

Thinking In Your Own Colours

The CBT method helps analyse unhelpful thoughts and come to terms with feelings but it is all rather 'black and white'. DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) in contrast looks at the operating conflicts in each persons psyche that colour their behaviour. Hence mixed, or 'co-morbid', depression and anxiety (previously known as agitated depression) can be more effectively tackled. Most find either problem becomes both so it makes sense to tackle them together. Escape and avoidance behaviour are also countered. DBT is good for things in two's!

The principle of seeing a dialectic is recognising two opposing pulls on a situation. An example would be the trade-off between freedom and security for a given persons situation. It is unlikely anyone is truly at one end or the other of the scale (even if 'freedom is just nothing left to lose'). The exercise is to judge by questions whether a move one way or another along the scale might be beneficial, challenging the assumptions we tend to forget we have made. This is not a 50/50 game. We often adopt extreme positions in the spectrum for largely historical reasons or sound current ones.

That said we can see depression itself as a conflict between hopefulness and hopelessness

Hopefulness ←---where r u ?-----→Hopelessness

And if you follow so far we can do a similar description of anxiety.

Want Safety←-----'Anxiety conflict'-----→Feel Threat

Of course if you don't feel a threat you are unlikely to react to it/get things done. What would your driving be like without anxiety? This is described as Hebb's cone. There is what is known as an optimal hedonic tone, which is different for different folk.

We can put anxiety and depression together to describe a more complete 'pull' or driver.

Safety←-----Mixed Anxiety and Depression-----→Freedom

From here we could work up a whole pile of different dialectics but it is more helpful to try and isolate just where the problem ones are and look in more detail.

An example is Activity verses Passivity so try the following table. For each issue which statement would you endorse (left or right)? We could seem to be stuck back in black or white but instead of putting a 'number or colour' to each issue we are firstly looking at the balance of the scales. We can then quantify how many balance left and how many right to get an overall picture.

Activity ←-----conflict-----→ Passivity

I get things going. I begin projects without a lot of hesitation	I procrastinate. I just don't have the critical mass to begin, even when I know I should or want to
I want to make things different and know that my efforts will eventually pay off	I doubt my energy will result in any substantial changes in my life
Most of what has been accomplished in my life has been of my own doing	Others have provided me with things that are important to me
Variety and change is the spice of life and I welcome them	I dread change. Things are bad enough as they are. Change could be worse
I notice the world around me, it influences me in important ways that I seek out	The world frightens me. I need my safe places in order to feel comfort
I don't let my momentary feelings interfere with my long term projects and plans	My feelings control my life. When I am anxious or depressed I stop and wait for a better day before proceeding
I have influence over the course my life takes	I'm powerless to control the course of my life

You might consider writing down now examples of your active and passive behaviour in the past. Now the bold step. What will you strive to do differently from now on? If you choose to change your attitude in this way the results you get *and* the way you see them will be better (*well that's the theory, believe it if you will!*).

Some Other Dialectics

Self-Focus/Other-Focus (Extravert/Introvert?)

Self/Society

Trust/Suspicion

Transparency/Privacy

Independent/Dependent (Self Efficacy/Seeking Help-different?)

Skill Enhancement/Self-Acceptance

There are many others, some more to do with emotion, some with thought, values or coping strategies. Not all compromises we make rest with us easily and invalidation can be a problem. We have to construct our own meaning to our lives, whatever that entails. The use of *Mindfulness* has become an associated technique, useful for those who have experienced emotional turmoil.

Mindfulness

Through schooling we learn to name/categorize things and hence to stop observing them. We instead hold assumptions about them. Everything in neatly closed boxes.

This technique is about being in the moment *and* aware of your environment. People under pressure tend to be preoccupied understandably with their feelings but changing focus can help those nagging thoughts. If you are too single-minded you need a distraction to restore some balance. 'Oh still small voice of calm' as the hymn says. If you listen to suitable music or birdsong or even study your hands, get lost in a nature program, do the ironing etc. you can become more centred in your own existence. You *can* tune out the sad things that haunt you or your worries about your tax return and paying for the summer holidays. JUST BE ! (mindful/aware) Meditation is similar in a sense but this is about being functional not distant. It requires a lightness of touch and improves with practice. For people with big worries mastering the method allows them to dip into their hot zones without being so phased and so get on with the business of dealing with them.

To use the Dialectical Behaviour analysis effectively you obviously need to be aware of your own thoughts/feelings etc. and be prepared to observe them so mindfulness is kind of hand in glove with it.

People often talk about seeing or hearing themselves thinking. Professional development has coined the phrase 'reflective observation' as key to self improvement. It may be worth considering that if you can see yourself thinking the part of yourself that is seeing is *not* thinking. That part of you that is not thinking is very important. Do not lose sight of it!

Ian Hawkes, 29th March 2007