

Navigo's DBT service embedded DBT group skills alongside risk assessment (DICES) since 2008, becoming fully evidenced in 2015, treating EUPD primarily with suicidality. The following account is from a DBT client in her own words.

### MY JOURNEY FROM THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR

There is always another way. The human spirit is stronger than we credit. When feeling broken, thinking nothing can help, trust the treatments available to you.

I hit the depths of despair in 2015, coming home to learn my husband had passed away. I was beyond devastated, in complete shock, crying hysterically and saying "why me", having suffered another huge loss 2-years before. I was now a single mum with a young toddler. I hit a huge brick wall of dark depression. Even small tasks were overwhelming. My head wouldn't work. I couldn't think, struggling to retain information. I stared into space, had no self-worth and hated myself. Putting my child to bed I prayed for sleep, respite from this mental torture but awoke panicking of another day of this. I could barely put one foot in front of another. I believed my brain and thinking permanently broken, which no-one could treat. Kindly Care co-ordinators tried helping. I asked: "Have you seen other people as poorly as me? Do they get better?" They answered "yes". I didn't believe them. I thought how can anyone feel this bad?

Things felt even worse. I genuinely believed my child would have a better life with somebody "normal" - I was failing him through no self-worth; completely alone, as if trapped outside, desperately wanting entry into the real world. I felt incredibly alone even with friends/family; in mental pain, self-destruction and torture.

In February 2016, I couldn't take more and decided to kill myself. The mental pain would stop and life no longer felt worth living. I made a very serious attempt but paramedics intervened resulting in mental health admission. I hated being there though on reflection it was necessary.

The DBT lead assessed my problems with me, explaining I was very unwell and detained as I was a high risk for killing myself. He recommended DBT, which I hadn't heard of; a 9-month intensive therapy. I felt very unsure but he said DBT would reassure Children's Services who were involved with my child. With nothing to lose I wanted to fight for a better life and my child.

I researched DBT on Google. How this would fix all my negative thinking through weekly 1-hour appointments with a therapist and 2½ hour group sessions? My biggest fear was the group. I thought everyone would just talk about their problems, and I preferred 1:1. My therapist explained people got so much out of groups and it wasn't like I imagined. As for my apprehensions about DBT, she reassured me saying "give it a chance". I decided I wanted to get better and this was my time to do this.

I was really nervous in the first group wondering about others and their thoughts of me. Surprisingly everyone was really nice. The group was very structured, setting out what we would do and have discussions about. We got insight into DBT's ultimate goal of "a life worth living". Handouts covered behaviours to decrease and skills to increase. My goals were to decrease: negative self-talk (being so hard on myself); doing too much and exhausting myself; and wanting to make others happy before myself. The skills to increase were: positive self-talk (kinder to myself); accepting my limitations; managing my time and prioritising tasks so I could relax.

I felt relieved and optimistic about the group. My therapist was there to support me on everything from groupwork or a bad day, helping me think differently. I got to know others really well and we bonded. It was nice to hear how we had done on "homework" from very different experiences.

I felt very silly during early mindfulness exercises thinking "how is this of any benefit", but it really helps you relax through very different exercises that sometimes had us in stitches. I looked forward to weekly groups/sessions, which really complimented each other.

We covered really interesting sections. I learnt to decrease unwanted emotions and emotional vulnerability/suffering whilst understanding my own emotions. The exercises and homework really helped you practice new skills and test them. I learnt to name the emotion I was feeling, what prompted it; rating its intensity before and after using the skills I'd learnt. DBT was tailored to you getting the most from it and learning to think differently. I was amazed by the positive changes family/friends commented on. I saw changes in others and remember speaking to one person and being amazed by her positivity. She said "I was where you are when I started and I promise you if you fully commit and put the work in, you will be where I am".

What she said became true. I made small changes all the time through homework, groupwork and therapy. I thoroughly looked forward to DBT and felt sad when it ended but glad I did it. My previously negative view meant I'd nearly refused.

DBT is amazing: it doesn't dissect your problems to improve each one but focuses on solutions; tailored packages providing whole sets of tools you never knew you had. Amazingly, using these new tools mean problems in your head start to disappear. I cannot speak highly enough about DBT and what it has done for me. It has given me a life worth living. I feel like a new woman. I got my child back, have a new job I love and a better relationship with family/friends than ever before. I can honestly say I have found piece of mind after 30 years of suffering mentally as a tortured soul; something I never thought would happen.

For anyone unsure about DBT, be 100% committed and grab the opportunity. It's the best thing I ever did. A huge thank you; what you have done for me is priceless.