

## EXERCISE

## 11

# Promoting Dialectical Thinking Through Both-And Statements

## Preparations for Exercise 11

1. Read the instructions in Chapter 2.
2. Download the Deliberate Practice Reaction Form and Deliberate Practice Diary Form at <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/deliberate-practice-dialectical-behavior-therapy> (see the "Clinician and Practitioner Resources" tab; also available in Appendixes A and B, respectively).

## Skill Description

### Skill Difficulty Level: Advanced

One of the primary goals of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is to increase dialectical thinking and to help clients shift typically extreme emotions and behaviors to more balanced, effective responses. In DBT, the therapist pushes for change in the client while helping the client accept their emotional experience and those aspects of their reality that cannot be changed. One way that DBT therapists support their clients in this endeavor is by using dialectical strategies to balance problem-solving solutions that are oriented toward change with acceptance-focused solutions that are oriented toward helping clients tolerate reality as it is (Sayrs & Linehan, 2019). These two seemingly opposing positions are balanced through the adoption of a dialectical stance (i.e., embraces the view that therapists can simultaneously hold the positions of accepting the client as they are and moving them toward change) as well as through a set of dialectical communication strategies. When taking a dialectical approach, validation and change strategies are woven together so that both are conveyed in communication with the client.

When the therapist identifies rigid or extreme thinking (i.e., nondialectical thinking), they highlight how both sides of an issue can be true. For example, a client may use

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substances to help escape distressing flashbacks of past traumatic events. The validity of this behavior is that it solves the problem of ending or numbing aversive experiences. On the other hand, substance use creates other problems for the client that further exacerbate their pain and suffering. In this scenario, the therapist may use dialectical communication to highlight to the client that it makes sense they want to escape painful emotions in the moment and that they need to develop skills for effectively managing flashbacks to decrease pain over the long run. For this exercise, we focus on using “both-and” language to reframe polarizing or extreme statements or to highlight seemingly opposed parts of a client statement that are equally true and valid.

#### SKILL CRITERION FOR EXERCISE 11

1. The therapist balances use of acceptance-oriented strategies with change-oriented strategies through both-and statements.

### Examples of Promoting Dialectical Thinking Through Both-And Statements

#### Example 1

**CLIENT:** [*Sad*] Things are just so hard right now. I'm coming to therapy, trying to make these big changes, but I'm struggling day to day.

**THERAPIST:** You are working really hard to get better, and it's really difficult.

#### Example 2

**CLIENT:** [*Frustrated*] I can't believe you're going on vacation next week. You won't be there for me if I need you.

**THERAPIST:** Yes, it would be better for you if I were not going away next week and it's OK that I'm going away next week.

#### Example 3

**CLIENT:** [*Ashamed*] If you understood how much pain I'm in, you wouldn't ask me to stop cutting. Cutting is the only relief I can get right now.

**THERAPIST:** Cutting brings you relief and it maintains your pain in the long run.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXERCISE 11

#### **Step 1: Role-Play and Feedback**

- The client says the first beginner client statement. The therapist improvises a response based on the skill criteria.
- The trainer (or, if not available, the client) provides brief feedback based on the skill criteria.
- The client then repeats the same statement, and the therapist again improvises a response. The trainer (or client) again provides brief feedback.

#### **Step 2: Repeat**

- Repeat Step 1 for all the statements at the current difficulty level (beginner, intermediate, or advanced).

#### **Step 3: Assess and Adjust Difficulty**

- The therapist completes the Deliberate Practice Reaction Form (see Appendix A) and decides whether to make the exercise easier or harder or to repeat the same difficulty level.

#### **Step 4: Repeat for Approximately 15 Minutes**

- Repeat Steps 1 to 3 for at least 15 minutes.
- The trainees then switch therapist and client roles and start over.

➔ **Now it's your turn! Follow Steps 1 and 2 from the instructions.**

**Remember:** The goal of the role-play is for trainees to practice improvising responses to the client statements in a manner that (a) uses the skill criteria and (b) feels authentic for the trainee. **Example therapist responses for each client statement are provided at the end of this exercise. Trainees should attempt to improvise their own responses before reading the example responses.**

#### BEGINNER-LEVEL CLIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 11

##### *Beginner Client Statement 1*

**[Sad]** I'm so confused. I want this relationship to work so badly, but things between me and my partner are so difficult right now. Every time we're around each other, we get into these huge fights. I love them so much but being together right now isn't working.

##### *Beginner Client Statement 2*

**[Anxious]** I feel so nervous all the time. Things are going well for the first time in my life. I've made so many changes and I can see all the positive effects, but I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop.

##### *Beginner Client Statement 3*

**[Irritated]** I'm trying so hard. I don't think you understand how hard it is. Some days I just don't feel like working so hard.

##### *Beginner Client Statement 4*

**[Ashamed]** I did what we talked about. I texted my friend when I was feeling down last night, but she didn't respond. I felt really upset at the time but was able to validate my emotions.

##### *Beginner Client Statement 5*

**[Ashamed]** I'm sorry for leaving the session so abruptly last week. I felt like you were judging me, and I just needed to take some space to calm down. I didn't mean it when I told you I thought you were a bad therapist.



**Assess and adjust the difficulty before moving to the next difficulty level (see Step 3 in the exercise instructions).**

**INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL CLIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 11****Intermediate Client Statement 1**

**[Frustrated]** You don't get it—I'd use skills if I could, but when I get anxious, I go from zero to 100. There's no time to use skills!

**Intermediate Client Statement 2**

**[Sad]** I want to leave my job, but I don't want to disappoint my boss. He's been really supportive. I feel like if I leave, I'm going to let him down.

**Intermediate Client Statement 3**

**[Confused]** My friend keeps asking for my help. She's suicidal and in constant crisis and needs so much support. I guess because we're both in DBT I can kind of help her figure out which skills to use. I want to be there for her, but it can get pretty overwhelming sometimes and trigger my own suicide urges.

**Intermediate Client Statement 4**

**[Withdrawn]** This is too hard. Talking about this stuff brings up too many bad memories.

**Intermediate Client Statement 5**

**[Frustrated]** I had a tough week. My parents were driving me crazy and then I got into a fight with my sister because she took their side. I tried to use the skills we were learning in group but couldn't figure out which ones to use. I thought about calling you but thought I should be able to figure it out by myself and didn't want to bother you.



**Assess and adjust the difficulty before moving to the next difficulty level (see Step 3 in the exercise instructions).**

### ADVANCED-LEVEL CLIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 11

#### ***Advanced Client Statement 1***

**[Angry]** My mom just wouldn't stop nagging me. I asked her to leave me alone, but she just kept going. So I got really in her face and screamed at her. I think I scared her. She backed off.

#### ***Advanced Client Statement 2***

**[Anxious]** I don't really know where to start. I feel like I can't do anything right. I missed group this week because I was too anxious to face everyone. And I'm still feeling anxious right now. Maybe I should cancel group again today.

#### ***Advanced Client Statement 3***

**[Angry]** You make me feel like I'm the problem. We always focus on what I did wrong or what I could do differently, but what about everyone else and their shitty behavior?

#### ***Advanced Client Statement 4***

**[Guilty]** I feel like I should spend the holidays with my family. I know they want to see me, and they're so great in so many ways. But when I go home, my family constantly misgenders me, and I leave feeling depressed and even more disconnected.

#### ***Advanced Client Statement 5***

**[Angry]** This is bullshit! I told you what the problem is and you just don't want to help me. You don't give a shit about me.



**Assess and adjust the difficulty here (see Step 3 in the exercise instructions). If appropriate, follow the instructions to make the exercise even more challenging (see Appendix A).**

## Example Therapist Responses: Promoting Dialectical Thinking Through Both-And Statements

**Remember:** Trainees should attempt to improvise their own responses before reading the example responses. **Do not read the following responses verbatim unless you are having trouble coming up with your own responses!**

EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO BEGINNER-LEVEL CLIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 11
<b>Example Response to Beginner Client Statement 1</b>
You love him, and you need to take a break from him right now.
<b>Example Response to Beginner Client Statement 2</b>
You're proud of the changes you've made, and you're feeling scared about what comes next.
<b>Example Response to Beginner Client Statement 3</b>
You are doing your best, and you need to try harder.
<b>Example Response to Beginner Client Statement 4</b>
You were disappointed by the situation, and you accepted it for what it was.
<b>Example Response to Beginner Client Statement 5</b>
You really hurt my feelings, and we will work it out.

EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL CLIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 11	
<b><i>Example Response to Intermediate Client Statement 1</i></b>	
	It's hard to use skills when emotions are so high, and it's the perfect time to use them.
<b><i>Example Response to Intermediate Client Statement 2</i></b>	
	You care about your boss, and you don't want to continue in the job.
<b><i>Example Response to Intermediate Client Statement 3</i></b>	
	Someone may have good reasons for wanting something from you, and you may have good reasons for saying "no" or observing your limits.
<b><i>Example Response to Intermediate Client Statement 4</i></b>	
	It's incredibly painful and not to avoid these feelings when they come up is necessary to reduce them in the long run.
<b><i>Example Response to Intermediate Client Statement 5</i></b>	
	You can try to figure out a solution on your own, and sometimes you need help and support from others.



**EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO ADVANCED-LEVEL  
CLIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 11**

***Example Response to Advanced Client Statement 1***

Screaming at your mom helped get her to back off, and there are probably more effective strategies for achieving that goal.

***Example Response to Advanced Client Statement 2***

Avoiding group relieves your anxiety in the short term, and learning how to feel anxious without needing to escape it is the very thing that's going to help you decrease your anxiety in the long term.

***Example Response to Advanced Client Statement 3***

You want to get a handle on your behavior, and you want to acknowledge the impact other people's behaviors has had on you.

***Example Response to Advanced Client Statement 4***

You appreciate their good qualities, and you want to limit how much time you spend with them because it's hurtful when they misgender you.

***Example Response to Advanced Client Statement 5***

I can care about you and refuse to do something you ask.