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# Dialectical Behavior Therapy for At-Risk Adolescents: A Practitioner's Guide to Treating Challenging Behavior Problems

By Pat Harvey ACSW LCSW-C, Britt H. Rathbone MSSW LCSW-C



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Adolescents are more likely than any other age groups to engage in behaviors that contribute to injuries, violence, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and reckless alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. At-risk adolescents may also exhibit signs of moodiness, aggression, and even self-injury, and these behaviors often cause parents, teachers, and clinicians to become extremely frustrated. Adolescents themselves may even believe that change is impossible.

Drawing on proven-effective dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), *Dialectical Behavior Therapy for At-Risk Adolescents* is the first reader-friendly and easily accessible DBT book specifically targeted to mental health professionals treating adolescents who may be dangerous to themselves or others. If you work with adolescents who exhibit at-risk behavior, you know how important it is to take immediate action. However, you may also have trouble “breaking through” the barrier that these young people can build around themselves. This book can help.

The DBT skills outlined in this book are evidence-based, and have been clinically proven to help build emotion regulation skills, which are useful for all age groups, though perhaps especially for the millions of at-risk adolescents experiencing depression, anxiety, anger, and the myriad behaviors that can result from these emotions. This book also includes practical handouts and exercises that can be used in individual therapy sessions, skills training groups, school settings, and when working with parents and caregivers.

Adolescents stand at the precipice of the future, and the decisions they make now can have life-long impacts. By showing them how to manage their emotions and deal with the stresses that are common in day-to-day life, you are arming them with the tools they will need to succeed and thrive.



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## **Bibliography**

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

“Harvey and Rathbone have written a gem of a book! *Dialectical Behavior Therapy for At-Risk Adolescents* is a must-read for all practitioners who treat this population, regardless of their therapeutic orientation. DBT practitioners will find much in this book to deepen and enhance their work; practitioners with other orientations will find ideas, skills and techniques to add to their own therapeutic style. ... The authors are clearly dedicated to providing the most effective treatment possible for adolescents and their families. Through this book, they generously share their knowledge with the rest of us. This book represents a major contribution to DBT and all therapy that involves working with adolescents.”

—**Judi Sprei, PhD**, psychologist and contributor at [www.dbtpsychologist.com](http://www.dbtpsychologist.com), Bethesda, MD

“I highly recommend *Dialectical Behavior Therapy for At-Risk Adolescents* to practitioners. Harvey and Rathbone skillfully review DBT and articulate sound reasoning for its use with at-risk adolescents. The reader will find detailed tools and interventions targeting challenging adolescent emotions and behaviors. The sample dialogues, practice assignments, and handouts designed specifically for work with adolescents also provide the reader with concrete tools that can be easily incorporated into practice. Harvey and Rathbone have crafted a clear rationale and comprehensive guide for clinicians seeking practical and straightforward interventions for using dialectical behavior therapy with adolescents.”

—**Christy Matta, MA**, author of *The Stress Response*

“This book provides a sympathetic view of the adolescent in crisis and has smart, accessible ideas for therapists and parents.”

—**Anne Kendall, PhD**, DBT psychologist at The Wake Kendall Group, Washington, DC

“*Dialectical Behavior Therapy for At-Risk Adolescents* is a welcome addition to the scant resources available for using DBT with this population—the very population that so desperately needs DBT. The text is immediately accessible and doesn’t rely on jargon, making it the ideal introduction for those who would like to begin to use this powerful technology but may have been intimidated by other sources. For those who have more experience with DBT for adults, it provides key concepts and modifications to help extend their practice to adolescents. Additionally, the authors’ use of charts, summarizing bullet points, concise language, case examples, and exercise suggestions provide experienced practitioners with an effective refresher and quick reference that supports their continued growth and commitment as a DBT provider.”

—**Abby Sarrett-Cooper, MA, LPC**, licensed professional counselor in private practice in New Jersey

“Full of practical examples and concrete tools, this book provides invaluable strategies for working with the toughest adolescents. Regardless of your DBT background, this book will prove useful to any professional seeking to help young people whose intense emotional reactions get in the way of building the lives they want. Harvey and Rathbone draw on their years of clinical experience to lay out an evidence-based treatment that is compassionate to youth and parents alike.”

—**Simona Dumitrescu Murnick, MD**, child and adolescent psychiatrist

“Harvey and Rathbone have created a clear, comprehensive, and accessible guide for clinicians who use DBT with adolescents and their families. ... This book is filled with practical how-to steps, including case examples and worksheets that practitioners can turn to again and again. It could be invaluable for any therapist who wants to use DBT with adolescents and their families.”

—**Brian Corrado, PsyD**, psychologist in Bethesda, MD

“This book offers readers an understanding of at-risk behavior that conveys respect and compassion for adolescents and their caregivers. The collaborative treatment strategies highlighted throughout the text provide hope that change and relief are possible for families that have struggled with the endless challenges that accompany behaviors such as self-injury, substance abuse, and aggression.”

—**Elizabeth Fessenden, MA, LMHC**, assistant director of dialectical behavior therapy services at The Bridge of Central Massachusetts, Inc.

“Reading this book by Pat Harvey and Britt H. Rathbone felt to me like having incredibly warm, expert DBT colleagues sitting with me while I was treating a challenging, even frightening, kid and family. They are sophisticated and practical when providing tips and examples of how to talk with teens and parents; how to introduce DBT, mindfulness, dialectics, behavioral chain analysis, diary cards (wisely renamed daily logs); and a multitude of other typical and difficult tasks. They give a wonderful guide to the five modules of DBT, along with examples, handouts, and worksheets for how to teach them. Their section on how to apply DBT for coaching parents is a real advancement to this evolving treatment. Having read their book, I know I will be a more balanced, skilled, and validating DBT therapist with teens and families.”

—**Charles Swenson, MD**, associate clinical professor of psychiatry for University of Massachusetts Medical School

“DBT has moved beyond diagnostic groups and specific target symptoms. By making DBT skills more broadly accessible, the authors provide powerful tools to at-risk adolescents and their parents. The skill sets in this book target the prevention of emerging psychiatric problems, and will endure as essential guidelines for effective living beyond crises. This book is a wonderful, alternative—and yet essential—guide to raising teens who are both at risk and not at risk!”

—**Blaise Aguirre, MD**, staff psychiatrist at Harvard’s McLean Hospital

#### About the Author

**Pat Harvey, ACSW, LCSW-C**, has been providing clinical social work services to individuals with emotion dysregulation and their families for over thirty years. Harvey trains mental health professionals in dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) skills and philosophy by facilitating trainings and workshops at organizations and conferences across the country, and helped to develop one of the first DBT-based group homes for adolescents. The focus of her practice is providing DBT-skill group and individual coaching to parents and other family members of youths who have emotion dysregulation. She is cofounder of the Metro DBT Consortium and coauthor of *Parenting a Child Who Has Intense Emotions*.

**Britt H. Rathbone, ACSW, LCSW-C**, provides psychotherapy services to adolescents and their families in the greater Washington, DC, area. He is consistently voted one of Washington’s best therapists for adolescents, and actively teaches graduate students and trains other professionals on issues of adolescent

development and clinical treatment. He has been providing DBT services to adolescents since 2002, and is cofounder of the Metro DBT Consortium.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Luz Davis:**

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#### **Michele Anderson:**

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#### **Terri Mitchell:**

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