WHAT IS DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOR THERAPY (DBT)?

DBT was developed by Marsha Linehan, a psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, to help people struggling with chronic suicidal and self-injurious behaviors. The treatment is based on the idea that impulsive and self-destructive behaviors are caused by an inability to manage intense emotion. DBT is a sophisticated intervention that blends cognitive behavioral approaches (e.g., CBT) with meditative practices and acceptance-based strategies. Due to the success of DBT in helping clients eliminate suicidal and self-injurious behaviors, it has now evolved into a treatment for people who struggle with other impulsive and problematic behaviors for whom emotion dysregulation may play a central role (e.g., eating disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder)

WHY DBT FOR EATING DISORDERS?

DBT is based on an emotion regulation model. One of the features that makes DBT unique is the importance it places on understanding and working with emotions. When it comes to treating eating disorders, focusing on emotions may be a valuable component for change. Here are several important facts about emotions and eating disorders:

- Some individuals with an eating disorder report that they have difficulty expressing and managing their emotions.

- Many individuals report that they do not have the skills to cope with their emotions in healthy, adaptive ways.

- Without adequate emotion regulation skills, eating disorder symptoms can become a way of regulating overwhelming and uncomfortable feelings...at least temporarily.

- Negative emotions are one of the most common triggers for eating disorder symptoms.

- If left untreated, emotion dysregulation may increase a person’s vulnerability to relapse following treatment.
Model of DBT for Eating Disorders

Problem to be solved

CUE OR TRIGGER → EMOTION DYSREGULATION

Attempt to Reduce or Avoid the Painful Emotion

Binge Eating And/Or Purging And/Or Restriction

TEMPORARY RELIEF