

STOP SABOTAGING

**A 31 Day DBT Challenge
to Change Your Life**



Debbie Corso

**Stop Sabotaging:
A 31 Day DBT Challenge To Change Your Life**

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Smashwords Edition

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Stop Sabotaging: A 31 Day DBT Challenge To Change Your Life is a work of nonfiction, but the writer has occasionally changed the names and other identifying information about places and persons in order to protect their privacy.

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Introduction

“If we have a part to play in the misery we’re experiencing, this means that the power to change our circumstances -- our very lives -- is also within us. It’s all about choices.”

With that, Debbie Corso's book, *Stop Sabotaging: A 31 Day Challenge to Change Your Life* begins. Corso, a blogger and author known for her caring guidance and humorous quips, has overcome her BPD through intensive DBT and now writes blogs and tweets to assist others in finding peace within.

You don't need a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder in order to get hooked on Corso's entertaining style of writing. She has great flow, and her stories are very personal, come straight from the heart, and are totally down-to-earth and intriguing. Picture all of this substance, packed into one guidebook - 31 bold topics in an easy-to-understand ebook!

Corso outlines Linehan's DBT skills in a relaxed format without losing any of the depth of classic DBT - pretty dialectical.

Stop Sabotaging: A 31-Day DBT Challenge to Change Your Life is an invaluable read for those who are beginning, continuing, or have graduated from an intensive Dialectical Behavior Therapy program and need the security of further guidance.

As a DBT Therapist, Debbie Corso's book, packed with emotion and experience, has helped me move forward with clearer insight in mastering my professional skills.

So, relax, grab a cup of tea and your journal, open the window to your mind, and become magnetized to this enlightening book.

Take Care.

Alicia Paz M.A., LLPC

www.aliciapaz.com

<http://aliciapazdbt.blogspot.com/>



Prologue

Many of us with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) reach a point where we realize our lives have become unmanageable. We realize that the same old ways of reacting, responding, and behaving that we've held onto and practiced simply no longer serve us. They are in fact, sabotaging everything we hold dear.

If you are in this place, there is hope for you. I was once in your shoes. My life was a mess. I made the same mistakes over and over again, and I was desperate to figure out how to change. The problem that I faced, and that you have likely faced up until now, is that I had absolutely no idea where to begin.

In my first book, [*Healing From Borderline Personality Disorder: My Journey Out Of Hell Through Dialectical Behavior Therapy*](#), I shared my documented experience of being diagnosed with BPD and my intensive two years in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), the treatment of choice for people with BPD. I was very pleased to find that in sharing my very private struggles publicly with others, many found or restored hope in their own ability to save and enjoy their own lives.

This book that you hold in your hands covers one of the questions I repeatedly received from readers hungry to take that first step toward healing and recovery: "How did you stop sabotaging your life?" And, more importantly, "How do I stop sabotaging my life?"

The fact that one would even ask this question is a hopeful sign. There's been a realization that things no longer work and that something must be done to bring healing to your emotionally wounded soul.

The first part of the answer is: We get to CHOOSE how we'll respond when we are upset or emotional, and even when we are triggered. This is incredibly liberating and empowering when we truly "get it." I'll, of course, elaborate as we move forward.

As you're learning this new information, taking it all in, processing it, and applying it, please keep in mind that you are not alone. As you read this book, think of the many others reading it alongside you around the world.

Think of the impact that willingly taking the time to work on your core issues will have on you as well as the ripple effects to those in your life and beyond. We cannot change without affecting others and our surroundings. Your decision to embark on a path of self-discovery and to do the tough work that comes along the way is a gift not only to yourself but to others as well. I personally wish everyone would choose to become introspective and work on being the best version of themselves. You're doing that.

I will walk you through examples of how sabotaging has manifested in mine and others' lives. You'll recognize yourself in some of the stories, and that's okay, because we will then explore specific strategies of how I and others have worked to repair and heal those broken parts of ourselves to contribute to becoming more integrated, emotionally healthier people.

Many of us with BPD did not have whole, integrated examples to model healthy behaviors for us. We can only learn by observing others' experiences and then deciding how to live our own lives. That doesn't mean we get to wallow in this or go on forever blaming others for our problems. At some point we must pick ourselves up and choose to take responsibility for the life we are creating going forward. DBT can help with this.

DBT is a set of skills created by Dr. Marsha Linehan that can be used to help people with a myriad of diagnoses. "Research shows that Dialectical Behavior Therapy strengthens a person's ability to handle distress without losing control or acting destructively" (McKay, Wood, and Brantley, 2007)

Your author has recovered from Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and no longer meets the criteria. You will see mentions and references to BPD throughout the text.

These skills have profoundly changed my life, and I hope that you find your life enriched by them as well. Be sure to get a journal, as you will be writing as part of the challenge. Any old notebook will do, as will a memo app on your phone, but I recommend going and getting yourself a beautiful journal/diary/notebook. Pick something lovely and visually appealing -- something you'll look forward to sitting down with and writing.

I hope this book serves as a source of hope, encouragement, and validation for you as you embark on this journey. I'm excited for you and the life you will create from this moment forward.

In kindness,
Debbie Corso

What is Sabotaging?

According to Google Dictionary, to sabotage means to: “[d]eliberately destroy, damage, or obstruct (something)...the action of sabotaging something” (Google, 2012).

sab·o·tage

verb /səˈbɑːtəʒ/ ⓘ

sabotaged, past participle; sabotaged, past tense; sabotages, 3rd person singular present; sabotaging, present participle

1. Deliberately destroy, damage, or obstruct (something), esp. for political or military advantage

noun /səˈbɑːtəʒ/ ⓘ

1. The action of sabotaging something

Let’s read that definition again. Did you catch that? Sabotaging is a *deliberate* act of damaging, destroying, or obstructing something. When I came to realize that *I* was the one who was destroying my life, my jobs, and my relationships -- when I realized that *I* was the one adding to the damage that *I* was the one obstructing the goals I so deeply longed to achieve, I knew I had a choice.

I could either further victimize myself by falling into woe-is-me self-judging and self-damning thinking, ala “It’s all my fault. I can’t do anything right. I’m doomed,” (which I did, initially,) or, I could cast aside the drama, move from Emotion Mind to Wise Mind, the place where we are able to rationalize, sort out thoughts, and make informed decisions, and realize the gift of that realization.

If we have a part to play in the misery we’re experiencing, this means that the power to change our circumstances -- our very lives -- is *also* within us. It’s all about choices.

The power is not in some other person or some other thing. Just as our thoughts, actions, and behaviors have been used as powerful negative influencers in our lives, they can also be used as powerful builders, reconstruct-ers, and healers in our lives. There’s something very empowering about this.

A pivotal moment of this realization for me was early on in my diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder. I showed up at the crisis clinic, yet again in despair and inconsolable. I was buckled over crying and wailing. I felt so desperate, alone, and empty. I needed someone to help save me from myself. I needed someone to reassure me that I would be ok -- to comfort me.

My individual therapist happened to be working in the crisis office the day that I showed up, so she was able to sit down and speak with her. I’ll never forget when she said to me: “All due respect Debbie...what do you expect us to do for you?”

My initial visceral reaction was one of terror. What? You’re not going to help me? I’ve burned the bridge? You’re abandoning me? Rejecting me? I want to die! (Insert a flood of suicidal thoughts.) A flood of those thoughts raced through my head, and I felt like I had a ball of dough in the pit of my stomach but I didn’t say a word. I felt paralyzed. I just looked at my therapist’s face, and it was undeniable to me from her expression that she was experiencing intense empathy for me in that moment.

I took some deep breaths, calmed down, and realized that she did not choose these words to hurt me but to help me. I said, “I don’t know. You’re right.” We came up with a plan for my safety, and I went home. Her words stood with me: “What do you expect us to do for you?”

As I continued to contemplate this, I realized that even though I knew this on a rational level a

along, that these people at the clinic are just human beings like me, I had very high expectations of them. I wanted them to fix to fix me. I wanted them to make me whole. They couldn't.

Sure, they work in psychology and are trained to help people like me deal with distress and proceed through the issues of life, but at the end of the day, they go home to their families and build their own lives. That's what I wasn't doing for myself.

I put all my stakes in my psychiatric care and thought that I could only feel well if reassured by a doctor or therapist. I thought that I wasn't whole, that I didn't have all of the pieces within myself, and that I had to constantly seek reassurance from outside of myself.

Remember, there's a cause for everything. If this is sounding familiar to you, why would you suppose that is? We behave in accordance with what we have learned. It's important to remember that if certain things were lacking in our upbringing, it is likely those things were also lacking for our caregivers when they were children. They passed on what they learned. It's up to someone to break the cycle. Will it be you? Even if you do not have children or do not plan on having them, you can take care of *yourself* in the ways that you didn't get to experience as a child. There is actually a special challenge later on in the book to help build up your precious inner child.

If we were not encouraged to believe that we could comfort, soothe, reassure ourselves, and practice skills to tolerate distress rather than sabotaging, how could we possibly know what to do? Naturally we'd look outside of ourselves and overly depend on professionals to help us to feel okay.

If we don't believe that we have the power, by directing our behaviors in new ways, to prevent things from falling apart in our lives or to cope with the aftermath when they do, how would we know any better than to continue on with self-destructive, sabotaging ways?

The answer is we don't, and that's probably why you're reading this book. Perhaps you've realized that the way you've been doing things is no longer working, and you want to start making changes. Maybe I'm the first to tell you that the key to the door you are seeking is within you. You just have to believe it and be willing to use it. It takes courage and strength, and with time, you can learn to Stop Sabotaging.

BPD & Sabotaging

One of the greatest causes of human suffering is believing that we cannot tolerate being alone. For many people with BPD, feeling alone creates an incredible amount of distress and sorrow. Even the mere prospect of being alone can cause us to feel triggered.

This can be for a number of reasons. In my own personal experience, it has often been a combination of a deep, aching, empty feeling triggered by loneliness, and a frightening sensation of free floating. Without someone else around to guide and cue me -- without someone there who I could assess and read and determine how to please, I felt invisible. I felt like I was nothing. I had no anchor.

Throughout my longest term relationship, my significant other often traveled to Europe both for business and to visit with his family. I remember the first time he left. I couldn't bear to watch him enter security at the airport. It was excruciating.

As he disappeared further and further into the distance behind the glass -- where I could no longer touch him, talk to him, or beg and plead to him not to leave me -- I felt as if I was losing a part of myself. I was terrified. I felt abandoned and empty. I didn't know how I could possibly live with him being so far away.

The pain and fright would become intolerable, and, not knowing what to do with my feelings or how to take care of myself -- not knowing how to cope with the thoughts and believing that I was in danger when I was really just hurting desperately, I made myself so sick that I needed to go to the emergency room. I sought out comfort and reassurance in the only way I knew how: reaching out to doctors who would *have* to take care of me.

Each time I showed up at the emergency room, I regressed emotionally to my late teens. When a doctor or nurse would ask my age, I would feel so embarrassed and vulnerable. I would want them to perceive me as younger and treat me as such. I wanted them to take care of me.

I had no knowing that I had the capability to survive the pain of the temporary situation. I had no knowledge of any skills I could use to cope with the intense emotions rather than giving in to impulses and recklessly and repeatedly sabotaging my life.

If you are in this place -- if you feel like even the notion of someone you love going away is simply unbearable, I was once where you are now. And, as impossible as it seems, you can, if you want it badly enough, learn ways to soothe yourself through the distress, to tolerate the intense emotions, and you can learn new ways of coping that don't make matters worse. If I could do it coming from such a desperate and (what I thought) hopeless place, you can, too.

It doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen without a lot of effort on your part. Equally important is that you seek and receive the support you need to conquer the demons that get between you and your ability to peacefully exist, even if you're on your own.

You may have noticed that I began this chapter by saying that our suffering is caused by "believing we cannot tolerate being alone." Before I started DBT, I didn't really slow down to evaluate my thoughts. I often took them at face value. Same thing with my feelings. For example, if I felt afraid, I determined I *must* be in danger. If I thought I should give up on something, I would tend to just give up on it. And, if I thought I couldn't tolerate being on my own, even for short amounts of time, I believed it and did everything in my power to avoid the terror that being alone evoked.

The great news is, all thoughts and feelings are not facts. There are many instances where, b

habit, a lack of knowing, or even fear, our thoughts are not in alignment with reality. When we can tap into our “Wise Mind,” (Linehan, 1998) we can more rationally evaluate the truthfulness of a thought or feeling and then respond and behave in reaction to this interpretation, rather than our initial impulsive reaction.

Additionally, people with BPD are often compared to chameleons. We often morph our personalities, mannerisms, and even our values to match whoever we are with in a given moment. I once shared with my DBT therapist that I had a great concern that should all of the people in my life convene with me in one room, I would completely lose it. Why? Because I was one way with my coworkers, another with my significant other, another with my family, etc.

Everyone adjusts their behavior for different social situations. It’s normal to be more relaxed at home with your partner than you are with your boss. There are social norms and acceptable behaviors in different environments. This is expected of us. Where I have seen this taken to the next level with my diagnosis is that I have completely adjusted my sense of self depending on the company I was keeping.

Even my values changed. I came to learn that, up until recently, I didn’t really have any steady values of my own. I would shift my viewpoints on religion, my sexual orientation, career goals -- majorly important parts of one’s sense of self -- literally from one minute to the next based on who I was talking to.

If I felt very “Christian” and then found myself in a conversation with someone who was Buddhist, I’d shift and begin to openly admire the person and become beyond intrigued with learning their belief system. In order to please them and have them like me, I would latch onto their words and express how I shared their convictions -- only to shift to the next person’s values and beliefs.

As insane as this may sound to someone who hasn’t experienced it, until just before my diagnosis this was a pretty normal way of life for me. I was a natural shape shifter. Even though I have found it very difficult to commit to and stay with jobs long-term, I would tend to ace all of my interviews and I nearly always be offered the position I applied for.

I have been offered jobs for which I had absolutely no interest and hardly any experience. I would get to an interview, find out about the job, perhaps realize that it wasn’t all that I thought it was going to be, but instead of conveying this, I would (at the time subconsciously) scan and assess my interviewer, the company, and what they were looking for, and then I *became* that person.

It may sound very manipulative to people who don’t experience it firsthand, and I totally get why that would be. I can honestly say that until my final nervous breakdown that led to my diagnosis, this behavior was just so natural that I didn’t even realize that I was doing anything “wrong” or unusual.

There are different theories about why people with BPD adapt this way. In my experience, I would theorize that because I was brought up in a mostly invalidating home environment and had to quickly assess the mood and needs of my caregivers and morph accordingly to get my needs met and avoid abuse, I carried this “skill” into adulthood.

The good news is, no matter our upbringing or previous circumstances, we can now start learning the skills we need to stop sabotaging our lives.

This book can be a part of your very important journey. The fact that you have this book in your hands indicates that you’re ready to try something new.

Let’s get started.

“Self-respect is the fruit of
discipline; the sense of
dignity grows with the
ability to say no to oneself.”

- Abraham Joshua Heschel



Day 1



Self-Care Challenge

Often one of the most difficult things for someone with Borderline Personality Disorder to do is engage in self-care. Whether we feel unworthy, taking care of ourselves feels unfamiliar, or we just don't know where to start, the day has come to begin investing in taking care of you: body, mind, and spirit.

DBT acknowledges that we must take care of all parts of ourselves in order to feel whole, integrated, and balanced, as illustrated in the PLEASE skills in the Emotion Regulation module.

By practicing these skills, we reduce our emotional vulnerability:

1.) **Treat Physical Illness:** Is there anything you may need to see a doctor about? Schedule an appointment for that overdue exam or to have your physician take a look at a concern that's been bothering you. Be sure you're taking all of your medications as prescribed, and if you're having side effects or have questions about them, check in with the prescribing doctor for advice and guidance.

2.) **Balance Eating:** Often when we are stressed, we either over or under eat. Do your best today to eat regularly and healthfully and to stay hydrated. I can't tell you the number of times I've felt completely out of it due to not eating enough. Taking care by eating regularly helps us be less vulnerable to certain types of mood swings. It's also important to take care not to consume foods that will cause you to feel triggered or too emotional, such as caffeine. My anxiety levels have substantially dropped since I've nearly eliminated caffeine from my diet.

3.) **Avoid Mood-Altering Drugs:** It can be so tempting to take a substance that will alter our state of mind or numb us from the pain we are feeling, but doing so only causes more problems in the long run and upsets our equilibrium in the present. It is essential to avoid taking recreational drugs and drinking alcohol if we want to focus on regulating our emotional state.

4.) **Balance Sleep:** Often when we're stressed, as with eating, we'll either over or under do it. This can be a tricky one, as the ability to sleep enough to feel well and balanced may seem out of our reach. When I feel this way, I do my best to do relaxing things before bed time and allow plenty of time to fall asleep. If I wake up in the middle of the night, instead of staying in bed and allowing my mind to race, I get up and distract for a while and then go back to bed. If it's going on two nights of disrupted or deprived sleep, I contact my psychiatrist about temporarily getting on a sleep aid or using my anti-anxiety medication to help me sleep. We all know what a difference it makes to get a quality night of sleep. The other end of the spectrum is over sleeping, and I am all too familiar with this pattern. Sometimes getting into bed and resting is the best solution, but if we spend too much time in bed, we can feel groggy, overtired, and thus affect our moods adversely. I've also been told that it can be a way of feeding into depression. So, if the temptation to crawl into bed becomes more and more

frequent, let your psychiatrist know.

5.) **Get Exercise:** We've all experienced this -- it feels so much more comforting to stay curled up on the couch than to put on our walking shoes and get outside and exercise. I experience this repeatedly. What I also experience is that, if I am able to push through, I feel SO much better both physically and mentally after the walk, yoga class, or aerobic dance session. Not only do I know that I am doing something good for my body by releasing stress chemicals and increasing "feel good" chemicals, I also get a sense of accomplishment and can better enjoy my lazy activities. You can start small and build up to 20 minutes, 3 times a week, or whatever regiment your physician says is appropriate for you. It really does make a difference.

How does practicing the PLEASE skills help us to Stop Sabotaging?

When we take care of our physical needs and health, we become less susceptible to the erratic, often dysregulated emotions that we can be vulnerable to when we are not. If we are feeling more balanced due to this self-care, we may experience less impulsive urges, reducing our possibilities of self-sabotage.

Day 2

Mindfulness and Self-Esteem Activity

I recently attended an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP), and one of the activities that we did in our Mindfulness group really impacted me and stood with me. I'm happy to share it with you in hopes that you'll also have a very positive experience.

The group therapist laid out a variety of stones and seashells that she had collected over the year. They were all unique in terms of color, texture, size, and shape. She asked each patient to go up to the table and select a rock or shell that spoke to them - meaning they were attracted to it in some way.

Each person brought their selection back to their seat and then did the following mindfulness activities. Before reading on, please select a rock, seashell, flower, or other object from nature and then return to participate in these activities. It won't take much time, and you may be surprised at how you feel after completing the exercise. Just walk outside and pick up a twig or a leaf if those are more readily available to you.



- 1.) Using your sense of vision, look at the object as if you are an alien from another planet, carefully examining this new thing for the very first time. Describe to yourself everything you see when you look at the object. Pause. Take a few deep breaths. Shift gears.
- 2.) Close your eyes, and using your sense of touch, feel the various surfaces of the object. Notice how the object feels in your hands as you allow your fingers to explore its surface. Describe the textures that you notice and any sensations you experience as a result of touching the object.
- 3.) Open your eyes and hold the object to your heart. According to the therapist who ran the group, although this may seem odd, she believes that every object in nature has its own resonance. This made me think of a lyric from the theme song from the Disney movie *Pocahontas*: "*Every rock and tree and creature has a life, has a spirit, has a name*" (Menken & Schwartz). If you don't feel comfortable with this philosophy, think about this piece of nature in a way that makes you feel comfortable as you hold it to your heart. Breathe deeply three times.

4.) Next, hold the object up to your ear. Imagine what words of wisdom this object from nature might have for you. As silly as it may seem, we often engaged in this type of wonderment and connection with nature when we were children. Try to tap into that or let your inner child do this part of the activity. What words of wisdom does your object have for you?

5.) The final part of the exercise was the most difficult for most. We were asked to go around in a circle and describe our object while using "I am" statements. I encourage you to try it.

Here is an image of the rock that I selected for the exercise. The camera just couldn't capture the brilliance of its facets and the way they reflected light, but here it is, along with some statements (and others) I came up with:



I am strong.

I have many different sides, and they all reflect light.

I have beauty.

I am rough in some places and smooth in others.

I have been through a lot, but I am not broken. I've survived.

I have changed with lots of pressure, but I am still here.

How does being mindful and building our self-esteem help us to Stop Sabotaging?

Practicing mindfulness has been a huge contributor to my ability to stop sabotaging my life. When we practice, we come into the present moment. We become in touch with what we think, how we feel, and what is actually happening right now. We don't get dragged back into the past and old wounds. We don't project into an imaginary future that doesn't even exist.

In practicing mindfulness, we also allow ourselves to put time and space - a pause - between our thoughts or urges we have and taking any action. Instead of jumping from a thought to an action, we pause in-between to allow ourselves the opportunity to slow down and think things through from a place of wisdom, rather than emotional reaction. Just slowing down in this mindful way can help prevent us from self-sabotaging.

Focusing on our self-esteem and building it up reminds us that we are worthy of so much more than we may have believed up until now. When we begin to believe that we are worthy, precious, and valuable, we are less apt to engage in destructive behaviors that hurt ourselves and sabotage the

progress that we work so hard to achieve.



Day 3



One Thing At A Time

We live in a culture where multitasking is valued and expected. You can answer the phone, type a letter, figure out these statistics, and stand on your head at the same time? You're hired!

Unfortunately, this mindset is hurting many of us. Studies, such as one conducted at Stanford University (Gorlick, 2009) show that multitaskers are actually less effective than those who focus on one project at a time.

This makes sense to me. I've personally noticed that if I am attempting to complete multiple tasks simultaneously, none of them actually gets done as best as they could if I focused on each individually.

I've actually stopped talking on the phone while in the grocery store. Aside from being less annoying to my fellow shoppers, I've noticed that the shopping experience is much less stressful when I go in and end up successfully following my list (for the most part), and focus on getting the items I set out to buy.

Before, I'd get caught up in my phone conversation (though not really paying full attention to the other person), and I'd forget items, get the wrong things, or notice that my shopping trip was excessively long compared with how many items I actually purchased.

I thought I was accomplishing more by having a phone conversation and shopping at the same time, but I wasn't fully present for either and would end up stressed. When we do more than one thing at once, we are missing out on those moments in life. We are not paying attention.

I realize that there are some circumstances, such as a Mom who must watch her children while doing other tasks, for example, where multitasking is essential, but for the most part, we can consciously choose to do things one at a time (or consciously choose to multi-task when circumstances make it necessary.)

This next challenge is an opportunity to practice One Mindfulness by doing one thing at a time.



We are going to make and enjoy a cup of tea, but we're going to slow down the process drastically. Read this list over so you know what steps to take, and then begin, pausing to notice between each step.

- 1.) Select a tea that you would like to enjoy.
- 2.) Take the tea bag out of its container.
- 3.) Hold the tea bag up to your nose and slowly inhale, noticing the aroma.
- 4.) Select a mug and place it on a counter.
- 5.) Place the tea bag in the mug.
- 6.) Get your tea kettle.
- 7.) Turn on the faucet, and fill the tea kettle with enough water.
- 8.) Place the tea kettle on the stove.
- 9.) Turn on the heat under the kettle.
- 10.) While waiting for the water to be ready, sit down.
- 11.) When the water is ready, stand up.
- 12.) Walk over to the kettle.
- 13.) Remove the kettle from the heat.
- 14.) Pour water into your mug and over the tea bag.
- 15.) Place the kettle down.
- 16.) Watch the water begin to darken from the tea.
- 17.) Notice any aromas as the tea begins to steep.
- 18.) Sit down and let the tea bag steep for the desired amount of time.
- 19.) When the tea is done steeping, stand up.
- 20.) Walk over to the cup of tea.
- 21.) Remove the tea bag from the mug.
- 22.) Put the tea bag in the trash.
- 23.) Add sweetener or milk or whatever you like to add to your tea.
- 24.) Stir the tea.
- 25.) Lift up your mug.
- 26.) Notice how the warm or hot mug feels in your hands.
- 27.) Carry the mug to where you're sitting.
- 28.) Sit down.

- 29.) Lift the mug to your face and feel the warm steam.
- 30.) Notice the aroma.

- 31.) Put the tea down and let it cool for a while.
- 32.) Look at and observe the tea.
- 33.) When the tea has cooled down enough, take a small sip.
- 34.) Notice the temperature of the tea.
- 35.) Notice the flavor.
- 36.) Notice how you feel.
- 37.) Enjoy your tea, sip by sip, all the while noticing how the warmth of the cup feels.

I bet you never realized that having a cup of tea could be broken down into 37 steps! Look at how much we miss when we glaze over the details and do things in an automatic or autopilot way.

This exercise can also be done when taking a shower or bath by breaking down each step (opening the bathroom door, drawing the shower curtain, turning on the faucets, etc.)

How do you feel after completing this exercise? What did you notice about preparing and enjoying tea that you never did before (or had long forgotten?)

How does doing one thing at a time help us to Stop Sabotaging?

We are less likely to be overwhelmed when we are able to give our full attention to one task at a time. Feeling overwhelmed leads to emotional vulnerability, which can lead to sabotaging. By slowing ourselves down and being mindful, we reduce our vulnerability to overwhelm.

Day 4

Identify Yourself

Not everyone has a strong sense of identity. This was actually one of the more frightening aspects of my condition that led me to receive a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder. I didn't know who I was.

Does this sound familiar? Do your opinions, thoughts, viewpoints, and even values shift depending on whose company you're in? This was certainly my story.

The thought that led me to truly desire to develop a sense of my own, unique identity was that I wondered how I could possibly handle it if everyone I knew were in the same room as me.

I was so different with different company, morphing into who I thought they wanted me to be in order to gain their love and acceptance that God forbid I should find myself in the room during a political discussion with a republican and democrat friend at the same time. Or a religious friend and an atheist friend. You get the point. This was a wakeup call for me.

I came to learn and realize that the development of my personality was stunted due to an invalidating home environment as a child. I was afraid of my father, so I'd behave in ways to try to desperately please him. I didn't understand my mother and feared her as well, so I'd act in another way with her. I had other mannerisms of behaving with each of my grandmothers.

Although, fortunately, none of these parts of me broke off into a separate identity or personality (as in Dissociative Identity Disorder, formerly Multiple Personality Disorder), I never formed a fully developed personality of my own, and I carried the pattern of people reading and pleasing into my adult life. These behaviors served to help me survive as a child. They were my mind's way of adapting to my environment and protecting me, but as an adult, the patterns began to no longer serve me.

Figuring out who you are takes time, love, and self-compassion -- especially if, like me, you're getting a late start.

You may want to start out by listing some very basic things that you know or believe to be true about yourself. As you answer each question, patiently remind yourself to answer from your heart -- not what you think is the "right" answer, the answer your sister would give, the answer your father would want to hear, etc. Dig down deep. What are YOUR answers?

Pull out your journal and complete these sentences:

- 1.) My favorite color is _____.
- 2.) My favorite number is _____.
- 3.) If I could live anywhere in the world, it would be: _____ because _____.

- 4.) The type of weather I prefer is _____.
- 5.) I feel good when I _____.
- 6.) The three world cuisines I enjoy the most are _____, _____, and _____.
- 7.) When it comes to cooking, I (choose one) usually enjoy doing it / do not usually enjoy doing it.
- 8.) One thing I know to be true about myself is _____.

Look at your answers. Review them while honestly assessing if the answers came from YOUR heart. I recommend making a note in your journal each time you notice something that you believe to be truth about who you are.

Examples:

I love to get into conversations with others.

I am a vegetarian.

I prefer to wear comfortable clothes.

Keep a log and review it from time to time. Share it with your therapist as you continue to explore the unique, wonderful being that you are.

How does working on identity issues help us to Stop Sabotaging?

When we don't know who we are, there is a tendency to change course with every wind that blows. If we are not grounded in our own values and goals, we can easily become emotionally dysregulated and unbalanced.

Developing a clearer picture of who we are, what we stand for (and what we don't stand for) can help guide us in making decisions that lead us toward our goals rather than destroy our progress by sabotaging.



Day 5



Build Mastery

When I first heard about the Build Mastery skill in DBT, I thought it would involve taking on an enormously challenging task and accomplishing it.

The good news is this skill only requires that you pick something to do that is at least somewhat challenging given where you are in your journey at the moment.

For one person, this could mean learning how to make fused jewelry in a one-day workshop. For another, it might mean finally getting the dishes washed and out of the sink. It really depends on how much energy you have on the day you practice and how ready and willing you are to push yourself.

Consider a task that you can complete today. Pick something that feels only slightly out of reach or challenging. It can be a housework task, an arts and crafts project that you saw online and have been meaning to try, a DBT homework assignment, or making an important phone call that you've been putting off. These are just examples. Think of your own life and pick one thing that you'd like to complete today.

Once you've completed it, you've practiced the skill of building mastery. Notice how you feel. Often times, we experience a sense of accomplishment and relief.

Begin a section in your journal where you log one task that you intend to practice each day, and then complete the task and log your accomplishments for the duration of the challenge (and beyond, if you find the practice is helping you on your journey.) Allow yourself to grow with increasingly challenging tasks as the month goes on.

How does building mastery help us to Stop Sabotaging?

We are often very hard on ourselves and don't keep track of all of the things we do *right*. By planning and documenting tasks that you complete successfully, you'll counteract the negative messages that say you're not getting anything done. When we feel more accomplished, we are more likely to continue behaving effectively rather than sabotaging our efforts.

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