

## ***Introduction***

The Balance Programme is an intensive community-based Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) programme for clients with the diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder. The overall goal of DBT is to build a life worth living. This is achieved in different stages and with a range of components which are outlined below.

## ***Stage 1 DBT***

The goal of the first stage of DBT is to learn and apply the skills necessary to establish stability in your life. This typically takes 12 months in which you attend individual weekly therapy sessions and complete the “Stage 1” Balance Group twice. These 22-week long groups run for 2 ½ hours and are structured to learn skills – they are not “process groups” to discuss feelings or events like self harm which may distress other group members.

It is important to practice the skills between the group meetings with the aid of diary cards – a system to support and monitor your mood and skill use.

## ***Stage 2 DBT***

The second stage of DBT is about decreasing the effects of past trauma and post-traumatic stress. You learn to emotionally experience life in a more positive way. This is often the second year of

therapy. There are “Stage 2 Balance Groups” that support this work.

## ***Individual Therapy***

Weekly individual therapy is at the centre of DBT and explores how and why these skills will help to improve your life. Therapy seeks to hold the tension that exists between conflicting issues and truths in our lives. Like any therapy it depends building a healthy, supportive and safe relationship with your therapist. DBT therapy is about a community of therapists treating a community of clients - your therapist is required to be in a specialist DBT supervision group to practice in the Balance programme.

## ***The DBT Group Skills***

The Stage 1 Balance Groups teach four skills modules. Each contains a range of skills which you practice and apply to help improve your life.

- **Mindfulness** skills are adapted from eastern spiritual practice and western contemplative practices. You learn how to focus your attention and be aware of just one thing in the moment. You are taught to observe and then describe experiences, and to participate non-judgementally and more effectively in your life.

- **Distress Tolerance** focuses on the ability to accept both oneself and the current situation in a non-judgmental manner. This is particularly useful in situations where nothing can be done immediately to change a distressing situation.
- **Emotion Regulation** skills teach you how to moderate emotions, re-orient attention and overcome mood-dependent actions. These skills are about understanding your emotions and having more effective emotional experiences.
- **Interpersonal effectiveness** skills are similar to standard interpersonal problem solving and assertion training. Learning to effectively interact with others can help reduce overwhelming emotions and help develop more positive relationships in your life.

### ***The DBT treatment hierarchy:***

DBT therapy progresses according to a *treatment hierarchy*. Issues further down the hierarchy are only addressed when the previous issues have been sufficiently dealt with. This promotes safety.

The DBT hierarchy:

1. Decreasing suicidal and self-harm behaviour
2. Decreasing behaviours that undermine or interfere with therapy
3. Decreasing behaviours which interfere with your quality-of-life; often behaviour which lead to crisis
4. Increasing other required skills
5. Decreasing post-traumatic stress
6. Increasing respect for self
7. Achieving other individual goals

Safety is always at the top of the hierarchy – you must work to stay safe (and alive) to benefit from therapy. You may also have the opportunity to develop a DBT crisis plan to specify how the Crisis services can best help you to cope with crisis.

### ***Commitment***

It takes time and effort to build a life worth living. To get the benefits you will need to participate fully for at least 12 months. But

that's not actually that long when you consider the benefits and the alternatives.

This commitment can seem impossible when you start out and the first step is finding reasons to make – and keep – this commitment. We spend up to six sessions addressing this as the first stage of therapy and before you commence the programme.

To join the programme you will be asked to sign up (literally) for one year, to work towards eliminating self harm and commit to building a life worth living. You must also agree to complete any evaluation and research measure required. If you miss four sessions in a row you must “stand-down” from the programme for 6 months. This is because continuity and consistency is necessary to benefit from the programme and to feel a part of the groups.

### ***Want to know more?***

To learn more about the Balance Programme talk to your therapist. You can also visit an American website where DBT was developed: [www.behavioraltech.com](http://www.behavioraltech.com)



## More about Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and the Balance Programme

Information for clients and their families

This brochure contains detailed information for those who are considering joining the Balance programme. You should already have read the introductory brochure titled “About the Balance Programme” and had preliminary discussions with a DBT therapist.

