



Empowering Communities for Brighter Futures

A New England Approach to Youth Diversion

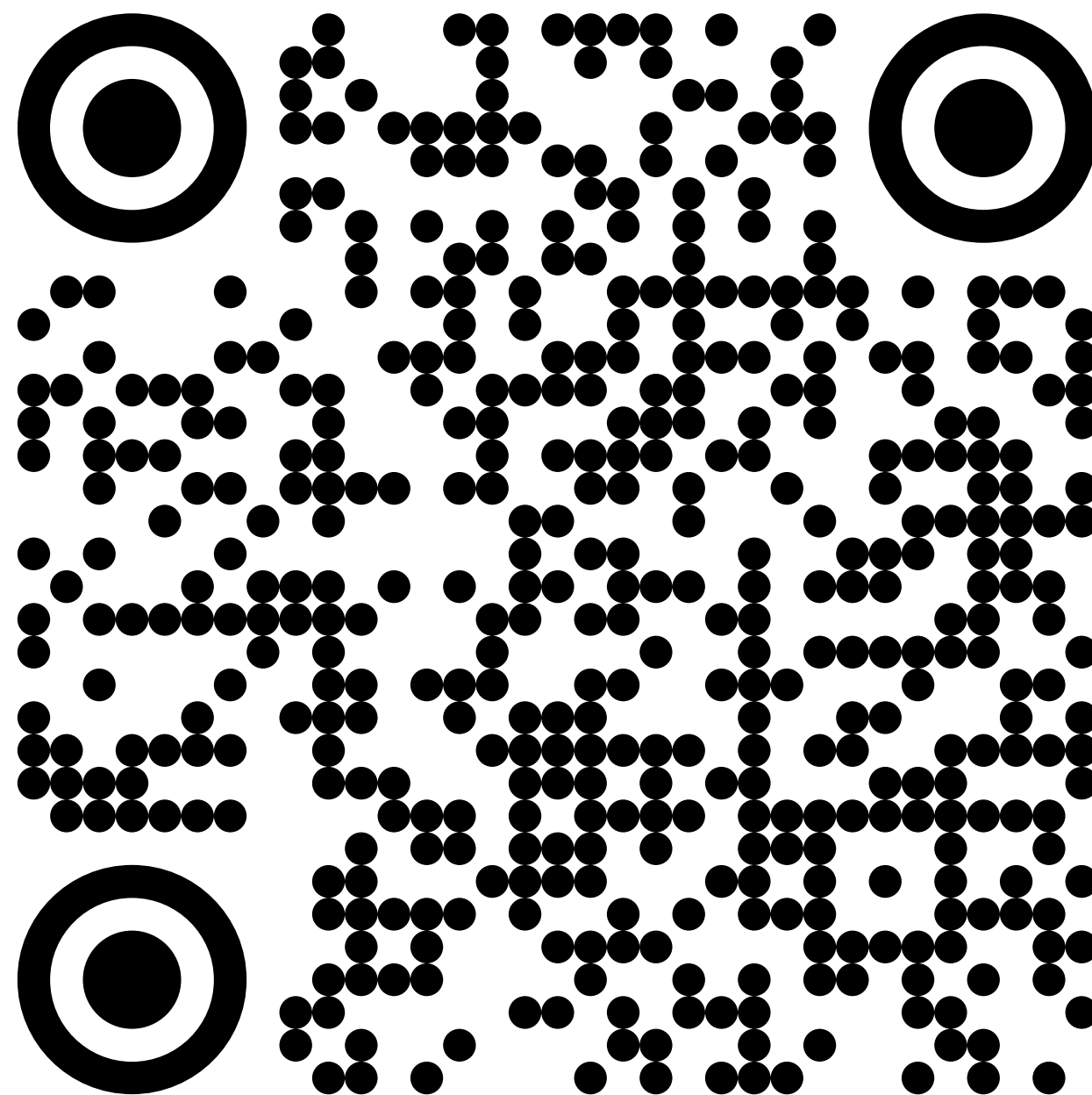
DBT:
Same Skills, Different Places

Developed by DBT for You, a New Hampshire organization which provides DBT training to communities and schools, along with DBT Skills Classes and Coaching for teens, young adults, and parents.

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Downloadable Resources



dbtforyou.org/neyd26-resources

According to the CDC:

**Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act,
helping us determine how we handle stress,
relate to others, and make choices.**

Mental Health $\neq$ Mental Illness

Psychological Health is the Presence of :

- Emotional awareness
- Behavior control
- Decision-making under stress
- Relationship effectiveness

In 2023 the CDC outlined the following two strategies for individuals, families, and communities*.

1. Promote Well-being
2. Improve Access to Supports and Opportunities

*cdc.gov/mental-health/about/what-cdc-is-doing.html

So far, most of the community focus has been around improving access to help for mental illness and suicidality, vs. promoting well-being.

**What can people who work with kids
do to help promote positive psychological health?**

Pair Exercise:

What do you usually tell a youth when they are overwhelmed?

Common Approach vs Skill Based Approach to Helping Kids who Are Experiencing Strong Emotions

Common Approach

Stay positive

Calm Down

Skill Based Approach

Name the feeling and then choose a response

Pause and tolerate distress

The Difference

Most common approaches focus on something that is change oriented without the necessary information that a teen needs to enact the action. Skill-based approaches teach teens what they need to do to achieve the desired result.

**DBT skills help people manage emotions,
behaviors and relationships.**

DBT skills education $\neq$ DBT Therapy

Why are DBT skills effective to promote psychological health?

1. They are behaviorally focused. They identify for youth what to do as well as understand how they feel.
2. Skills are teachable.
3. They address all areas of psychological health.
4. They are adaptable for all ages.

Four Types of DBT Skills

Skill to Increase	How It Helps
Mindfulness	Awareness of the Current Moment
Emotion Regulation	Understanding and Coping with Emotions
Distress Tolerance	Managing Intense Emotions and Respond vs. React
Interpersonal Effectiveness	Improve Communication Skills

Mindfulness Skills

Mindfulness is the core DBT skill.

Mindfulness is about being aware of the present moment.

Mindfulness skills help us learn how to notice what is going on inside and outside of ourselves.

Five Sense Mindfulness

Emotion Regulation Skills

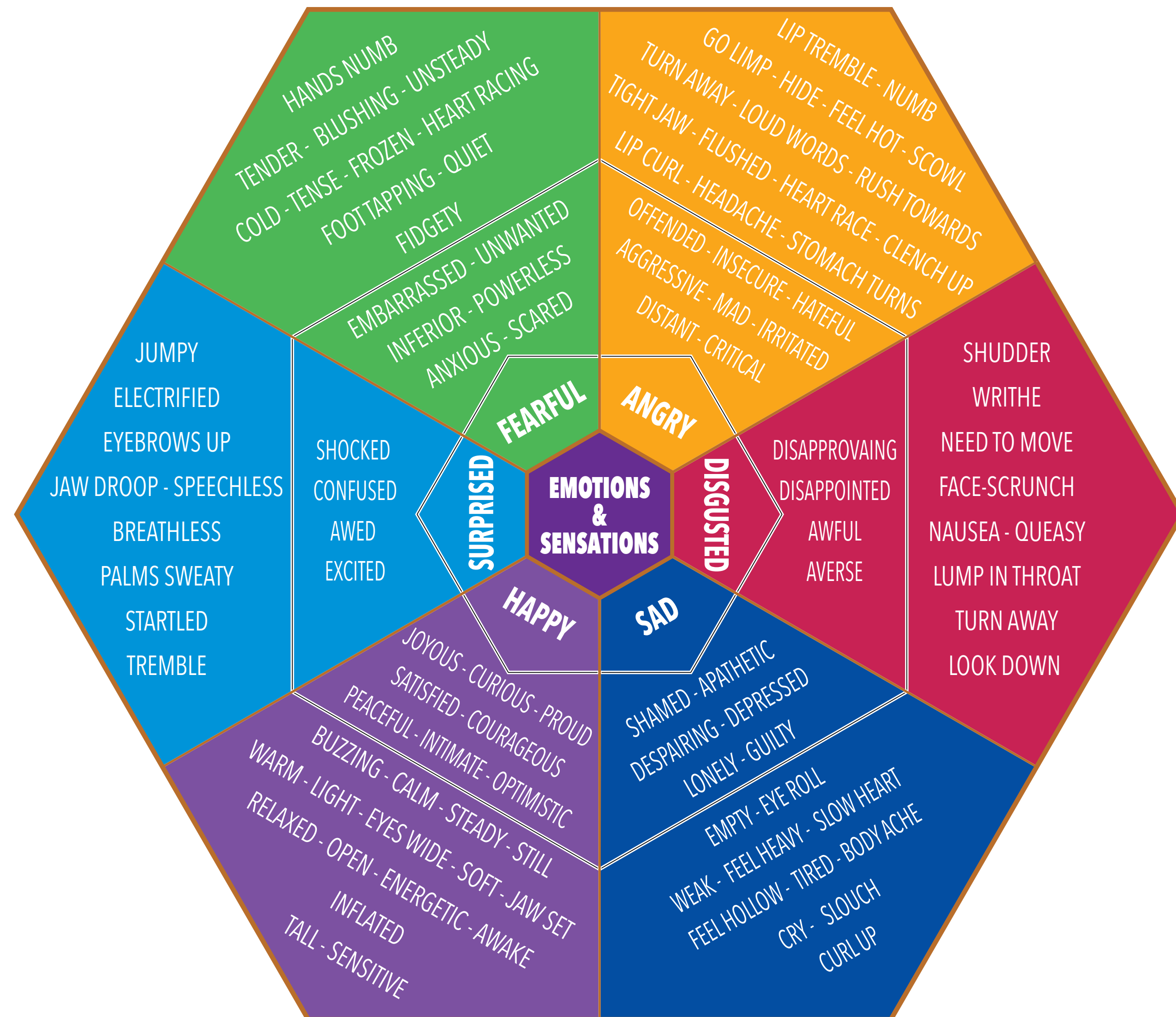
Emotion Regulation skills are used to help understand our emotions, tolerate our emotions, and use the information our emotions give us to guide our actions.

Emotion Regulation skills teach us how to get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

Emotion Regulation is a large set of skills that includes:

- Skills to label and understand emotions
- Skills to decrease reactivity to Big Emotions by self care
- Skills to use the information gained through emotions to guide actions to match values

Emotions & Sensations



Distress Tolerance Skills

There are two types of distress tolerance skills:

- Skills to help decrease Big Emotions in the moment
- AND
- Skills to learn how to accept reality as it is

Paced Breathing

Let's try it

Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

The goal of interpersonal effectiveness skills is to help people get their needs met within relationships. There are all kinds of specific skills to help with getting along, asking for help, validating themselves and others, etc.

These skills are in three main categories:

DEAR MAN- Asking for what you need skillfully

GIVE- Keeping a good relationship

FAST- Keeping your self respect

When we consider these, it is important to remember that we aren't usually looking at just one skill within a situation. We are looking at using all of them in combination.

In order to decide which skill to use when, it can be helpful to ask yourself what your goal is in the situation.

Coaching in Daily Interactions with Youth

When we are looking at behavior as skill deficits, it guides our language.

Four Types of DBT Skills

Behavior to Decrease	Skill to Increase	Skill Prompt
Feeling overwhelmed Focus on the past or future	Mindfulness	What's going on right now?
Emotional outbursts that lead to unwanted consequences	Emotion Regulation	Can you tell me what emotion you are experiencing? Can you share what prompted the emotion?
Impulsive behavior that leads to dangerous situations	Distress Tolerance	Can you ride this out? OR Let me to help you ride this out.
Pattern of relationship problems Believes is not understood	Interpersonal Effectiveness	What do you want here? What outcome are you looking for?

Steps to Guiding a Youth Toward Skill Use

1. Validate their experience/emotion/perspective (ex- I get why you are upset)

2. Identify the target of the skill

Example: It sounds like you are struggling to manage irritation, OR it seems like you can't stop worrying about what is going to happen later, OR I notice you get headaches when you are anxious.

3. Use a skill prompt.

4. Teach a skill if needed.

5. Help identify a first step/behavior that would move them towards a preferred outcome.

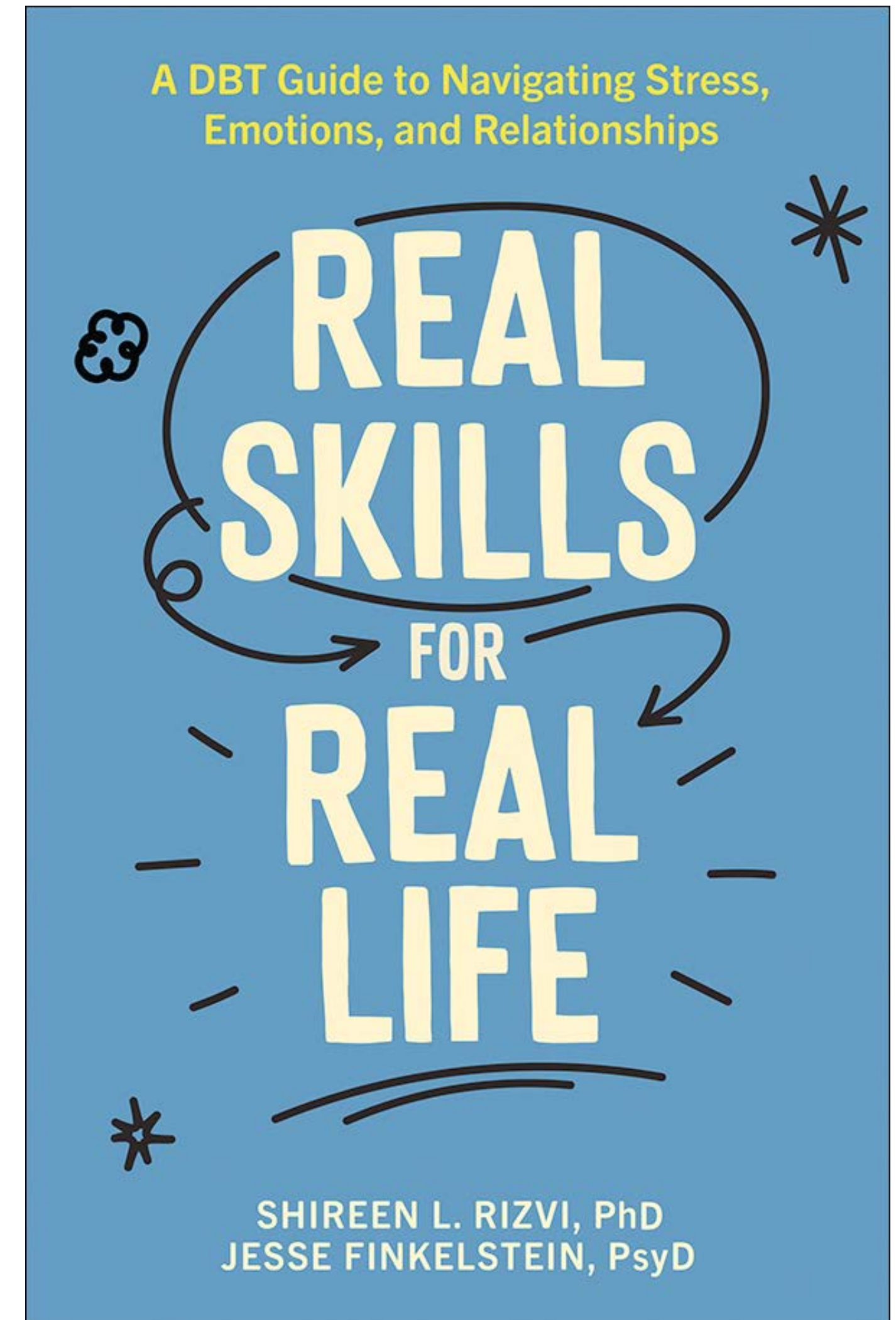
Small Group Exercise:

Guiding a Youth Towards Skill Usage

Resources

Real Skills for Real Life - A DBT Guide to Navigating Stress, Emotions, and Relationships

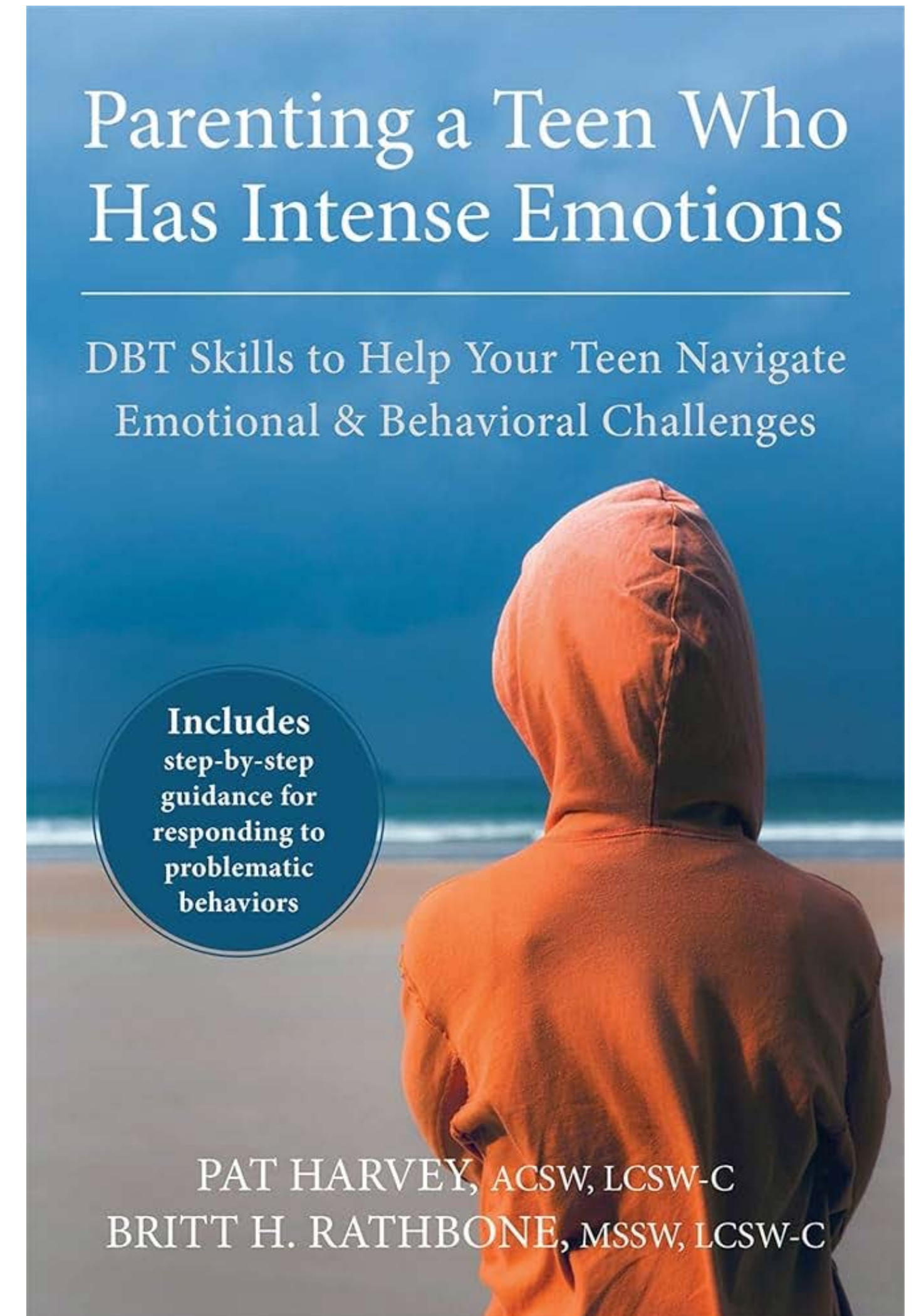
Rizvi and Finkelstein (2025)



Resources

Parenting a Teen Who Has Intense Emotions: DBT Skills to Help Your Teen Navigate Emotional and Behavioral Challenges

Harvey and Rathbone (2015)



Take Aways

Psychological health is different from mental illness, and DBT skills are tools that can be taught to youth in order to improve their psychological health.

There are 4 core skill areas in DBT. These skills help people stay present in the moment, regulate emotions, manage distress, and effectively interact with other people.

You do not need to be a therapist to teach and coach DBT skills. There are ways to prompt skill usage in daily conversation.

Thank you!

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