



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Groups for Eating Disorders

DBT adapted for eating disorders applies the four DBT skill modules, mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness, to the patterns that maintain disordered eating. It starts from a key observation: binge eating, purging, and restriction often work as ways to manage overwhelming feelings. So rather than targeting food and body behaviors first, DBT targets the emotional dysregulation that drives them, teaching coping that does the same job without the harm. The group is the main skills vehicle, usually paired with individual therapy.

WHO IT'S FOR, AND WHO IT'S NOT

- A strong fit when emotional dysregulation is prominent and you'll do the homework.
- Not for those medically unstable or needing a higher level of care.
- Not first-line for anorexia without added clinical support. In crisis? Call or text 988.

What it's for

Primarily binge eating disorder and bulimia, where emotion and eating link clearly.

Also eating disorders with self-harm, suicidality, or marked mood instability.

A good fit when CBT-based approaches haven't fully worked.

WHAT TO EXPECT

1 Sessions run 90 minutes to two hours: homework review, new skill, practice, assignment.

2 Diary cards between sessions track eating, emotions, and skill use.

3 This is skills training, not open-ended processing: the question stays "which skill, and how?"

DBT for eating disorders has a meaningful and growing evidence base.

- The original group trial for bulimia found **significantly greater drops in binge-purge episodes** than waitlist, with 29% reaching abstinence.¹
- A 2021 review of 11 studies found gains in **emotion regulation, eating pathology, and mood**, strongest for binge eating and bulimia.²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Fill the diary card. Tracking is how the skills find their moment.

Catch the chain early. Skills work best before the urge peaks.

Expect clumsy. Skills get smoother with daily reps.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1 Is the leader trained in both DBT and eating disorder treatment?
- 2 Is it the 20-session adapted protocol or a full DBT program?
- 3 Is individual therapy part of it, and is medical monitoring in place?

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Sources

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- 1 Safer, D. L., Telch, C. F., & Agras, W. S. Dialectical behavior therapy for bulimia nervosa. *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2001), 158(4), 632–634.
- 2 Rozakou-Soumalia, N., Dârvariu, Ş., & Sjögren, J. M. Dialectical behaviour therapy improves emotion dysregulation mainly in binge eating disorder and bulimia nervosa: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Personalized Medicine* (2021), 11(9), 931.

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