

# Skills Squad: An adaptive Dialectical Behaviour Therapy for youth with cognitive challenges

Sarah Adair BSc

Micheline Low MSW

Jennifer Wide MSc, MD, FRCPC, ABAM(D)

23 February 2023

·FOUNDRY·

*We acknowledge, with gratitude, that we work on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the <sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and se'ílwitulh (Tsleil-waututh) Nations.*

# Clear Picture Exercise



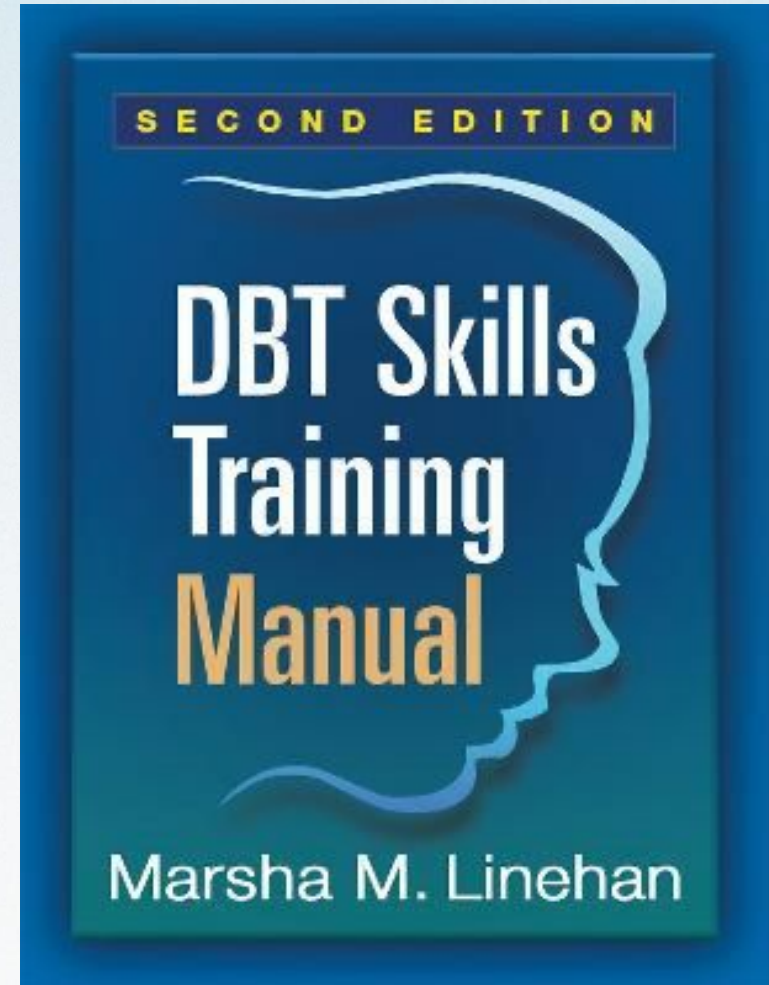
Source: Public Domain

# Why adapt DBT?

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is a world renowned evidence-based therapy, developed by Marsha Linehan, Ph.D., professor of psychology and researcher at the University of Washington, to treat people with borderline personality disorder, that uses skills and strategies to help regulate emotions, manage distress, practice acceptance and improve interpersonal relations

Challenges with DBT:

- Pace
- Language/abstract concepts
- Cognitive overload
- Limited scaffolding





Source: Public Domain

What is needed...

Simplification (reduced skills)

AND

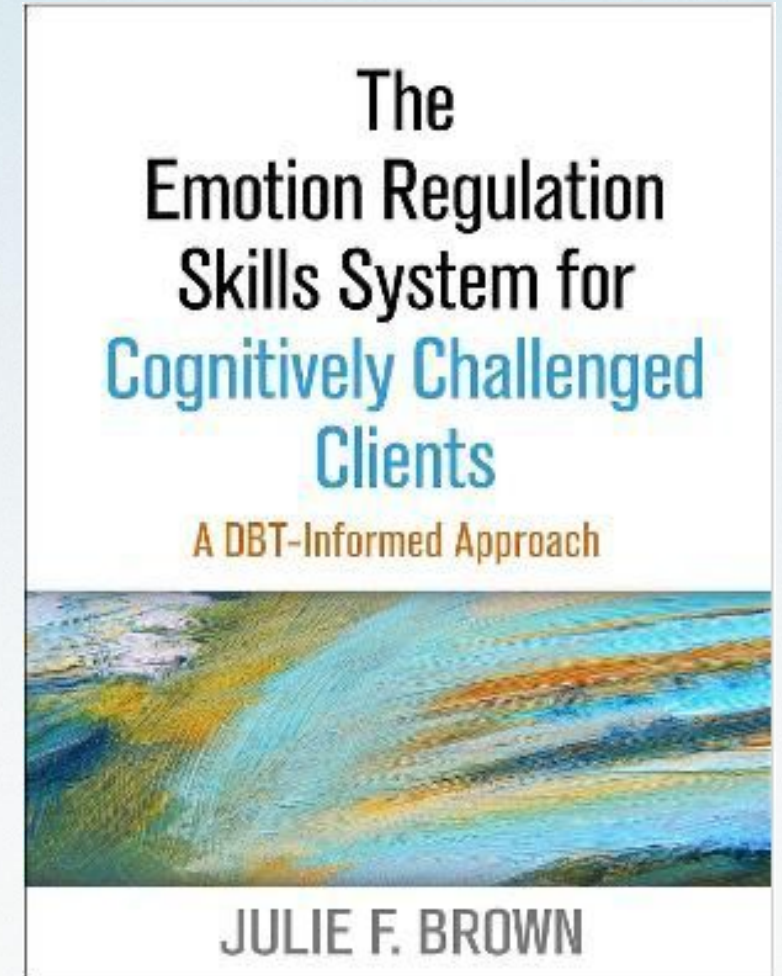
Scaffolding (when to use what skill)

# Skills System

Julie Brown, PhD., developed an adapted form of DBT, called the Skills System, which was specifically designed for individuals with intellectual challenges.

Benefits of Skills System:

- Modifies concepts from standard DBT, albeit reduces complexity
- Uses relatable language and images
- Repetition to promote learning
- Increased visuals
- Reduced to 9 skills learnt



# Skills System (at Foundry Granville)

- Group of clinicians (social work, psychology, psychiatry) taught ourselves the manual
- Joined the Skills System Community of Practice
- Consulted with Dr Julie Brown, developer of Skills System
- Input from Youth Advisory Committee
- Clinicians rotate in co-facilitating, with a consistent main facilitator
- Youth commit to one hour weekly x 12 weeks; may repeat x 3 = 1 year



# Skills Squad



Source: Public Domain

# Referral Criteria

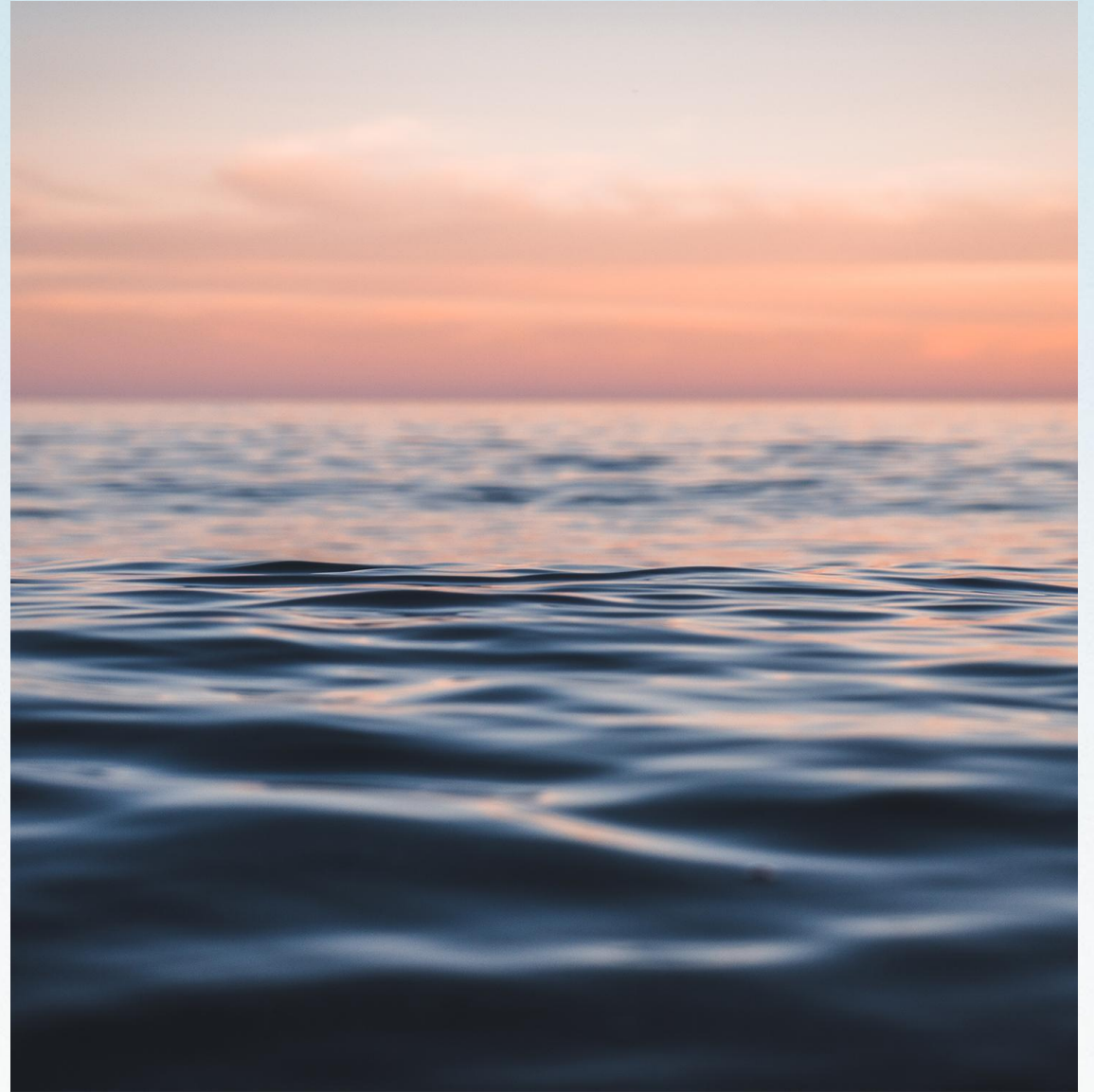
- Youth 16-24 yo
- FSIQ = 100 or below
- Impaired working memory and/or processing speed ( = 79 or below)
- Struggles with emotion and social challenges
- (BPD dx is not required)
- Minimal substance use
- No active/recent psychosis
- FASD, TBI, ASD dx are accepted

We are accepting referrals!

# Why Learn Skills System?

- 1) Persons with intellectual challenges are particularly prone to difficulties with mood regulation and socialization
- 2) A unified approach to behavioural therapy is needed
- 3) We want to provide youth any means to be more skillful and more capable, by generalizing concepts and applying skills effectively in their daily lives

## 9 Skills



Source: Public Domain

# Skills List & Categories



1. Clear Picture



2. On-Track Thinking



3. On-Track Action



4. Safety Plan



5. New-Me Activities



6. Problem Solving



7. Expressing Myself



8. Getting It Right



9. RelationSHIP Care

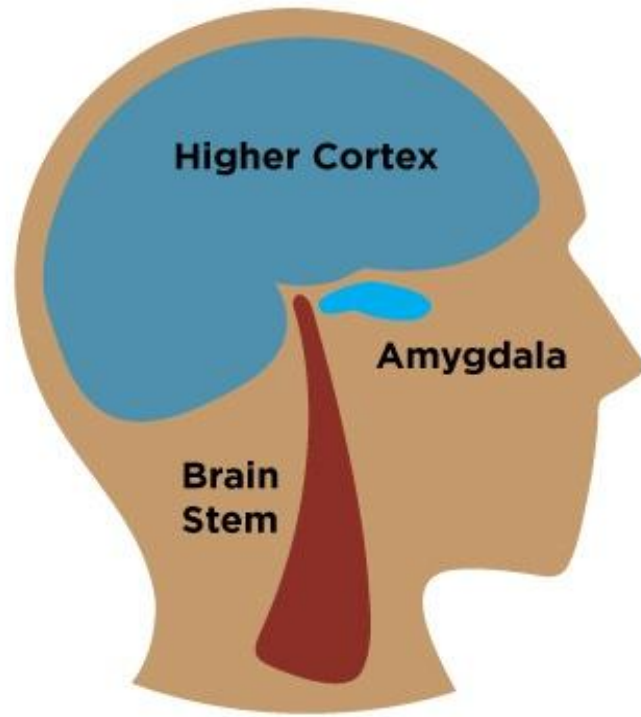
## All-The-Time Skills



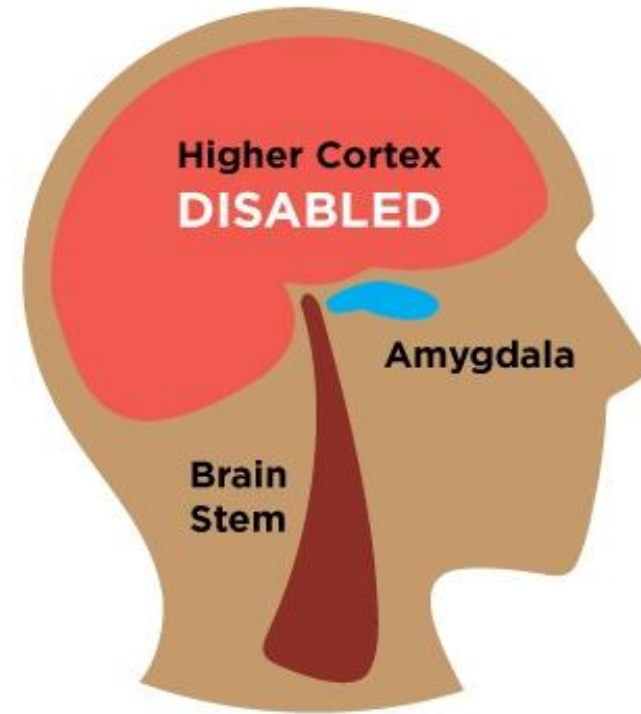
## Calm-Only Skills



Bigger emotions need the right type of skill



**LOW Emotion**  
(Calm, Relaxed)



**HIGH Emotion**  
(Anger, Fear, Excitement, Love,  
Hate, Disgust, Frustration)

# Feelings Rating Scale

**Level 5 =**  
Hurting Self, Other, or Property



**5** Overwhelming

**Level 4 =**  
Fuzzy Thinking;  
Unable to Talk, Listen  
& Have a 2-Way Street  
Relationship



**4** Strong Feeling



**3** Medium Feeling



**2** Small Feeling



**1** Tiny Feeling



**0** No Feeling

**Levels 0-3 =**  
Clear Thinking;  
Able to Talk, Listen &  
Have a 2-Way Street  
Relationship



# Skills List & Categories

-  1. Clear Picture
-  2. On-Track Thinking
-  3. On-Track Action
-  4. Safety Plan
-  5. New-Me Activities

-  6. Problem Solving
-  7. Expressing Myself
-  8. Getting It Right
-  9. RelationSHIP Care

## All-The-Time Skills



## Calm-Only Skills



# Skill 7 = Expressing Myself

- Determine what I want to express (thoughts, feelings, wants, desires, etc)
- How do I express this? (voicing, written, body language)
- Learning the right timing - “Calm Only” skill - can be used when at low level emotion
- Understand the difference between avoiding or venting
- Create an expressing myself plan





Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Expressing Myself Plan

What is something that is On My Mind or In My Heart?

\_\_\_\_\_

It is a: Thought    Concern    Need    Feeling    Like/dislike    Hope/dream

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Who do I need to Express Myself to?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why is it important to express this?

\_\_\_\_\_

How can I best Express Myself?

Talk in person    Phone call    Video    Signing    Letter    E-mail    Text    Body language

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

When is it best to Express Myself?

\_\_\_\_\_

Points I need to express:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Purpose of Evaluation

- To assess the feasibility and acceptability of repeated cycles of Skills Squad for inner city youth with co-occurring cognitive difficulties and complex mental health needs.
- We will measure pre-post changes in youth's emotional regulation and social-interpersonal functioning.

# Methodology

- Evaluations every 12 weeks
- Youth Evaluation
  - **Demographics**
  - **DERS-SF**
  - **LPI**
  - **ERKS**
  - **C-ORS**
  - **Acceptability scale**
- Care provider Evaluations
  - **DERS-P**
  - **ORS**

# Goals



My most important goal was ...

---

---



Did I reach this goal?

YES

NO

COMPLETED SOME OF IT



What might have got in the way?

---

---

	Not important to me				Very important to me	
Communication skills	0	1	2	3	4	5
Controlling my emotions	0	1	2	3	4	5
Health	0	1	2	3	4	5

# Hypotheses

- Youth tend to under-report challenges compared to caregivers
- Youth will improve scores of emotional and social functional functioning with each cycle
- Youth will find the therapy to be both feasible and acceptable

# References

- Bunford, N., Dawson, A.E., Evans, S.W., Ray, A.R., Langberg, J.M., Owens, J.S., DuPaul, G.J., Allan, D.M. (2020) The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Parent Report: A Psychometric Investigation Examining Adolescents With and Without ADHD. *Assessment*, 27(5):921-940. doi: 10.1177/1073191118792307.
- Duncan, B., Sparks, J., Miller, S., Bohanske, R., & Claud, D. (2006). Giving youth a voice: a preliminary study of the reliability and validity of a brief outcome measure for children. *Journal of Brief Therapy*, 5(1), 5–22. CC 2003.
- Kaufman, E.A., Xia, M., Fosco, G., Yaptangco, M., Skidmore, C.R., & Crowell, S. (2016). The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale Short Form (DERS-SF): validation and replication in adolescent and adult samples. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 38(443). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-015-9529-3>
- Miller, S. D., Duncan, B. L., Brown, J., Sparks, J., & Claud, D. (2003). The Outcome Rating Scale: A preliminary study of the reliability, validity, and feasibility of a brief visual analog measure. *Journal of Brief Therapy*, 2, 91-100. CC 2003.
- Natoli, A. P., & Brown, J. F. (2022). Development and initial examination of a measure of emotion regulation knowledge. *Journal of Projective Psychology and Mental Health*, 29(2), 87-96.
- Rathus, J.H., Wagner, D., & Miller, A.L. (2015). Psychometric evaluation of the Life Problems Inventory, a measure of borderline personality features in adolescents. *Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 5.
- Sekhon, M., Cartwright, M. & Francis, J.J. Acceptability of healthcare interventions: an overview of reviews and development of a theoretical framework. *BMC Health Serv Res* 17, 88 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-017-2031-8>.



# Our team!



Dr Melissa Bota, Psychiatrist



Dr Sheena Miao - Psychologist



Mich Low, Case Manager



Alison Barrett, Intake Coordinator



Sarah Adair, Research Coordinator



Dr Jen Wide, Psychiatrist

With many thanks to Dr Julie Brown  
.....AND our youth participants!

• F O U N D R Y •

foundrybc.ca



**foundrybc.ca/frayme2023**

e: [info@foundrybc.ca](mailto:info@foundrybc.ca)

web: [foundrybc.ca](http://foundrybc.ca)

• F O U N D R Y •