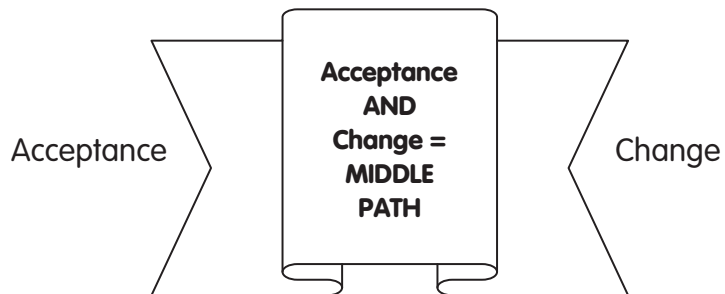


Dialectics: What Is It?

Dialectics teach us that:

- There is always more than one way to see a situation and more than one way to solve a problem.
- All people have unique qualities and different points of view.
- Change is the only constant.
- Two things that seem like (or are) opposites can both be true.
- *Honor* the truth on both sides of a conflict. This does not mean giving up your values or selling out. Avoid seeing the world in “black-and-white,” “all-or-nothing” ways.



Examples:

I am doing the best I can **AND** I need to do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change.

I can do this **AND** it's going to be hard. My mom is really strict **AND** she really cares about me. I've got big problems **AND** I can try to solve them. You are tough **AND** you are gentle.

This perspective helps pave the way toward the middle path by helping you:

- Expand your thoughts and ways of considering life situations.
- “Unstick” standoffs and conflicts.
- Be more flexible and approachable.
- Avoid assumptions and blaming.



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Dialectics “How-to” Guide

Hints for Thinking and Acting Dialectically:

1. Move to “both–and” thinking and away from “either/or” thinking. Avoid extreme words: *always, never, you make me*. Be descriptive.

Example: Instead of saying “Everyone *always* treats me unfairly,” say “*Sometimes* I am treated fairly *and* at other times, I am treated unfairly.”

2. Practice looking at all sides of a situation and all points of view. Be generous and dig deep. Find the kernel of truth in every side by asking “What is being left out?”

Example: “Why does Mom want me to be home at 10:00 P.M.?” “Why does my daughter want to stay out until 2:00 A.M.?”

3. Remember: No one has the absolute truth. Be open to alternatives.

4. Use “I feel . . .” statements, instead of “You are . . .,” “You should . . .,” or “That’s just the way it is” statements.

Example: Say “I feel angry when you say I can’t stay out later just because you said so” instead of, “You never listen and you are always unfair to me.”

5. Accept that different opinions can be valid, even if you do not agree with them.

Example: “I can see your point of view even though I do not agree with it.”

6. Check your assumptions. Do not assume that you know what others are thinking.

Example: “What did you mean when you said . . .?”

7. Do not expect others to know what you are thinking.

Example: “What I am trying to say is. . . .”

(continued)

Practice:

Circle the dialectical statements:

1. a. "It is hopeless. I just cannot do it."
b. "This is easy . . . I've got no problems."
c. "This is really hard for me and I am going to keep trying."
2. a. "I know I am right about this."
b. "You are totally wrong about that and I am right."
c. "I can understand why you feel this way, and I feel different about it."

Thinking Mistakes

1. **ALL-OR-NOTHING, BLACK-AND-WHITE THINKING:** If you're not perfect, you're a total loser. If you don't get everything you want, it feels like you got nothing. If you're having a good day, the whole rest of your life is perfect and you don't need therapy anymore.
2. **CATASTROPHIZING (FORTUNETELLING ERROR):** You predict the future negatively without considering other, more likely outcomes. "I'm definitely going to fail my test," or "If I tell her that, she'll hate me forever."
3. **MIND READING:** You believe you know what other people are thinking even without asking. "He clearly doesn't think I will do a good job."
4. **OVERGENERALIZATION:** You make a sweeping, negative conclusion that goes far beyond the current situation. "Since I felt uncomfortable in my first day of class, I know that I won't be able to enjoy the rest of the year."
5. **MENTAL FILTER:** You develop selective hearing and vision and only hear and see the one negative thing and ignore the many positive things. "Because my supervisor gave me one low rating on my evaluation (that also had many higher ratings), it means I'm doing a terrible job."
6. **DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** You tell yourself that the positive experiences, actions, or qualities do not count. "I did well in that one basketball game because I just got lucky."
7. **EMOTIONAL REASONING:** You start thinking your emotions are fact. "I feel . . . ; therefore, it is. I feel like she hates me; therefore, she does." "I feel stupid; therefore I am stupid." "I dread school, so it's a bad idea to go."
8. **"SHOULD" STATEMENTS:** You "should" on yourself or someone else by having a fixed idea of how you or others should behave, and you overestimate how bad it will be if these expectations are not met. "It's terrible that I made a mistake; I should always do my best." "You shouldn't be so upset."
9. **LABELING:** Overgeneralization is taken a step further by the use of extreme language to describe things. "I spilled my milk. I am SUCH A LOSER!" "My therapist didn't call me right back; she is the most uncaring, heartless therapist ever!"
10. **PERSONALIZATION:** You see yourself as the cause for things you have absolutely no control over or the target of stuff that may have absolutely nothing to do with you. "My parents divorced because of me." "The receptionist was short with me because I did something wrong."

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Feel Your Feelings

The Feel Your Feelings skill is about being mindful of your emotions. This means noticing and experiencing your emotions and letting them naturally come and go (Linehan, 1993b).

Feel Your Feelings sometimes means experiencing painful emotions without turning the painful emotions into suffering.

We create emotional suffering by stuffing or sticking to our emotions.

STUFFING

FEEL YOUR FEELINGS

STICKING

Stuffing. *Stuffing* means bottling up, ignoring or rejecting your emotions. People who are emotional stuffers try to push their emotions away. In other words, they try not to feel what they are feeling. Stuffing leads to suffering, because ignored emotions don't go away—stuffing just causes emotions to build up. Eventually, those emotions will become too overwhelming and cause an emotional breakdown.

Sticking. *Sticking* means holding on to emotions and trying to keep them around. People who are emotional stickers will replay a stressful situation and experience difficult emotions over and over. Sticking leads to suffering because emotions naturally come and go, but sticking does not allow the emotions to fade. In other words, sticking to emotions causes painful emotions to last much longer than they would naturally.

Feel Your Feelings. Feel Your Feelings is the middle ground between stuffing and sticking. When you Feel Your Feelings, you notice your feelings without holding on to them. In other words, you feel emotions and then let them go when they are ready to go. To practice the Feel Your Feelings skill, Observe and Describe your emotions, body sensations, thoughts and urges. Notice how the intensity of your emotion comes and goes. When you are ready to feel something new, let the old emotion go and notice the new feeling.

Worksheet

Feel Your Feelings Evaluation

Are you an emotional stuffer or an emotional sticker? Are you good at Feeling Your Feelings? Look at the lists below and check the items that fit for you. If you check a lot in the stuffing or sticking category, it might be helpful to focus on skills that help you Feel Your Feelings.

Stuffing:

- I frequently pretend like everything is Ok when it is not.
- I ignore my emotions.
- I smile even when I'm sad, hurt, anxious or angry.
- People are surprised when they find out I'm depressed or anxious.
- I focus on other people's problems and ignore my own.
- I feel emotionally numb a lot.
- I will hold in my emotions until they are too big to ignore.
- People tell me I'm emotionally distant.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Sticking:

- I often replay a crisis or difficult event over and over in my head.
- I focus a lot on my difficult emotions.
- I beat myself up a lot for things that are far in the past.
- Most of the time I don't let myself see the positives.
- People tell me I don't get over things very easily.
- People tell me I make a bigger deal than I should out of things.
- It's hard for me to let go of difficult emotions.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Feel My Feelings:

- I notice my enjoyable and difficult feelings when they are happening.
- I let my feelings come and go.
- I notice both the positives and negatives.
- I am usually able to tell people how I'm feeling.
- I am comfortable with my emotions.
- The people close to me usually know how I'm feeling.
- When I have a difficult emotion, I can feel it without holding onto it.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Practice Exercise: Thinking and Acting Dialectically

Due Date _____

Identify a time this week when you did *not* think or act dialectically.

Example 1: Briefly describe the situation (who, what, when) _____

How did you think or act in this situation? _____

Are you thinking in extremes (e.g., all or nothing or catastrophizing)? Examples: _____

What is a more dialectical thought (or action) about the situation? _____

What was the outcome? _____

Identify a time this week when you *did* think or act dialectically.

Example 2: Briefly describe the situation (who, what, when) _____

How did you think or act in this situation? _____

What was the outcome? _____

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