

Eight Questions to Ask a DBT Program

A lot of therapy is called DBT. These questions tell you whether a program delivers the full treatment the research tested — or something that borrows its name.

You are allowed to ask these. A program delivering comprehensive DBT expects them and answers without hesitation. The point is not to grade anyone — it is to match the treatment to the problem. For chronic suicidal thinking, self-harm, and borderline personality disorder, the evidence is for all four modes at once.

How to use it. Ask each question as written. Tick what you heard. A specific answer is the tell; a vague one usually means the piece is missing. Write the actual words down — you will want them later.

ASK	A COMPLETE ANSWER SOUNDS LIKE	WHAT YOU HEARD
1 Do you meet with a consultation team every week? The mode you never see, and the one that keeps the other three honest.	Yes — weekly, about 90 minutes, and I present my cases there.	☐ Weekly team ☐ "Peer supervision" ☐ Works alone _____
2 Can I reach you for skills coaching between sessions? Short, in-the-moment calls or texts. Not email tomorrow, not only a crisis line.	Yes — here is how to reach me, the hours, and what a call is for.	☐ Yes, with terms ☐ Email only ☐ "Call 988" _____
3 Will I fill out a diary card every week, and will we go over it? The card sets the session agenda. Optional means it fades.	Every week. We open each session with it and it decides what we work on.	☐ Weekly, reviewed ☐ "If helpful" ☐ No _____
4 When something goes wrong, do we do a chain analysis? Link by link, with solutions at the links — not a conversation about how it felt.	Yes — a target behavior on the card is what the session is spent on, step by step.	☐ Yes, described it ☐ "We'd talk about it" _____
5 Where did you train in DBT — an intensive, or a workshop? A ten-day intensive and a two-hour webinar are both "DBT training."	Specific: "Behavioral Tech Intensive, 2022, with our team" or "Foundational, on a team led by someone intensively trained."	☐ Intensive ☐ Foundational ☐ Workshop/CE ☐ Vague _____
6 Is the program DBT-LBC certified? Independent audit against the full model. Checkable at dbt-lbc.org. "No, and here's where we are" is an honest answer.	Yes, certified program — or a straight no with how they hold to the model anyway. Not "our therapists are all certified" meaning they attended a training.	☐ Certified (verified) ☐ Honest no ☐ Unclear _____
7 Is skills class separate from individual sessions, covering all four modules? Mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness.	Weekly class, separate, all four modules over about six months; you attend both.	☐ Separate weekly class ☐ "Woven in" ☐ Group optional _____
8 How long is the program, and what does the structure look like on paper? A frame you could write down, plus an agreement you go over before starting.	Something concrete: weekly individual, weekly class, coaching, a six-to-twelve-month commitment, and a written agreement.	☐ Clear frame ☐ "Depends on the person" only _____

Reading the answers

Several vague answers do not mean the therapist is bad. They mean the program is something other than comprehensive DBT, and it should be described as what it is. For the problems DBT was built for, the honest options are a program that delivers all four modes or a clearly different treatment chosen on purpose. Full explanation of each question: frtc.ltd/blog/is-your-therapist-actually-doing-dbt