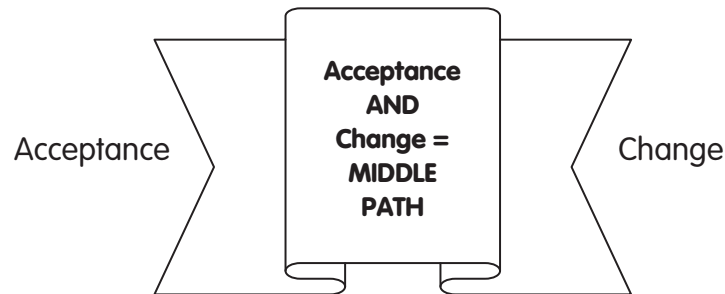


Dialectics: What Is It?

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)

Dialectics Homework

Dialectics Homework Sheet*

Circle the letter in front of the dialectical statement for each group of sentences:

1. A) It's hopeless. Why even try? I give up.
B) My problems are gone, this is easy.
C) This is hard for me, and I'm going to keep working at it.
2. A) I'm totally right about this—it's the truth!
B) I'm stupid. Everyone else is always right about things.
C) Well, I can see it this way, and you see it that way.
3. A) Everyone is always unfair to me.
B) In some situations, I feel that I'm not being treated fairly.
C) Everyone is always fair to me.
4. A) People should listen to me whenever I need to talk.
B) I should be able to handle my own problems without bothering other people.
C) Sometimes I need someone to listen to me. When they can't, it's frustrating.
5. A) It's my parent's fault that I have these problems, so I shouldn't have to work so hard to solve them.
B) All of my problems are my own fault.
C) I may not have caused all of my own problems, but I need to solve them anyway.
6. A) Other people always hurt me, so I don't trust anyone.
B) I trust some people and I find it very difficult to trust others.
C) If I were healthy I would be able to trust everyone.
7. A) I hate you for doing what you did. I am done being your friend.
B) It shouldn't be any big deal if other people hurt me.
C) You really hurt my feelings and we will have to work it out.

*From: <https://www.drLindaOlson.com>

Dialectics Homework (contd.)

Which of these dialectical statements do you struggle with the most? (Numbers 1-7 on prior page)

Over the week, try to notice when you are thinking about this statement in an "all or nothing" or judging way.

Try to make the statement in your mind more balanced. Write the "all or nothing statement" and then the dialectical statement that you came up with below.

The "all or nothing" statement you made	Your dialectical statement made in response	When did it happen and where were you?

BONUS: Did you notice how you felt when you were focused on the all or nothing statement? When you changed the statement to become more dialectical, did your emotion change?

The "all or nothing" statement	How you felt at the time	Your dialectical statement	How you felt at the time

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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