

Front Range Treatment Center's

DBT Skills for Friends and Family

Part II

Course Overview

This 8-week course builds on the foundational concepts and skills from Part I. We now turn to deeper mindfulness practice, advanced dialectical thinking, and three critical new skill areas: Distress Tolerance, Emotion Regulation, and long-term skills integration.

- Week 1: Mindfulness II: Observing & Describing Reality
- Week 2: Dialectics II: Walking the Middle Path
- Week 3: Distress Tolerance I: Crisis Survival Skills (TIPP)
- Week 4: Distress Tolerance II: Tolerating and Accepting Distress
- Week 5: Emotion Regulation I: Self-Care with PLEASE
- Week 6: Emotion Regulation II: Opposite Action
- Week 7: Emotion Regulation III: Building a Life Worth Living (ABC)
- Week 8: Putting It All Together

Week 1

Mindfulness II: Observing & Describing Reality

This week covers the “**What**” **skills** of mindfulness, which are the fundamental, active *actions* you can take to become fully present in any moment. These skills move mindfulness from a conceptual idea into a tangible practice. By being *mindful*, what are you actually *doing*?

1. Observing: Simply Noticing (and nothing else)

The skill of **observing** is about purposefully paying attention to the present moment, both within yourself and in the environment around you, without any additions: no mental commentary, interpretation, evaluation (including “good” or “bad”), and with no intervention. It is a passive yet focused form of noticing. The core practice is to simply *take it in*. Do not try to push away an unpleasant sensation or cling to a pleasant one. Just register its presence and move on.

Pure observation is especially important when our only real task is to take things in. Observation increases feelings of appreciation and peace by quieting our (often unhelpful) inner-monologue.

Anything you add—your judgments, your thoughts about what’s notable or important, your additions or spin—can all lead you astray. It’s about seeing the whole picture, accurately, without color commentary. Think Sherlock Holmes.

What to observe:

- **Physical Sensations:** Notice internal sensations as they arise—the feeling of your breath, the pressure of your feet on the floor, an ache in your shoulder, the knot in your stomach when you feel anxiety, or the warmth in your chest when you feel contentment.
- **Thoughts:** Notice the pure stream of thoughts as they pass, like clouds drifting across the sky. Don’t try to change them, just notice with gentle curiosity. An excellent intervention for racing or intrusive thoughts.
- **Outer Experiences:** Use all five senses to take in the world. Notice the sounds (traffic, birds, silence), sights (colors, shapes, light), smells (coffee, rain, perfume), textures (the fabric of your clothes, the smooth surface of a table), and tastes.

2. Describing: Putting Words to Experience

The skill of **describing** involves labeling your observed experiences using concrete, non-evaluative language. It requires a commitment to sticking strictly to the observable facts and verifiable data, separating the event from any associated judgment or story.

Sometimes, the best way to be mindful is to simply observe. Other times, it can be helpful to describe what we have observed. This is especially true when we just can't help add our own distorted spin, and we need to practice seeing things in a more grounded, factual way.

- **Fact-Based Language:** Replace loaded or emotional words with neutral, factual descriptions. Instead of thinking, "I'm a failure," the description is, "I notice a strong sensation of sadness and heaviness in my chest." Instead of "That person is rude," the description is, "That person started talking while I was talking."
- **Labeling Thoughts and Feelings:** Acknowledge internal experiences by naming them: "I am having the *thought* that I should have done better," or "I feel the *emotion* of anger rising." This externalizes the experience and creates necessary distance for *checking the facts*. This skill helps shift from being *fused* with an emotion ("I *am* angry") to simply *having* it ("I am experiencing a feeling of anger").
- **Key: Verification.** If a third party were watching you on camera, could they verify your description? If not, it's a judgment, not a description. "She was so angry at me" is an interpretation; it's not verifiable, and other people might see the same scene and come to a different conclusion. "She raised her fists up to shoulder level" is a description of something that everyone would agree on.

3. Participate: Pure Doing

The skill of **participating** is about throwing yourself completely into the moment and the current activity. While observing and describing involve stepping back to notice and label experience, participating means stepping *in*—fully engaging with whatever you are doing, without self-consciousness or distraction. It is the opposite of going through the motions.

When you participate, you become one with the activity. Think about a time you were so absorbed in something—a conversation, cooking a meal, playing with a child, exercising—that you lost track of time. That is participating. There was no inner voice narrating, no worrying about the past or future. You were simply *doing*.

Participating is especially valuable for friends and family members because so much of supporting a loved one involves *being present* with them. If you're having a conversation but mentally rehearsing your response, planning dinner, or judging what they're saying, you're not truly participating. Your loved one can usually sense the difference.

How to practice participating:

- **Let Go of Self-Consciousness:** Stop watching yourself from the outside. Don't worry about how you look or whether you're "doing it right." Just do it. Sports and dancing are two great areas to practice *participating* in.
- **Enter the Experience Fully:** When listening, really listen. When playing a game, really play. When comforting someone, be fully there—not halfway in your phone or mentally somewhere else.
- **Act Intuitively:** Practice responding from Wise Mind (Week 3, Part I) rather than overthinking every word. Trust your skill and preparation.
- **Practice in Low-Stakes Activities First:** Try fully participating while washing dishes, walking the dog, or listening to music. Build the muscle before you need it in a difficult conversation.

Bringing the “What” Skills Together

Observe, Describe, and Participate work together but are used at different times. In a single interaction with your loved one, you might first observe (notice they seem tense, notice your own rising anxiety), then describe (“I’m noticing my chest tightening and having the thought that this conversation is going to go badly”), and then participate (let go of that narrative and engage fully in the conversation from Wise Mind).

Homework

- Practice each “What” skill at least once this week. Try observing during a quiet moment, describing during a stressful one, and participating during a conversation with your loved one.
- Reflect: Which of the three skills felt most natural? Which was hardest? Write a brief note about your experience.

Week 2

Dialectics II: Walking the Middle Path

This week builds on the dialectical thinking introduced in Part I (Week 4). Where we previously introduced the core principles of dialectics—that opposing truths can coexist, that everything is connected, and that change is constant—this week focuses on applying those principles in relationships. “Walking the Middle Path” means finding the synthesis between two extremes, rather than getting stuck on one side.

Review: The Core Dialectic of DBT

The fundamental dialectic in DBT is **acceptance AND change**. Your loved one needs to be accepted exactly as they are right now, *and* they need to change. You need to accept the current reality of your relationship, *and* you need to work toward improving it. Neither acceptance alone nor change alone is sufficient. When we get stuck on one side—all acceptance (enabling, giving up on growth) or all change (constant criticism, relentless pressure)—we lose effectiveness.

Common Dialectical Dilemmas for Families

Families often swing between two extremes. Recognizing where you tend to get stuck is the first step toward finding the middle path.

One Extreme	The Middle Path	Other Extreme
Minimizing the problem (“You’re overreacting”)	Validate the emotion while encouraging effective action	Catastrophizing (“This is a disaster”)
Doing everything for them (Removing all consequences)	Offer support while respecting their autonomy and capability	Refusing to help at all (“Figure it out yourself”)
Walking on eggshells (Avoiding all conflict)	Be gentle AND honest. Use GIVE and DEAR MAN together	Saying whatever you think (Regardless of impact)
Giving in to every demand (Losing yourself)	Be compassionate AND firm. Use FAST to maintain self-respect	Holding rigid boundaries (Refusing all flexibility)
Forcing change (“Just stop doing that”)	Accept reality AND work toward change. Use willingness	Accepting everything (“That’s just who they are”)

How to Walk the Middle Path

1. **Notice When You're at an Extreme:** Use your observing skills (Week 1). Words like “always,” “never,” “should,” or “can't” are red flags that you've moved away from the middle.
2. **Look for the Kernel of Truth on the Other Side:** Even if you're 90% right, ask yourself what the other 10% looks like. What is your loved one's perspective? What part of it is valid?
3. **Use “And” Instead of “But”:** The word “but” negates everything before it. “I love you but I'm frustrated” invalidates the love. “I love you *and* I'm frustrated” holds both truths.
4. **Move Toward Synthesis:** Synthesis isn't compromise (where both sides give something up). It's a new, higher-level understanding that honors both truths. “They are doing their best AND they need to do better” leads to a different kind of support than either statement alone.

Validation as a Dialectical Tool (Review)

Validation (Part I, Week 5) is one of the most important tools for walking the middle path. Validation communicates acceptance (“*I hear you, and your feelings make sense*”) while still leaving room for change (“*And what do you want to do about it?*”). When we skip validation and jump straight to problem-solving or advice, we've abandoned the acceptance side of the dialectic. When we only validate and never move toward change, we've abandoned the other side.

Homework

- Identify one area where you tend to swing to an extreme with your loved one (using the table above as a guide). Write down what the “middle path” might look like in that specific situation.
- Practice replacing “but” with “and” in your conversations this week. Notice how it changes the tone.

Week 3

Distress Tolerance I: Crisis Survival Skills (TIPP)

This week introduces **distress tolerance** skills—tools for surviving intense emotional moments *without making things worse*. Distress tolerance is not about feeling better. It's about getting through a crisis without engaging in behaviors you'll regret. These skills are for short-term, high-intensity situations: the moment when emotions are at a 9 or 10 out of 10 and you need to bring the temperature down enough to think clearly.

For friends and family members, this often means the moments when your loved one is in crisis, or when *you* are overwhelmed by frustration, fear, or helplessness. Learning TIPP isn't just for your own use—it also helps you understand and support the crisis survival skills your loved one may be practicing.

When to Use Crisis Survival Skills

Use these skills when the emotional intensity is very high and you are at risk of acting impulsively or ineffectively. These are not everyday coping tools—they are emergency interventions. Think of them as the emotional equivalent of first aid: stabilize first, address the underlying problem later.

TIPP Skills

TIPP stands for four techniques that work by directly changing your body’s physiological response to stress. They are effective because intense emotions live in the body as much as the mind, and sometimes you need to calm the body *first* before the mind can follow.

Skill	What to Do	Why It Works
Tip the Temperature	Hold ice cubes, splash cold water on your face, or place a cold pack on your forehead or the back of your neck. The key is cold.	Triggers the “dive reflex,” which slows heart rate and redirects blood flow. Rapidly reduces physiological arousal.
Intense Exercise	Do 10–20 minutes of vigorous activity: fast walking, running, jumping jacks, push-ups, or anything that gets your heart rate up quickly.	Burns off the adrenaline and cortisol that fuel the fight-or-flight response. Shifts the body out of crisis mode.
Paced Breathing	Breathe in slowly (4–5 seconds), then breathe out even more slowly (6–8 seconds). The exhale should be longer than the inhale. Repeat for 1–2 minutes.	Activates the parasympathetic nervous system (“rest and digest”), directly counteracting the stress response.
Paired Muscle Relaxation	Tense a muscle group (e.g., fists, shoulders) for 5–10 seconds while breathing in, then release completely while breathing out. Move through major muscle groups.	Releases physical tension that accompanies emotional distress. The contrast between tension and release teaches the body to relax.

Using TIPP to Support Your Loved One

When your loved one is in crisis, you can gently suggest TIPP skills—but timing and delivery matter. In the middle of an intense argument is usually not the time to teach a new skill. Instead, you might model the behavior (“Let’s both take a few slow breaths”), have supplies ready (ice pack in the freezer), or suggest a walk together. If your loved one is in DBT and already knows these skills, a simple prompt—“Do you want to try TIPP?”—can be enough.

Important: Don’t force it. If they say no, respect that. Your job is to offer, not to fix. And remember: these skills are for *you* too. If you’re overwhelmed during a confrontation or crisis, step away if you can and use TIPP to bring yourself back to a place where you can respond effectively.

Homework

- Try each of the four TIPP skills at least once this week, even outside of a crisis. Getting familiar with them when you’re calm makes them easier to access when you need them most.
- Notice your body’s stress signals this week (tight jaw, racing heart, shallow breathing). These are your cues that TIPP might be helpful.

Week 4

Distress Tolerance II: Tolerating Distress

Last week's TIPP skills are designed for acute, high-intensity crises. Their fairly quick and simple, so they're easy to do when you're upset. But what's comes next? This week focuses on the skills that follow TIPP—when distress is real and persistent, but you need to endure it without making things worse- for, say, a few hours, or until bedtime.

Distraction: Stepping Away Temporarily

Distraction is not avoidance. Avoidance is pretending the problem doesn't exist. Distraction is a deliberate, temporary shift of attention so that you don't act impulsively while emotions are still high. You come back to the problem later, when you can approach it from Wise Mind. Think of it as pressing pause, not stop. It's a change of focus, away from the thing you're not currently able to manage effectively.

Healthy distractions include:

- Activities that require focus: puzzles, cleaning, organizing, a work task, gardening.
- Helping others: volunteering, doing a kindness, offering support to a friend.
- Generating different emotions: watch a funny show, listen to uplifting music, look at photos that bring good memories.
- Less effective but still ok: passive distractions like TV.

Self-Soothe with the Five Senses

Self-soothing means treating yourself with compassion during difficult times by engaging your senses in something calming or pleasant. This is not self-indulgence—it is self-care during distress. Many family members feel guilty about doing something pleasant while their loved one is suffering. Remember: you cannot pour from an empty cup.

- **Sight:** Look at something beautiful—nature, art, photographs, a candle flame.
- **Sound:** Listen to calming or favorite music, nature sounds, or a soothing voice.
- **Smell:** Light a scented candle, use essential oils, step outside for fresh air, or bake something.
- **Taste:** Drink a warm cup of tea, eat a piece of chocolate slowly, or savor a favorite meal.
- **Touch:** Wrap yourself in a soft blanket, pet an animal, take a warm bath, or hold a smooth stone.

IMPROVE the Moment

The **IMPROVE** skills are strategies for making a painful moment more bearable when you can't solve the underlying problem right away. They are ways of shifting your attention in an internally focused manner. Many of these can be used in your imagination, when only have a moment, any time or any place. Think: 5 minutes before a big meeting. You can't do ice diving or watch a movie, but you can imagine yourself on a tropical beach for 2 minutes.

Letter	Skill	Example
I	Imagery	Imagine a safe, peaceful place. Visualize yourself handling the situation effectively.
M	Meaning	Find purpose in the pain. "This is making me a more empathetic, resilient person."
P	Prayer / Meditation	Turn to whatever provides spiritual comfort—prayer, meditation, or mindful breathing.
R	Relaxation	Engage in progressive muscle relaxation, a warm bath, or gentle stretching.
O	One Thing at a Time	Focus only on what's in front of you right now. Let go of the rest for the moment.
V	Vacation (Brief)	Take a short mental or physical break: a 15-minute walk, a chapter of a book, a cup of coffee outside.
E	Encouragement	Talk to yourself like a friend would: "I can get through this. I've handled hard things before."

Pros and Cons of Tolerating Distress (vs. Acting on Urges)

When you're tempted to act on an urge—to yell, to give an ultimatum, to give in to a demand you know is unreasonable—it helps to think through the pros and cons ahead of time. That's often the choice: delay with something like distraction, or attempt to problem solve when you're not ready (because you're in emotion mind) and make things worse).

Write out four quadrants: the pros of tolerating the distress (staying effective), the cons of tolerating it (it's painful), the pros of acting on the urge (short-term relief), and the cons of acting on the urge (long-term damage). Most of the time, this exercise makes the right choice clearer.

Radical Acceptance (Review)

Radical acceptance (Part I, Week 8) is the foundation of all distress tolerance. It means fully, completely accepting reality as it is—not as you wish it were. Radical acceptance does not mean approval. It does not mean giving up on change. It means stopping the war with reality so that you can respond effectively. *“This is what’s happening. I don’t like it. And I accept that it’s real.”* From that place of acceptance, wise action becomes possible.

Homework

- Create a list of at least 10 distraction or self-soothe activities you're willing to try when upset. Keep it handy. When upset, pull it out (possibly after doing TIPP!), and just go down the list.
- Practice IMPROVE the Moment at least once. Write down which letter you used and how it helped (or didn't).

Week 5

Emotion Regulation I: Self-Care with PLEASE

This week shifts from *tolerating* distress to *reducing vulnerability* to it in the first place. Emotion regulation skills are about decreasing the frequency and intensity of unwanted emotions over time. The starting point? Taking care of your body.

When you're depleted, your emotional threshold drops—small frustrations feel enormous, your fuse gets shorter, and you're far more likely to end up in Emotion Mind. PLEASE skills are foundation that makes everything else possible.

The PLEASE Skills

PLEASE is an acronym for the core areas of physical self-care that directly affect emotional resilience. When these areas are neglected, even a person with excellent coping skills becomes vulnerable to emotional dysregulation.

Letter	Skill	What This Looks Like
PL	Treat Physical Illness	See your doctor. Take prescribed medications. Don't ignore symptoms because you're "too busy." Pain and illness make emotional regulation significantly harder.
E	Balanced Eating	Eat regularly and enough. Avoid skipping meals (low blood sugar fuels irritability and anxiety). Don't use food to cope. Nourish your body in a way that supports stable mood and energy.
A	Avoid Mood-Altering Substances	Minimize alcohol, recreational drugs, and excessive caffeine. These provide short-term relief but increase emotional volatility and interfere with sleep and judgment. We're trying to avoid the effects of being intoxicated, as well as hangover, and the other negative health and cognitive effects of substance use.
S	Balanced Sleep	Aim for consistent, sufficient sleep (7–9 hours for most adults). Poor sleep is one of the strongest predictors of next-day emotional problems. Protect your sleep schedule even when things are chaotic.
E	Regular Exercise	Move your body regularly—even a 20-minute walk counts. Exercise reduces anxiety, improves mood, and builds the physical resilience that supports emotional resilience.

PLEASE as Prevention, Not Just Response

Think of PLEASE skills as preventive medicine for your emotional health. You don't wait until you have a cavity to start brushing your teeth. Similarly, you don't wait until you're burned out and reactive to start caring for your body. Consistent PLEASE practice raises your baseline resilience, so that when stressful situations arise (and they will), you start from a stronger place.

A common pattern for when life is stressful: you prioritize PLEASE even less. Over weeks and months, you're sleeping worse, exercising less, eating worse, and overlying on substances to regulate mood. Then one day a relatively small trigger causes a massive emotional reaction—and you wonder what went wrong. What went wrong is that your PLEASE foundation eroded. *Taking care of yourself is not optional. It is a skill.*

Identifying Your Vulnerable Areas

Everyone has one or two PLEASE areas that tend to slip first under stress. For some people it's sleep; for others it's food or exercise. Knowing your pattern helps you catch the slide early. Ask yourself: "When things get hard, what's the first thing I stop doing for myself?" That's the area to protect most deliberately.

Homework

- Do an honest self-assessment of each PLEASE area. Rate yourself 1–10 on how well you're currently maintaining each one. Identify your weakest area.
- Choose one specific, achievable change to make this week in your weakest PLEASE area (e.g., "I will go to bed by 11pm at least 5 nights this week" or "I will take a 20-minute walk 3 times").

Week 6

Emotion Regulation II: Opposite Action

This week teaches one of DBT’s most powerful emotion regulation skills: **opposite action**. Where PLEASE skills (Week 5) reduce your *vulnerability* to intense emotions, opposite action is a tool for changing an unwanted emotion *once it’s already here*.

Step 1: Check the Facts

Before you try to change an emotion, you first need to determine whether it **fits the facts** of the situation. An emotion “fits the facts” when its type and intensity are proportional to what is actually happening (not to our interpretation, story, or prediction about what’s happening). Remember, we need to be able to **describe** in order to effectively check the facts.

Checking the facts means asking yourself:

- **What is the prompting event?** What actually happened? (Describe it—Week 1.)
- **What are my interpretations?** Am I adding judgments, assumptions, or mind-reading?
- **Does my emotion fit the facts?** Is this the emotion I’d expect given what actually occurred, or is it being driven by my interpretation?
- **Does the intensity fit?** Even if the emotion fits, is the level of intensity proportional?

Sometimes, checking the facts is enough. You realize your anger is based on a misinterpretation (“She ignored me on purpose” when she actually didn’t see you), and the emotion naturally decreases. Other times, the emotion fits the facts—and then the question becomes: *is acting on this emotion’s urge effective?*

Step 2: Opposite Action

When an emotion *doesn't fit the facts* or when *acting on its urge would be ineffective*, opposite action is the skill to use. Every emotion comes with a built-in action urge (Part I, Week 2). Opposite action means identifying that urge and doing the **complete opposite**—not just in behavior, but all the way down to body posture, facial expression, and tone of voice.

Emotion	Action Urge	Opposite Action
Fear / Anxiety	Avoid, escape, freeze	Approach what you're afraid of (when safe). Stay in the situation. Do what you've been avoiding.
Anger	Attack, confront, lash out	Gently avoid the person (briefly). Do something kind. Relax your body. Speak softly.
Sadness	Withdraw, isolate, shut down	Get active. Reach out to others. Engage in activities even when you don't feel like it.
Shame	Hide, avoid, keep secrets	Share what you're ashamed of with someone you trust. Hold your head up. Act with openness.
Guilt	Punish yourself, apologize repeatedly	If the guilt doesn't fit the facts: let it go, don't apologize. (If it does fit: repair the harm.)

Step 3: Act Opposite All the Way

Opposite action only works if you do it **completely**. If the urge of shame is to hide, and you share with someone but do it while staring at the floor, speaking in a whisper, and apologizing the whole time, you're only partway there. True opposite action means sharing openly, with a confident posture, without apology. The more completely you act opposite, the more effectively the emotion will change. This is hard. It often means doing the thing that feels most unnatural in the moment. But emotions follow behavior—and when you change the behavior, the emotion catches up.

Homework

- Identify one recurring emotion with your loved one that often leads to ineffective behavior. Write out: the emotion, the action urge, and what the opposite action would look like.
- Practice opposite action at least once this week. Reflect on what happened and how the emotion changed (or didn't) afterward.

Week 7

Emotion Regulation III: Building a Life Worth Living

The previous two weeks focused on reducing vulnerability (PLEASE) and changing unwanted emotions (Opposite Action). This week focuses on the other side of emotion regulation: **increasing positive emotions**. In DBT, this is called “Building a Life Worth Living.” It’s the proactive, long-term work of creating a life that generates more joy, satisfaction, and meaning—rather than just managing the pain.

For friends and family members, this is often the most neglected area. When so much energy goes toward crisis management, the things that bring you happiness, purpose, and a sense of accomplishment quietly disappear. This week is a reminder that *your life matters too*—and that building it up is a skill, not a luxury.

The ABC Skills

A: Accumulate Positive Experiences

Short-Term: Do Pleasant Things Now

Make a deliberate effort to include small, enjoyable activities in your daily life. These don’t need to be big or expensive—a walk in the park, coffee with a friend, reading a good book, cooking a meal you enjoy. The key is intentionality. When you’re caught in a cycle of caregiving and crisis management, pleasant activities don’t happen by accident. You have to plan them.

When doing pleasant things, practice *participating* (Week 1): be fully present. Don’t check your phone while watching a movie. Don’t think about your loved one’s problems while having dinner with a friend. Let yourself actually experience the positive moment.

Long-Term: Work Toward Your Values

Short-term pleasant activities feel good in the moment, but lasting satisfaction comes from living in alignment with your values. Values are the things that matter most to you—not what others expect, not what feels urgent, but what gives your life meaning. Ask yourself: If I weren’t consumed by this situation with my loved one, what would I be working toward? What kind of life do I want?

Common values include: family, health, career or education, community, spirituality, creativity, friendship, adventure, honesty, and independence. There are no wrong answers. The point is to identify what’s important to you and take small, consistent steps toward it—even while navigating a difficult family situation.

B: Build Mastery

Building mastery means regularly doing things that give you a sense of *competence and accomplishment*. This counteracts the helplessness that often comes with caring for someone with emotional struggles. When you feel like nothing you do makes a difference, mastery activities remind you that you are capable.

Mastery activities are things that are moderately challenging—hard enough to feel satisfying when done, but not so hard that they’re overwhelming. Examples include: learning a new recipe, completing a work project, exercising, organizing a space in your home, picking up a hobby, taking a class, or finishing a book. The activity itself matters less than the feeling of “I did that.”

C: Cope Ahead

Coping ahead means *planning in advance* for situations that are likely to be emotionally challenging. Instead of hoping you’ll handle it well in the moment, you rehearse your response ahead of time.

How to Cope Ahead:

1. **Identify the situation:** What upcoming event or conversation is likely to be difficult?
2. **Check the facts:** What’s likely to happen? (Not the worst-case scenario—the realistic one.)
3. **Decide on your skills:** What skills will you use? (TIPP if it escalates? GIVE to stay relational? FAST to maintain self-respect?)
4. **Rehearse in your mind:** Visualize yourself in the situation, using the skills, and handling it effectively. Imagine potential obstacles and how you’ll respond.
5. **Practice relaxation:** After rehearsing, use calming techniques so you don’t work yourself up.

Homework

- Schedule at least two pleasant activities this week. Put them on your calendar. Do them—and practice participating fully.
- Choose one upcoming situation you’re dreading and practice Coping Ahead. Write out the situation, the skills you’ll use, and visualize yourself handling it.

Week 8

Putting It All Together

This final session is dedicated to integrating everything you’ve learned across both courses—sixteen weeks of concepts, skills, and practice. The goal isn’t to master every skill perfectly. It’s to leave with a clear understanding of what tools are available to you, and a realistic plan for continuing to use them.

Skills Review: Your Complete Toolkit

Below is a summary of every major skill covered in Part I and Part II. Use this as a reference when you’re in a difficult moment and need to remember what’s available to you.

Module	Key Skills	Use When...
Mindfulness	Observe, Describe, Participate, States of Mind, Non-Judgmentalness	You need to slow down, see clearly, and respond from Wise Mind rather than reacting from Emotion Mind.
Dialectics	Both/And Thinking, Walking the Middle Path, “And” vs. “But”	You’re stuck in black-and-white thinking, or swinging between extremes (acceptance vs. change, firmness vs. flexibility).
Interpersonal Effectiveness	GIVE, FAST, DEAR MAN, Validation (6 Levels)	You need to navigate a conversation: preserve the relationship (GIVE), maintain self-respect (FAST), or get what you need (DEAR MAN).
Distress Tolerance	TIPP, Distraction, Self-Soothe, IMPROVE, Pros/Cons, Radical Acceptance	Emotions are high and you need to survive the moment without making things worse.
Emotion Regulation	PLEASE, Check the Facts, Opposite Action, ABC (Accumulate, Build Mastery, Cope Ahead)	You want to reduce vulnerability, change unwanted emotions, or build a more fulfilling life.
Behavior Change	Reinforcement, Ignoring, Understanding Extinction Bursts	You want to encourage effective behavior and stop reinforcing ineffective behavior.
Acceptance	Radical Acceptance, Willingness, Half-Smiling, Willing Hands, Turning the Mind	Reality is painful and you need to stop fighting it so you can respond effectively.

Building Your Personal Effectiveness Plan

Skills work best when you have a plan for using them—not when you’re trying to remember what to do in the middle of a crisis. Your personal effectiveness plan is a simple document that you create for yourself, review regularly, and update as you learn what works.

Your plan should include:

1. **Your Top 3 Skills:** Which skills have been most helpful for you? These are your go-to tools. Write them down where you can see them.
2. **Your Warning Signs:** What are the early indicators that you’re sliding into Emotion Mind or burning out? (e.g., sleep disruption, snapping at small things, withdrawing from friends, dropping PLEASE habits.)
3. **Your Cope-Ahead Scenarios:** What are the 2–3 most common difficult situations you face? Write out your plan for each one using the Cope Ahead framework from Week 7.
4. **Your Support System:** Who can you talk to? This might be a therapist, a friend, a support group, or a family member who understands what you’re going through.
5. **Your PLEASE Commitments:** What are the non-negotiable self-care practices you will maintain, no matter how chaotic things get?

What to Expect Going Forward

Learning skills is one thing. Using them consistently is another. Here are some realistic expectations for the road ahead:

- **You will forget to use skills sometimes.** That’s normal. The goal isn’t perfection—it’s practice. When you notice you’ve reverted to old patterns, that *noticing* is itself a mindfulness skill.
- **Progress is not linear.** You’ll have good weeks and bad weeks. A setback doesn’t erase your progress. It’s one data point, not the trend.
- **Skills get easier with practice.** Right now, using DEAR MAN or Opposite Action might feel awkward and effortful. Over time, these skills become more natural—even automatic in some situations.
- **Your loved one’s journey is their own.** You can support, encourage, validate, and reinforce—but you cannot do the work for them. Radical acceptance applies here too.
- **Taking care of yourself makes you more effective.** This isn’t a platitude. Every skill we’ve taught is harder to use when you’re depleted. PLEASE isn’t optional.

A Final Word

You showed up for sixteen weeks to learn skills that will help you be more effective in one of the most challenging situations a person can face: supporting a loved one who is struggling. That commitment matters. The fact that you're here, learning, and trying says something important about who you are and what you value.

These skills are yours now. Use them imperfectly. Use them often. And be willing to keep practicing—because willingness, as you know, is the key to everything.

Homework

- Write out your Personal Effectiveness Plan using the five components above. Share it with someone you trust.
- Review the complete skills summary table. Highlight the 3–5 skills you want to continue practicing most actively. Put a reminder in your phone or calendar to review your plan monthly.