



Parent FAQs

Edition 01



What is DBT in Schools?

DBT is short for “Dialectic Behavioral Therapy” – which is basically a skills-based approach to helping individuals manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and cope with stress by balancing acceptance and change. Cayuga County’s DBT in Schools program brings many of the skills from this approach into your child’s classroom, where it can benefit all young people without a one-to-one therapy context. More specifically, DBT in Schools is intended to teach your child practical skills to manage emotions, tolerate stress, improve interpersonal relationships, and benefit from the practice of mindfulness.



Why is a school environment an appropriate setting for accessing my kids?

Schools are where students spend most of their time, making them the perfect place for teaching emotional resilience and coping skills. By integrating DBT into the school environment, we ensure early intervention, reduce mental health stigma, and provide consistent, accessible support for all students. When social-emotional learning is a part of everyday education, students are better equipped to manage stress, succeed academically, and build healthy relationships. Let’s make school a place where mental wellness is just as important as academic success!



Why is it needed today?

In today's world, youth face increasing stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges, making it essential to equip them with skills to manage emotions and build resilience.

DBT helps students navigate daily challenges – from managing conflicts with peers and handling test anxiety to effectively asking for what they need. It also provides critical skills for coping with overwhelming emotions, reducing self-harm behaviors, and managing suicidal thoughts in a supportive and constructive way.

By integrating DBT into schools, we empower students with the tools they need to handle both big and small challenges with confidence and emotional stability.



Will it be disruptive to my child's everyday education?

No! By teaching you such DBT in School skills such as combating impulsiveness and reducing unregulated behaviors, teachers will be better able to keep hold of your child's attention and focus on his/her classroom throughout the day as they learn English, History, etc.



What if I feel DBT in Schools “doesn't apply to me?”

Please keep in mind that for students not currently struggling academically, socially or emotionally, these DBT skills serve as preventative measures, helping ensure your child is well-educated and well-prepared to handle emotions and stressors in the future.

Know, too, that DBT in Schools is not a therapy program, but is a curriculum used to teach students certain helpful skills.



What are the goals for DBT in Schools as implemented in Cayuga County schools?

It's possible to cultivate a healthy lifestyle for mental wellness, just as programs have been introduced to promote physical health. By incorporating mental health skills via DBT into the universal school culture, we will give all students the knowledge of how to address a variety of challenges they may face in the future. Typical goals would include aiding students in effective problem solving or how to most effectively communicate with peers and teachers.

Other goals would include helping students manage difficult emotional situations, cope with stress and make better decisions. Obviously, a number of these outcomes would be applicable outside of school, many within the family setting.



Why should you care about DBT for kids?

Navigating the roller coaster of emotions for students can be difficult but envision having the right tools to help them do so. DBT in Schools encourages young people to control their emotions, and it discourages black-and-white thinking – avoiding extremes like “everything is terrible” or “I’m perfect.” This approach allows students to deal with hard times more easily while boosting their mood.



Does the universal approach to DBT in Schools help identify youngsters who may require additional one-on-one attention?

Absolutely! If you have specific concerns, or you're at a point where you think general training in DBT in Schools skills may not be adequate, there will be a DBT in Schools specialist/onsite therapist at school a couple of days each week.



How will we know if it's working? In other words, how will program success be measured?

In schools that have successfully implemented DBT in Schools program, outcomes are typically measured through a combination of:

- Self-report questionnaires are where students complete surveys to assess their own perceptions of emotional regulation, ability to cope with stress and use of DBT in School skills.
- Behavioral observation scales occur when teachers use checklists to track specific behaviors related to DBT in School skills, such as appropriate responses to frustration, active listening during discussions or ability to self-calm.
- Teacher feedback where teachers can provide qualitative feedback on how students are applying DBT in Schools skills in the classroom, such as improvements in classroom behavior.



Watch for other DBT in Schools FAQs.

In the meantime, if you have questions about the advantages of DBT in Schools in your child's classroom – please feel free to contact your DBT in Schools onsite specialist. Cayuga County Mental Health will also be sending out occasional updates through ParentSquare, social media, and our DBT in Schools website.