

[Intro Music]

Zina Peters: We are On The Couch With Kiwi for another episode of our podcast series. I am your host Zina Peters, I am pleased to introduce to you today Dr. Justine Wallace, a university psychologist at FIU CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services). She will talk to us today about Dialectical Behavior Therapy which we will refer to as DBT. Welcome Dr. Wallace!

Dr. Wallace: Thank you guys for having me On The Couch With Kiwi!

Peters: We're so happy to have you here! So tell us about DBT and the problems it was developed to treat?

Dr. Wallace: Sure, so DBT stands for Dialectical Behavior Therapy which is a type of psychotherapy or talk therapy. It uses a cognitive behavioral approach and really what a cognitive behavioral approach is helping an individual change their unhelpful thinking and behaviors to improve mood and functioning. DBT is based on that we are putting more of an emphasis on an emotional and social aspects of an individual. So it was developed in the late 1980s by Marsh Linehan to help treat something called borderline personality disorder. Symptoms of this disorder include emotional instability, feelings of worthlessness, insecurity, impulsivity, and impaired social relationships. If this sounds like something that you experienced don't panic just yet, these symptoms do not necessarily mean a diagnosis but schedule an appointment with a mental health provider either through CAPS or the community to further discuss your experiences and further talk about with what's going to best address your needs. So DBT has been shown to be effective in many behavioral issues as well as helping reduce suicide attempts as well as harming behavior and hospitalization. If you are experiencing thoughts about wanting to harm yourself or kill yourself seek help immediately, you can contact CAPS at our main number at (305)-348-2277 or in the community you can contact the switch board of Miami at 211 or if you have an immediate plan of killing yourself contact 911.

Peters: So what does DBT stand for, like those letters?

Dr. Wallace: Sure! So DBT is Dialectical Behavior Therapy so that means the D stands for dialectics and that refers to the underlying assumption that opposite ideas can be combined to come up with a more balanced and more accurate view of reality. So one of the main dialectics is that an individual needs to fully accept themselves while at the same time they must change and that's that B in DBT, the change is a behavior. So let me just tell you a little more about how DBT operates. It comes from the biosocial theory and what that means, is that it's a transaction between biology and social environment that influences a person. So some people are more biologically predisposed to experience

emotions, they are more sensitive so they may feel emotions much more often and more intensely than others. They also have more difficulty regulating these emotions and then returning back to that normal baseline. So, the social aspect of the theory talks about an invalidating social environment and how that makes it hard to regulate our emotions also. What is an invalidating environment? One where maybe we're told your emotions are wrong, what's wrong with you, why are you feeling that way, or maybe you're just ignored that doesn't make us feel good; so that ends up reinforcing our out of control behavior. So, that interaction between social and biological environment impacts how we express and regulate our emotions.

Peters: That makes so much sense, yeah. Thanks for sharing that, so what are the core skills of DBT?

Dr. Wallace: Sure! So DBT acknowledges that there's a problem with the way we're thinking, so the therapist will work with an individual to accept this rather than judge it and then help you make those changes and those changes help with the skills of DBT. It's broken down into four different skills mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Peters: So can you breakdown those skills for us and tell us what each one is all about?

Dr. Wallace: Sure! So mindfulness is about staying present in the moment and really improving our ability to do that. This doesn't mean our minds go blank, but rather we allow those thoughts to pass through, kind of like a cloud floating through the sky. We focus really on the *what* skills and on the *how* skills. The *what* skills include observing describing and participating so what are we actually doing in the moment. And then, the *how* skills are nonjudgmentally, one-mindfully, and effectively. Nonjudgmentally just means we're not doing it with judgement, we're not saying it's good or bad, it's just accepting what we're doing in that moment. One-mindfully means doing things one at a time. A lot of us struggle with that, especially since we all have our phones that have everything right there.

Peters: It's multitaskers, right?

Dr. Wallace: Exactly! And we say that's a good thing and at the same time it doesn't allow us to be fully present in the moment. So then lastly, is effectively and that actually means being mindful of what your goals are in a situation and doing what works. So then, we jump into distress tolerance how do we really manage the emotions when we can't change them, so it teaches us how to soothe ourselves in a way that is healthy rather than avoiding or hiding from our emotions. So, we allow ourselves time to make a wise

decision really looking at the logic and the reasoning behind something and balancing that with emotion. Some ways that we can do this is by taking deep breaths before responding or walking away. Even changing our body temperature by taking a hot shower or sticking out hand in some ice can really make a difference in allowing us to stop and think. Then we look at emotion regulations and that's really helping people understand their emotions, it helps us to decrease the intensity of our feelings and help us experience strong emotions without necessarily acting on them. So the goal is to learn how to better manage them, how can we describe it, and then how do we change them. We can change them by checking the facts, doing the opposite reaction, or problem solving. And then, we focus a little bit on how do we really build a life worth living by really looking at our emotions and reducing our vulnerability to them. Then lastly, looking at our interpersonal effectiveness skills, and that's really helping us understand what our needs are in a relationship and how do we go about getting our needs met. That involves looking at how do we respect ourselves, how do we communicate effectively with other people, how do we deal with people that we really don't know how to deal with, repairing relationships, and then being able to say no and set boundaries with others. Those are what we really focus on to learn how to better learn to manage our behaviors, our emotions, and our thoughts.

Peters: Those are really helpful skills to have I think it could benefit anyone. And so, what are the goals in DBT?

Dr. Wallace: So the goals of DBT are pretty simple. They teach people how to live more in the moment, cope healthy with stress, better manage our emotions, and improve our relationships with others.

Peters: Very helpful goals

Dr. Wallace: And they tie right into those skills.

Peters: And is it effective for anyone who is having a mental or behavioral health need or need that kind of support?

Dr. Wallace: It definitely is. DBT is what we call an evidence-based treatment, which means it has research to support its effectiveness. So, DBT assumes that many of the problems that we're facing are because we don't have the skills to deal with them. So, DBT will allow you to learn some of these skills to manage these situations, these emotions, and these relationships in a healthier way. There's focus on individual and group work and it provides ways for collaboration and support and interventions that help us look at those thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. So it definitely is effective for mental and behavioral

health support, I would recommend, if this is something you're interested in is seeking out support from a mental health provider, to discuss what you've been experiencing and then come up with an appropriate treatment plan.

Peters: And so with that, who could benefit from DBT?

Dr. Wallace: Kind of like what you said, anyone can really benefit from the skills in DBT. A lot of us are already doing them without maybe putting the label of DBT on them. It was initially developed for those with borderline personality disorder. However, it has been beneficial for clients who have chronic difficulty with regulating emotions, managing, and keeping healthy relationships, tolerating distress, and those who engage in impulsive behaviors, including self-harm.

Peters: So here at FIU at CAPS are there any groups or workshops that may provide DBT support to our college students?

Dr. Wallace: We offer something called ADAPT, which is to help you learn to live a more adaptive lifestyle and it focuses on the skills taught in DBT. It operates throughout the semester and it goes through mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness to teach these skills and really help students master them to better improve their ability to regulate their own emotions and manage the stresses and relationships that they have. We're also in the process of developing a workshop that will provide this information and some of these skills in a more brief shorter format, so that we can reach more students who may benefit from some of these.

Peters: Definitely! Well that's a really great resource coming down the pipeline really soon. I really just want to pause and say thank you so much for sharing all of this information about DBT and the work that is being done here at CAPS to really support our students.

Dr. Wallace: Thank you for inviting me to be On The Couch With Kiwi and allowing me this opportunity to share this information!

Peters: Yeah well, we enjoyed having you! To our listeners please visit caps.fiu.edu to listen to more podcasts and to learn more about other CAPS services and thank you very much for joining us today On The Couch With Kiwi.

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