

Preliminary Evidence for the Effectiveness of Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Adolescents

Hollenbaugh, K. M. H., & Lenz, A. S. (2018). Preliminary Evidence for the Effectiveness of Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Adolescents. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 96*(2), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12186>

What is the Study About?

- Effectiveness of dialectical behavior therapy for adolescents (DBT-A)
- The five modules of DBT-A are distress tolerance, mindfulness, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and walking the middle path
- DBT is a treatment focused on treating consistent emotion dysregulation related to a variety of mental illnesses by teaching emotion regulation skills to individuals

Why is it Important?

- 50% of U.S. adolescents will struggle with mental illness at some point
- Among these individuals 32% will struggle with an anxiety disorder, and 14% of them will struggle with a mood disorder
- 40% of adolescents will be diagnosed with multiple disorders at some point in their lives
- Regardless of having a diagnosed mental illness, up to 50% of adolescents will engage in self harm at some point in their life
- Of adolescents with depression 30% will experience suicide ideation
- Suicide is the number two cause of death for adolescents

How Was the Study Done?

- Meta-analysis that looked at the effectiveness of DBT-A in reducing the symptoms of anxiety, depression, self-injury, and/or suicide risk
- Between-group studies of DBT-A compared to no treatment or an alternative treatment conducted between 1991 and 2016
- A total of 12 articles were found
 - Anxiety – 10
 - Depression – 8
 - Self-Injury – 3
 - Suicide – 8

What Did They Find?

Problem	DBT-A Compared to	Mean Effect Size
Anxiety	Alternative Treatment	-0.46
Depression	Alternative Treatment	-0.46
Depression	No Treatment	-0.40
Self-Injury	Alternative Treatment	-0.36
Suicide	Alternative Treatment	-0.47

Negative numbers indicate a reduction in symptoms

What Can School Social Workers Do?

- None of the studies included in the meta-analysis were indicated to have occurred in a regular (non-alternative) school setting
- However, the students can be prompted to utilize the DBT skills they have learned within their regular (home) school environment