Keeping Well After DBT: Guided Self-Help for Everyday Wellbeing

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After DBT: Guided Self-Help for Everyday Wellbeing

Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

A self-help workbook · 7 modules · about 7 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Keeping Well After DBT: Guided Self-Help for Everyday Wellbeing programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. Its text is drawn from the programme and is kept current with it: whenever the programme changes, the workbook is set again.

Revision 3. This printing was set on 7 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on using this workbook. It offers self-help based on established psychological approaches for difficulties of mild to moderate severity. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment by a qualified professional and is not designed for use in a crisis. The examples in it are fictional; no real person appears in them. If you are worried about your safety, or your difficulties are getting worse, the page headed “When self-help is not enough” says where to turn.

Set in Poppins and Roboto, the Talking Therapies UK typefaces.

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How to use this workbook

This guided self-help programme supports individuals who have completed a course of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and wish to maintain the gains they have made. It draws on the robust evidence base for DBT, including randomised controlled trials and meta-analyses, as well as complementary CBT approaches to reinforce skill use. Over a series of short, focused modules, participants will review core DBT skills, develop personalised wellbeing plans, and learn strategies to anticipate and manage early signs of relapse. The programme is designed for use alongside routine NHS step-2 support and can be accessed independently with brief therapist guidance.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After DBT: Guided Self-Help for Everyday Wellbeing programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. It follows the programme module by module: each part of the book is one module, and each chapter is one piece of the module's teaching, set in the order the programme presents it.

Read the chapters of a part in order, then turn to the worksheets that follow them. The worksheets are the part of the work that changes things, so give them the time they ask for and come back to them as the weeks go on. You may copy or print the worksheets for your own use, as often as you need.

Most people work through one module a week, which takes the whole programme about 7 weeks. Go at the pace that suits you: a module done properly is worth more than two done quickly.

The check-in questionnaires let you see how things are changing. Complete each one when you reach it, note the date and your total, and compare it with the last.

When self-help is not enough

- If you are in danger now, or have seriously harmed yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- If you need help urgently but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 or contact your GP surgery.
- Samaritans are there day and night, every day of the year: call 116 123 free from any phone.
- If you would rather not talk, text SHOUT to 85258 for free, confidential support at any hour.
- If your difficulties are getting worse as you work through this book, or you find yourself thinking about ending your life, stop and speak to your GP or a mental health professional. A workbook can be a good start, and some difficulties need more help than a book can give.

What this workbook will help you to do

- Participants will understand the concept of relapse and why ongoing practice is essential. They will learn how the DBT model explains the cycle of emotional dysregulation and the role of maintenance strategies. This foundation prepares them for the skills work that follows.
- Learners will revisit the four DBT skill modules and identify which are most relevant to their current challenges. They will recognise the links between each skill set and everyday wellbeing. This review creates a shared language for the rest of the programme.

- Participants will construct a personalised plan that integrates their values, strengths and preferred activities. They will set realistic, measurable wellbeing goals and schedule regular check-ins. The plan serves as a roadmap for applying skills in real life.
- Learners will practise brief mindfulness exercises that can be used at work, at home or on the move. They will learn how regular mindfulness reduces emotional reactivity and supports decision-making. The module includes tips for overcoming common barriers to practice.
- Participants will identify their most frequent triggers and select appropriate distress tolerance techniques such as TIP, self-soothing and IMPROVE. They will develop a quick-reference sheet for use in high-stress situations. Mastery of these tools helps prevent escalation before relapse can begin.
- Learners will practise emotion regulation skills like opposite action and checking the facts, and interpersonal effectiveness strategies such as DEAR MAN. They will create action plans for applying these skills in common relational scenarios. Enhanced regulation and communication reduce the likelihood of relapse triggers.
- Participants will develop a personalised relapse-prevention checklist, including early warning signs and coping responses. They will learn how to access NHS step-2 resources, peer support and brief therapist check-ins when needed. The module consolidates all previous learning into a sustainable long-term strategy.

PART 1

Introduction and Psycho-education

Understanding maintenance and relapse risk

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Keeping Well After DBT: Orientation and the Maintenance Journey

Welcome to Keeping Well After DBT: Guided Self-Help for Everyday Wellbeing. If you have recently completed a course of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), congratulations on the hard work, courage, and commitment it took to get here. This seven-module programme is designed to support you in maintaining the significant gains you have made, moving from acute skill acquisition into sustainable, everyday wellbeing.

Over the coming modules, we will draw directly on the robust evidence base for DBT and complementary cognitive-behavioural approaches. You will be invited to review core skills, build personalised wellbeing plans, and learn practical strategies to anticipate and manage early signs of vulnerability. Whether you are using this alongside routine NHS step-2 support or accessing it independently with brief guidance, this programme is your space to consolidate your progress.

In this first module, Introduction and Psycho-education: Understanding maintenance and relapse risk, we explore why ongoing practice remains essential even when things are going well. Grounded in clinical evidence, we will look at how the DBT model explains the cycle of emotional dysregulation and why structured maintenance strategies protect against relapse.

A NOTE

Remember, keeping well is not about perfection; it is about noticing the early signs of distress and responding with the compassionate, effective tools you already possess.

Let us begin by orienting ourselves to what maintenance truly means in daily life, setting a solid foundation for the skills work that follows across the rest of the programme.

CHAPTER 2

Welcome to Keeping Well After DBT: Orientation and the Maintenance Journey

Welcome to Keeping Well After DBT: Guided Self-Help for Everyday Wellbeing. If you are reading this module, you have likely completed a course of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). That is a significant achievement. DBT is an intensive, evidence-based psychological treatment that asks a great deal of you. It requires courage to look closely at your patterns of emotional pain, vulnerability, and behaviour, and even more courage to learn and apply new ways of coping. This guided self-help programme has been designed to support you as you transition from active treatment into everyday life, helping you to maintain the valuable gains you have worked so hard to secure.

A NOTE

NHS Step-2 Guided Self-Help and Your Ongoing Care This programme is built to align with NHS step-2 psychological wellbeing principles. It is structured to be used independently or alongside brief guidance from a psychological practitioner. It does not replace full DBT, but rather serves as a bridge, helping you consolidate your skills so they become lifelong habits.

When people finish a course of therapy, there is often a natural expectation that life will now run smoothly, or that emotional distress will simply vanish. However, clinical research and lived experience tell us a different story. Emotional vulnerability and intense emotional dysregulation are often enduring aspects of how a person's nervous system operates. DBT does not cure emotional sensitivity; instead, it provides a sophisticated toolkit to manage that sensitivity effectively. Once formal therapy ends, the scaffold of weekly group sessions and individual therapy is removed. Without that external structure, it is entirely normal for old habits to begin creeping back in, almost imperceptibly at first.

To understand why maintenance requires intentional effort, we can look at how human behaviour is shaped over time. Every time you used a DBT skill during treatment—whether it was stopping to use a TIPP skill during a crisis, practising radical acceptance when facing an unchangeable reality, or using interpersonal effectiveness skills to maintain a relationship—you were carving a new neural pathway in your brain. In psychological terms, this is known as neuroplasticity. However, older pathways—those built on years of reactive coping mechanisms, avoidance, or intense emotional spirals—do not disappear overnight. They remain etched into your neurological history. When stress levels rise, or when life presents unexpected challenges, the brain naturally gravitates towards the path of least resistance. Often, that path is the old, familiar habit, even if it ultimately causes more pain.

Sarah completed a six-month DBT programme feeling stable and confident. For the first few weeks, she practised her mindfulness and emotional regulation skills daily. As life got busier with a new job, she began skipping her morning mindfulness routine, telling herself she no longer needed it because she felt fine. Over three months, minor stressors began to accumulate.

Because she had stopped actively practising her toolkit, she found herself reverting to old patterns of emotional avoidance when minor conflicts arose at work. By month six, she experienced a significant emotional crisis that felt very similar to the ones she had managed successfully in the past. Sarah's experience illustrates the concept of the 'gradual drift'—how a lack of ongoing skill maintenance can slowly erode therapeutic gains.

Clinical trials and meta-analyses examining the long-term outcomes of DBT consistently highlight that while treatment effects are robust and enduring, booster sessions, self-monitoring, and structured maintenance strategies significantly reduce the risk of relapse. Relapse in this context does not mean a sudden, catastrophic collapse. More often, it is a gradual erosion of skill use, followed by a rise in emotional vulnerability, a return of dysregulated behaviours, and eventually, a recurrence of clinical symptoms that mirror what brought you to therapy in the first place. By understanding that maintenance is an active, ongoing process rather than a static destination, you can take proactive steps to protect your wellbeing.

Throughout this seven-module programme, you will be invited to review core DBT concepts, evaluate your current skill use, and build a personalized relapse prevention and wellbeing plan. This first module lays the groundwork by exploring why relapse happens, how the DBT biosocial model explains emotional vulnerability, and what you can do to stay ahead of the curve. You have already done the heavy lifting of learning these skills; this programme is about keeping them sharp, accessible, and ready for whatever life brings your way next.