

DBT and DBT-S: What's the difference?

You may have heard about Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Substance Abusers or DBT-S. As you might imagine, many individuals diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) also have issues with substance use, so it's not an uncommon pairing. In fact, both BPD and Substance Use Disorders (SUD) may actually share a common root which is trauma.

Based on an article linked to this website, *Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Substance Abusers* by Linda A. Dimeff, Ph.D. and Marsha M. Linehan, Ph.D., in *Addiction Science & Clinical Practice*, 2008, June; 4 (2): 39 – 47, the differences between DBT and DBT-S are summed up below.

First, the DBT therapist communicates in the first session with the client an expectation of abstinence from substances and asks the client to commit to a period of abstinence which s/he feels confident can be achieved. When the client achieves the period of abstinence, another commitment is requested. The therapist also predicts to the client that s/he may be challenged, like a "butterfly", to stay attached to treatment and the two of them develop a plan should the client miss sessions or fail to stay connected as agreed upon. Other aspects of DBT-S similar to relapse prevention strategies, are "coping ahead", in which the client proactively takes steps to avoid relapse while at the same time s/he "burns bridges" to his/her substance abusing past.

The "reasonable mind" and "emotion mind" dialectic from DBT that's synthesized into "wise mind" has a parallel in DBT-S. The descriptions are "addict mind" and "clean mind" synthesizing into "clear mind". In this case, the "addict mind" is the client at the beginning of treatment at which point his/her life is ruled by the addiction. As the client achieves abstinence, his/her outlook changes to "clean mind". However, in "clean mind" the client may not be using substances, but s/he may be in the honeymoon phase of recovery, confident that a relapse could not happen to them. The healthy balance is "clear mind" in which not only is the client enjoying freedom from substance use, but at the same time is fully aware (mindful) and prepared for any threats to his/her recovery.