

# SSW RESEARCH BRIEF

## Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Adolescents with Repeated Suicidal and Self-harming Behavior

Mehlum, Tørmoen, Ramberg, Haga, Diep, Laberg, . . . Grøholt. (2014). Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Adolescents With Repeated Suicidal and Self-harming Behavior: A Randomized Trial. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 53(10), 1082-1091.

### What is the study about?

The authors of this study examined if a shortened form of dialectical behavioral therapy for adolescents (DBT-A) is more effective than enhanced usual care (EUC) to reduce self-harm in adolescents.

- ❖ *Between 5 and 10 % of adolescents report past-year self-harm, with cutting as the most commonly reported method.*
- ❖ *Only 10-20% of adolescents who have self-harmed report receiving any kind of subsequent treatment.*

### Major Concepts from the Paper.

- DBT-A was adapted from dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) for outpatient treatment of self-harming adolescents, it consists of weekly individual sessions, weekly multifamily skills training, family sessions and extra phone support as needed.
- DBT-A has a substantially shorter duration than most comparable interventions that target adolescents that self-harm.
- This study was a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of adolescents with recent and repetitive self-harm treated which tested DBT-A against EUC.
- Adolescents with borderline traits and repetitive self-harm have usually been considered a difficult to treat population, this study suggests that it is possible for adolescents to be engaged, retained, and treated successfully and safely.

**What did they find?** The findings of the study suggest that DBT is effective in reducing frequency of self-harm, severity of suicidal ideation, and depressive symptoms.

**Why is it important?** There are an increasing number of adolescents that are engaging in self-harm and it is often discovered in schools. While the preferred method of treatment would be services outside of the school, some students may face barriers that limit their access to these resources. School social workers should have knowledge of EBP for treating self-harming behaviors and be able to incorporate it into their work with adolescents that self-harm.

### What Can School Social Workers Do?

- Identify and locate local agencies/providers in the community that use DBT-A to treat adolescents that self-harm and refer to those organizations first.
- Familiarize themselves with DBT-A and its components, incorporate it into their work with adolescents that self-harm.
- Inform mental health professionals at the school of the effectiveness of DBT-A in treating adolescents that self-harm.

