



Teacher FAQs

Edition 01



What is DBT in Schools?

DBT is short for “Dialectic Behavioral Therapy” – which is basically a skills-based approach to helping students 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 classroom, where it can benefit all students without a one-to-one therapy context. More specifically, DBT in Schools is intended to help you, as a teacher, introduce DBT’s practical skills to students in order to help them manage emotions, tolerate stress, improve interpersonal relationships, and benefit from the practice of mindfulness.



Why is a school environment an appropriate setting for accessing young people?

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.



Can DBT in Schools skills be of use outside of school or once young people graduate?

Most definitely. DBT in Schools' skills bring mental wellness strategies to schools and allow students to obtain their education potential today and become leaders for tomorrow.

Think of these skills comparable to a toolkit for navigating life's ups and downs, both in school, outside of school and beyond school.



How will it be implemented in our school and in my classroom?

Each school district who adopts the program (and it's optional) will have a DBT specialist/onsite therapist in school a couple of days a week to teach the teachers how to adapt the skills in their classrooms. Those same therapists will also be available for students who require more intensive DBT engagement.



Will I have the tools, training and a certified therapist to help me implement the program?

Your onsite DBT specialist/onsite therapist will help you introduce DBT in Schools' skills in your classroom. He/she will also be available to answer your questions, aid students needing one-on-one attention, etc. There is also a website you can visit to access a growing list of resources.

It's important to note that school administrators know that you are extremely busy as it is. That's why they are going to make this easy for you...the therapist down the hall is going to make it easy. You'll be given all the necessary tools that are not going to be difficult to learn, not be difficult to implement and not interrupt your current teaching schedule.



How will success be measured?

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

- Self-report questionnaires where students complete surveys to assess their own perceptions of their emotional regulation, ability to cope with stress and use of DBT in Schools' skills.
- Behavioral observation scales in which teachers may use checklists to track specific behaviors related to DBT in Schools' 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.



Where did this curriculum come from?

The program is being introduced by Cayuga County Mental Health but it's a comprehensive and well-proven curriculum developed by the originators of the **DBT in Schools** concept, Drs. James Mazza and Elizabeth Dexter-Mazza.



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.



Why should you care about DBT for kids?

Navigating the roller coaster of emotions can be difficult, but envision having the right tools to help them do so. DBT in Schools encourages students 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.



Watch for other DBT in Schools FAQs.

In the meantime, if you have questions about the advantages or procedures for introducing DBT in Schools in YOUR 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.