



DEALING WITH DISTRESS (DWD) ONLINE GROUP PROGRAM

A 16-week structured group therapy program that teaches effective, and evidence-based skills.



16 WEEK PROGRAM (DETAILED SESSION PLAN)

PHASE ONE: ENGAGEMENT + FOUNDATION

Week One

Engagement & psychoeducation

Focus: Engagement + psychoeducation

Content:

- Group introduction, expectations, confidentiality rules
- What is distress? (emotional vs behavioural response)
- DBT model: thoughts-emotions-behaviours
- ACT concept: control vs acceptance

Exercise:

- "What do I do when I feel overwhelmed?" mapping
- Cost of avoidance vs facing distress

Homework:

Distress diary (track triggers, thoughts, behaviours)

Week Two

Mindfulness Foundation

Focus: Present-moment awareness

Content:

- DBT mindfulness (observe, describe, participate)
- Non-judgmental awareness
- ACT: present moment vs autopilot

Exercise:

- 5-minute breathing practice
- "Leaves on a stream" (intro to defusion)

Homework:

Daily 5-min mindfulness practice

Week Three

Understanding Emotions

Focus: Emotional literacy

Content:

- What are emotions (function, purpose)
- Emotion identification + body signals
- Emotion myths

Exercise:

Emotion mapping (body + trigger + urge)

Homework:

Label emotions daily

PHASE TWO: DISTRESS TOLERANCE & ACCEPTANCE

Week Four

Crisis Survival Skills

Focus: Immediate distress management

Content:

- DBT distress tolerance skills
 - Distraction
 - Self-soothing
 - Grounding

Exercise:

- Create personal crisis plan

Homework:

- Use 1 distress skill during the week

Week Five

Radical Acceptance

Focus: Reducing suffering

Content:

- What is acceptance vs giving up
- Reality vs resistance
- ACT acceptance model

Exercise:

“Turning the mind” practice

Homework:

Practice acceptance in one difficult situation

Week Six

Clean Pain vs Dirty Pain

Focus: Deep emotional insight

Content:

- Clean pain = unavoidable
- Dirty pain = added suffering (avoidance, rumination)
- Link to anxiety, depression

Exercise:

Identify personal examples of both

Homework:

Track clean vs dirty pain during the week

Week Seven

Urges and Impulses

Focus: Behavioural control

Content:

- Urge surfing
- Emotional vs wise mind
- Delaying impulsive behaviours

Exercise:

Urge wave visualisation

Homework:

Practice urge delay (10-minute rule)

PHASE THREE: EMOTION REGULATION + THINKING

Week Eight

Reducing Emotional Vulnerability

Focus: Lifestyle stabilisation

Content:

- Sleep hygiene (VERY IMPORTANT)
- Regular sleep time
- **Reduce screen exposure**
- **Caffeine/alcohol impact**
- **Physical health, routine, nutrition**

Exercise:

Sleep routine planning

Homework:

Implement 1 sleep change

Week Nine

Self Compassion

Focus: Emotional safety

Content:

- Self-criticism vs self-compassion
- **Compassion-focused approach**
- **ACT: self-as-context**

Exercise:

Compassionate letter to self

Homework:

Daily self-compassion statement

Week Ten

Cognitive Defusion (ACT)

Focus: Thoughts ≠ reality

Content:

- “I am having the thought that...”
- Thoughts as mental events
- Reducing fusion

Exercise:

- Silly voice technique
- Thought labelling

Homework:

Practice defusion daily

Week Eleven

Core Beliefs

Focus: Deep patterns

Content:

- Identifying core beliefs (e.g., “I’m not good enough”)
- How beliefs drive distress
- Challenging vs accepting thoughts (CBT + ACT blend)

Exercise:

Downward arrow technique

Homework:

Track core belief activation

PHASE FOUR: INTERPERSONAL + VALUES

Week Twelve

Interpersonal Effectiveness

Focus: Communication

Content:

- Assertiveness
- Boundaries
- DBT interpersonal skills

Exercise:

Role-play difficult conversation

Homework:

Practice assertive communication

Week Thirteen

Values and Meaning (ACT)

Focus: Purpose

Content:

- Values vs goals
- What matters most?
- Meaning and direction

Exercise:

Values clarification worksheet

Homework:

Take 1 small values-based action

Week Fourteen

Forgiveness & Letting Go

Focus: Emotional release

Content:

- What forgiveness is NOT
- Letting go vs condoning
- Self-forgiveness

Exercise:

Forgiveness reflection exercise

Homework:

Write (not send) forgiveness letter



PHASE 5: INTEGRATION & RELAPSE PREVENTION

Week Fifteen

Putting It All Together

Focus: Integration

Content:

- Review all skills
- What works for me?
- Personal toolkit development

Exercise:

Build personal coping plan

Homework:

Practice full toolkit

Week Sixteen

Relapse Prevention & Closure

Focus: Future planning

Content:

- Early warning signs
- Maintaining progress
- Group reflection

Exercise:

- Future self visualisation

Homework:

- Long-term plan

What is the Dealing with Distress (DWD) Program?

A 16-week structured group therapy program that teaches effective, evidence-based skills to help you:

- Manage overwhelming emotions
- Reduce anxiety, stress, and low mood
- Cope better during difficult situations
- Improve relationships and communication
- Build a more meaningful and purposeful life

This program combines:

- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Self-compassion and mindfulness approaches

Duration: 16 weeks

Session Format:

- 90-minute group session
- Optional 30-minute check-in after group

Group Size: Small and supportive

Facilitator: Registered Psychologist

Who is this Program For?

This group may be helpful if you:

- Feel overwhelmed by stress or emotions
- Experience anxiety or depression
- Struggle to cope during difficult times
- Feel stuck or avoid problems
- Want practical tools to improve your wellbeing



Contact Us



(07) 4632 4688



momentummentalhealth.com.au