Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma and the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs.

Attendee Controls

All functions are located at the bottom of your screen

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Presenters



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Learning Objectives

1. Identify symptoms of vicarious trauma and burnout
2. Understand the framing of self-care as an ethical responsibility
3. Define a holistic concept of self-care
4. Name at least three different DBT skills that can support survivors of torture and providers alike
5. Use concrete DBT skills to support distress tolerance and emotion regulation



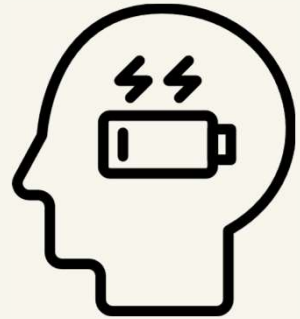
Grounding into the space: An invitation

What is Burnout?

Core characteristics include:

- **Emotional Exhaustion** (feeling overwhelmed, depleted)
- **Depersonalization** negative, cynical attitudes; distant relationship with clients and the clinical work)
- **Reduced sense of accomplishment** (feeling ineffective in one's work; negative evaluations of self)

(Yang & Hayes, 2020; Maslach 1981)

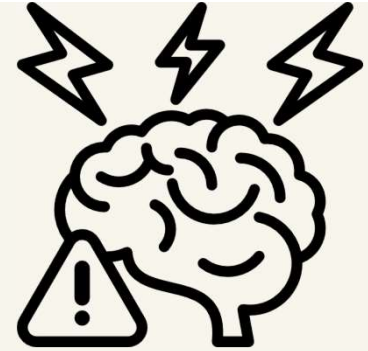


Causes of burnout

**Burnout is related to workplace setting.
Contributing factors include:**

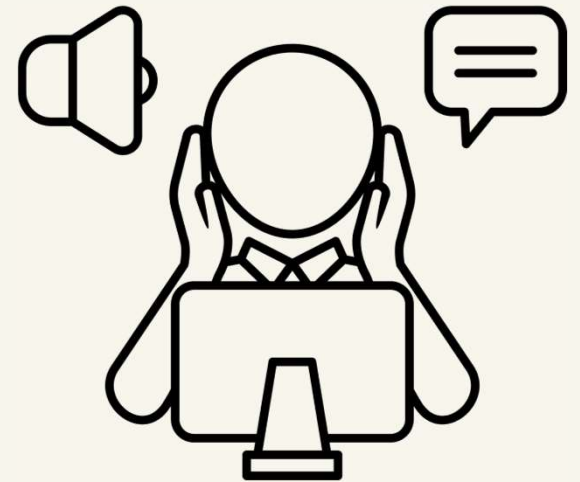
- High workload
- Overload of responsibility
- Lack of control over quality of services provided
- Interpersonal workplace problems

(Deighton, et al. 2007)



Signs of Burnout

- **Dreading and avoiding work**
- **High work dissatisfaction**
- **Reduced productivity**
- **Generalized apathy**
- **Emotional exhaustion**
- **Increased use of unhelpful coping strategies (e.g., substance use)**



(Branson, 2019 & Fernandes et. 2024)

What is Vicarious Trauma?



Vicarious Trauma is defined as:

- Significant experiences of distress that occur from direct empathic engagement with trauma survivors
- Involves a change in cognitive beliefs about oneself, others, and the world
- Can result in secondary traumatic stress

(WHO, 2013, ; Kim, 2022;)

Signs of Vicarious Trauma (STS)

- Difficulty maintaining compassion or empathy
- Mood changes (e.g., feeling especially guilty, shameful, angry, hopeless, numb)
- Difficulty controlling your worry
- Detachment from things you used to enjoy
- Nightmares and/or trouble sleeping
- Being on high alert/hypervigilant
- Unwanted thoughts of client induced imagery
- Increased absenteeism from work
- Social isolation
- Increasingly pessimistic worldview
- Distance from spiritual beliefs
- Stress-induced medical conditions



(Branson, 2019 & Fernandes et. 2024)

Why is self-care important?

- Working with survivors of torture can be **rewarding and meaningful, but also challenging**
- Challenging factors
 - Emotional intensity of hearing and holding SOT experiences
 - **Systems and structures** we are working within

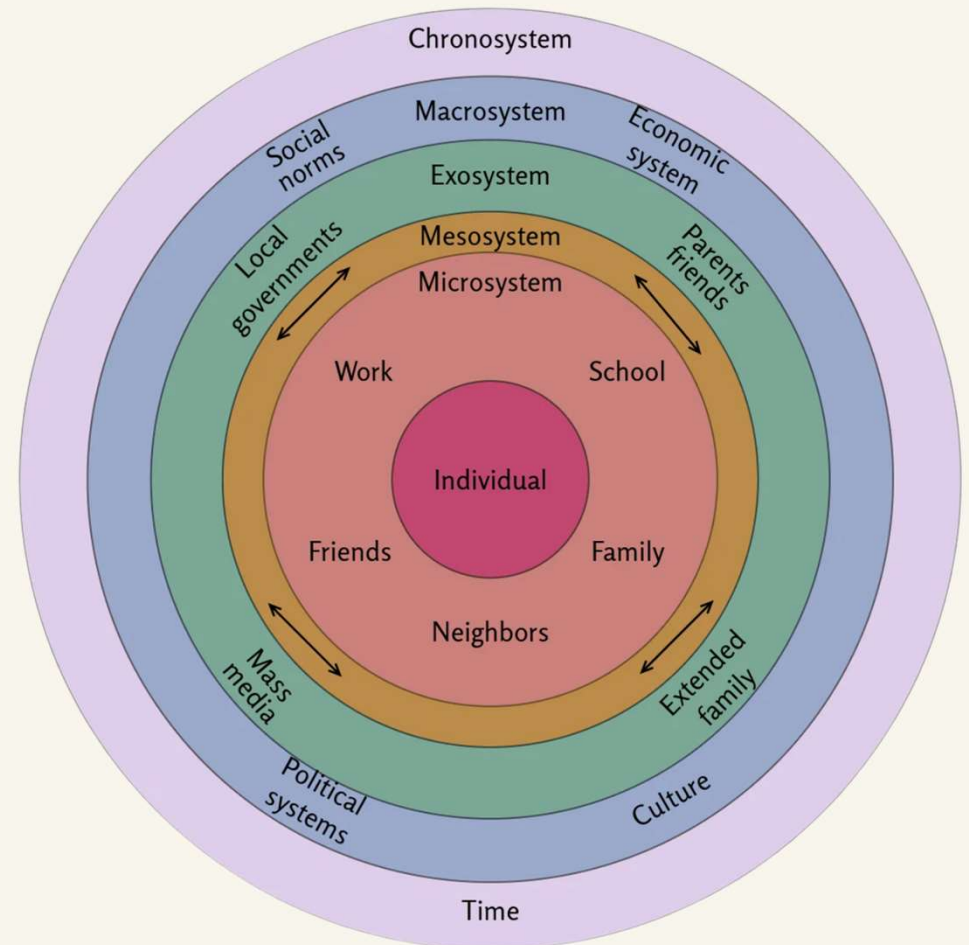


Image Source: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html> (Bronfenbrenner, 1977)



Importance of Self-Care

Self-care is aligned with tenets of APA ethics:

- Beneficence & Non-maleficence
- Fidelity & Responsibility
- Integrity
- Justice
- Respect for people's rights and dignity

(American Psychological Association, 2026)



Holistic self-care activities have three main characteristics:

- 1) You are the primary beneficiary
- 2) The activity brings you joy and increases inner peace
- 3) The activity nurtures your body, mind, and spirit

(Gandy, 1997; Bryant, 2022)

Holistic Definition of Self-Care



Introduction

Why DBT Skills?

Plan:

- Provide a basic introduction to DBT
 - Highlight some concepts and theories within DBT that I have found particularly helpful when working with SOTs
 - Introduce a handful of DBT skills that I have found helpful for clients and myself
-



Acknowledgments

DBT is a complex and in-depth treatment model

DBT skills vs. DBT to fidelity

- DBT offers concrete, accessible skills that can be integrated into sessions and everyday life. A few core concepts and a handful of these skills will be highlighted today.

Howard Center (Community Mental Health Agency)

What is DBT?

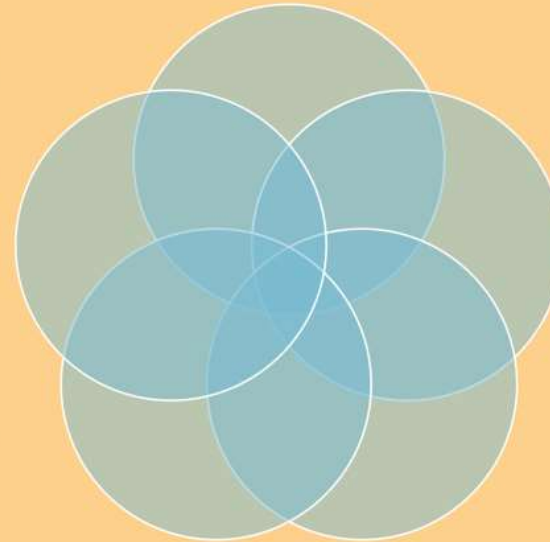
Dialectical Behavior Therapy

Introducing skills and concepts, *not* the model to fidelity

Initially for borderline personality disorder (BPD)

Marsha M Linehan

Broad form of cognitive-behavioral treatment





Modules



Mindfulness

Emotional
Regulation

Distress
Tolerance

Interpersonal
Effectiveness

Meaning Behind Dialectical

Linehan, M. M. (2025). *DBT skills training manual: Revised edition* (pp. 4–5). Guilford Press.

Individual parts of a system that are part of a larger whole

- e.g. individual behaviors within a larger environmental context

Having to do with internal opposing forces

- multiple polarities/opposing forces or factors can coexist at the same time

Assumption that:

- time/environment are not static
- change is a process
- client and therapist/provider experience continuous transition



Dialectics: Balancing Opposites

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16B



Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 155). Guilford Press.



Dialectics: Balancing Opposites

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16B



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Dialectics: Balancing Opposites

Interpersonal Effectiveness Handout 16B



Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 155). Guilford Press.



Radical Acceptance

Distress Tolerance Handout 11

"Accepting in your mind,
your heart, and your body"

"Reality is as it is"

"Life can be worth living
even with painful events in
it"

"Rejecting reality does not
change reality"

"Changing reality first
requires accepting reality"

"Pain can't be avoided..."

"Refusing to accept reality
can keep you stuck in
unhappiness, bitterness,
anger, sadness, shame, or
other painful emotions"

"Acceptance may lead to
sadness, but..." relief may
follow

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 155). Guilford Press.



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Control Wheels

Image by CleverCrowCo
https://www.etsy.com/listing/1570330211/circle-of-control-poster-what-things-i?ls=s&ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=i+cant+control&ref=sr_gallery-1-4&pro=1&sts=1&dd=1&content_source=d37e2f69f0-4d58-a940-1d1c5c0037a3%253ALT772c939e9090ae52d6e00dff37f4a17365af6a09&organic_search_click=1&logging_key=d37e2f69f0-4d58-a940-1d1c5c0037a3%3ALT772c939e9090ae52d6e00dff37f4a17365af6a09



Emotion Regulation Handout 20



- Treat **P**hysical **I**llness



- Balance **E**ating



- Avoid Mood-**A**ltering Substances



- Balance **S**leep



- Get **E**xercise

PLEASE
SKILL

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 259). Guilford Press.

Distress Tolerance Handout 4

- **S** – Stop
- **T** – Take a step back
- **O** – Observe
- **P** – Proceed mindfully



STOP Skill

- When we are overly reactive as providers it is often not productive and can be dysregulating or invoke fear in clients
- Finding a balance between acceptance and validation

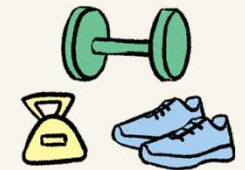
Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 294). Guilford Press.

TIPP Skill

Distress Tolerance Handout 6

- T – Temperature
- I – Intense exercise
- P – Paced Breathing
- P – Paired Muscle Relaxation

- Sympathetic → Parasympathetic



Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 300). Guilford Press.

Self-soothing

Distress Tolerance Handout 8

- Across the senses
 - vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch



- Examples:
 - looking at nature, listening to favorite songs, essential oils/aromatherapy, peppermint candy/gum, sit in a comfortable chair



- How can we create opportunities for self-soothing in sessions/appointments?
 - Mints, chocolate, tea, pleasant images on the walls, comfortable furniture/plants in the office, etc.



Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed., p. 311). Guilford Press.

**Closing
Quote**

**“We are each other’s harvest;
we are each other’s business;
we are each other’s magnitude
and bond”**

-Gwendolyn Brooks





A meditation to close



Questions?

Thank you for attending. Let's stay connected!

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The National Capacity Building Project is a project of the Center for Victims of Torture in partnership with Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma and the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs. More resources are available at www.healtorture.org.



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