



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT

Mentalization-Based Treatment (MBT) Groups

MBT is a structured psychotherapy developed by Anthony Bateman and Peter Fonagy, originally for borderline personality disorder (BPD) and now used across personality disorders, eating disorders, and depression where difficulties in mentalizing are central. Mentalizing is the ability to understand yourself and others in terms of mental states, thoughts, feelings, needs, intentions, and to see behavior as driven by those states rather than as random or malicious. People with BPD often struggle to mentalize under emotional arousal. MBT combines individual and group sessions; the group is not a support add-on but a treatment arena where mentalizing breakdowns can be worked with in real time.

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

- A fit for those stable enough for weekly work and a 12 to 18 month commitment.
- Not for acute crisis requiring hospitalization.
- Severe trauma may need trauma-focused treatment alongside or before MBT.

What it's for

BPD above all: emotional instability, impulsivity, self-harm, and suicidality.

Also other personality disorders, eating disorders, and comorbid depression.

MBT-A is the specific adaptation for adolescents.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- 1 Groups of 6 to 8 meet weekly for 75 to 90 minutes, over 12 to 18 months.
- 2 No curriculum: the therapist slows down interpersonal moments as they arise.
- 3 Combined individual and group is standard; group alone is not the model.

MBT is a leading evidence-based treatment for BPD.

- A network meta-analysis of 75 trials ranked MBT **among the most effective and acceptable treatments for BPD**, alongside DBT.¹
- A review of 14 studies found MBT and MBT-A produced **large reductions in self-harm, BPD symptoms, and depression** ($g=0.82$ for self-harm).²

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

Breakdowns are the material. Misreadings get worked with as they happen.

Many minds to read. A group offers richer practice than the dyad.

Curiosity over certainty. The skill is tolerating not knowing what others think.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU JOIN

- 1 Is the program both individual and group, as standard MBT requires?
- 2 Is the facilitator specifically MBT-trained and certified?
- 3 For a teen, is MBT-A available rather than the adult model?

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If you're in crisis, call or text 988.

The Group Guide is a directory, not a clinic. This handout is general education, not medical or mental health advice. Listings are written by group leaders and are not endorsements. Confirm details, cost, and fit with any group you contact. Sources on page 2.



Sources

Mentalization-Based Treatment (MBT) Groups · references keyed to the numbers on page 1.

- 1 Setkowski, K., Palantza, C., van Ballegooijen, W., et al. Which psychotherapy is most effective and acceptable in the treatment of adults with a (sub)clinical borderline personality disorder? A systematic review and network meta-analysis. *Psychological Medicine* (2023), 53(8), 3261–3280.
- 2 Hajek Gross, C., Oehlke, S.-M., Prillinger, K., et al. Efficacy of mentalization-based therapy in treating self-harm: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* (2024), 54(2), 317–337.

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