

Wise Mind: Experiencing Integration & Intuition

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) assumes that you are capable of experiencing wisdom in your life or achieving "Wise Mind." You will develop Wise Mind as you learn and practice DBT skills. Skills are learned abilities. With skills, you are able to change behaviors, emotions, and thinking patterns associated with problems in living, especially those causing misery and distress. The specific DBT skills for developing Wise Mind are interpersonal effectiveness skills, emotion regulation skills, distress tolerance skills, and core mindfulness skills.

Many people are familiar with the serenity prayer:

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

DBT seeks to help you learn acceptance and change skills and in the process courage, serenity, and wisdom. Core mindfulness skills and distress tolerance skills are acceptance skills. Emotion regulation skills and interpersonal effectiveness skills are change skills. Wise Mind puts these skills into action.

Problems in living can be separated into two broad categories: problems with emotions and problems with thinking. Emotional problems have to do with acting the way you feel (impulsivity), moodiness, anger, anxiety, and confused feelings. Problems in thinking have to do with what you know (or don't know), and problems with reason or logic. Any combination of such problems can lead to interpersonal chaos, confusion about self, or the inability to regulate one's mind in other words; misery and distress.

To understand Wise Mind, you need to understand two states of mind: reasonable mind and emotion mind.

Reasonable mind

Facts and logic are the framework of reasonable mind. You are in reasonable mind when you think logically and rationally. This intellectual or scientific state of mind defines

reality in terms of facts, numbers, equations, or cause and effect. Whether balancing your checkbook, baking a cake or working a crossword puzzle, you need information and a way to apply that information to obtain the desired result.

Reasonable mind is important to learning skills. You need to understand how a skill works and when to apply it. Reasonable mind can be a storehouse of information, helping you define a problem and determine a solution. To use skills, you need to know what the different skills are, and how to call them forth when you need them. For example, to regulate emotions, you must be able to name them, understand what events and interpretations prompt certain emotions, know what emotions feel like, what emotions compel you to do, and their aftereffects.

Reasonable mind is much easier when you are healthy, strong, sober, rested and fed but much harder when you are sick, weak, stoned, tired, or hungry. Emotion mind starts to take over when you are stressed or don't feel well.

Although, reasonable mind is critical to dealing with reality, many of life's problems have an emotional aspect.

Emotion mind

If reasonable mind runs "cool" then emotion mind runs "hot." Passionate, extreme, and intense reactions in emotion mind make reasonable, logical thinking difficult. When an emotional state controls your thinking and behavior, emotion mind has taken over. Acting the way you feel is how emotion mind behaves.

Emotion mind can flood your system with energy in anger or zap your energy in depression. Impulsively acting the way you feel can lead to out of control behavior creating chaos, hurt feelings, and more problems. Emotion mind tends to be irresponsible, careless, mindless, impulsive, and impatient. Strong emotions distort facts, magnify excuses, and shrink your perception of consequences.

Of course, certain amount of emotion mind can be beneficial. Intense love is a motivation for intimate relationships. Intense devotion or desire motivates staying with very hard tasks and sacrificing oneself for others. Mothers running through fires to save their children are in emotion mind. People high in emotion mind are often passionate about people, causes, and beliefs - these are the dramatic, fun people of the world.

Misery and distress are emotional reactions to problems in living that make a difficult situation worse. You can, however, learn to use emotion and logic together concert to improve your quality of life. This is the goal of Wise Mind.

Wise Mind

Wise mind is the active integration of emotion mind and rational mind. Wise Mind brings together the cold logic of reasonable mind and the heightened sensitivity of emotion mind to a centered calm state of mind. Wise Mind is doing the best you can under the circumstances. When you act skillfully with problems causing misery and distress, you are in Wise Mind and doing the best you can. When you relate what you know (your smarts) to you problems (what hurts) you are being skillful and in Wise Mind. Wise Mind joins what you know to your problems. Your effort to link your problems causing misery and distress with your reasonable, logical abilities is the basis of skillfulness and Wise Mind. But Wise Mind is more than this too, the magic of Wise Mind is intuition.

Intuition is understanding the meaning, significance, or truth of an event, without having to analyze it intellectually. Such intuitive knowing combines emotional experiencing and logical analysis, yet goes beyond them. Sometimes emotion can masquerade as intuition. You feel certain you “know.” If this “knowing” is intuitive it will still be valid when examined without the emotion of the moment. A calm certainty will validate your intuition, helping you discern whether your certainty is emotionally biased or truly intuitive. Intuition has qualities of direct experience and immediate recognition, with the roots of reason and experience.

As you use your skills, you learn to act intuitively out of Wise Mind. Wise Mind is similar to intuition (or, perhaps, intuition is part of Wise Mind). To access Wise Mind, you have to use intuition to go beyond emotional reactions and logical analysis. Polarized thinking and set ideas interfere with Wise Mind. Flexibility, awareness, imagination, and open-mindedness nurture Wise Mind.

A way to become wise is to practice being wise. Such practice requires learning skills and persistence. Practice identifying your problems of living and consider possible solutions. Be willing to bring together the problems of living with your experience, knowledge and intuition. Wisdom grows when you use your senses, develop your mind, and

learn skills. Wisdom takes work. Start working by learning core mindfulness skills, interpersonal effectiveness skills, emotion regulation skills, and distress tolerance skills.

Wisdom, Wise Mind, or wise knowing depends on integration of all ways of knowing something: knowing by observing, knowing by analyzing logically, knowing by what you experience in our bodies (kinetic and sensory experience), knowing by learning and experience, and knowing by intuition. Knowing in these ways develops with awareness and awareness expands as you observe, analyze experience, learn, and intuit. By exploring the various ways of knowing and becoming more aware, you develop a sense of wholeness, continuity and coherence.

Wise Mind is like riding a bike, which takes effort, balance, and steering. You can learn Wise Mind, like riding a bike, only by experience. First, you must be willing to expend a little extra effort to initiate Wise Mind. As you would fall over if you were too far to the right or left on a bike, find Wise Mind by making the effort to find the balance of your emotions and thinking. Intuition is like pedaling, it takes you forward. Doubt, shame, and guilt are like putting on the brakes. Like you can jump on a bike and ride, you can learn to activate wise mind and find a better way. As you bring Wise Mind skills to the problems in living, you will develop mastery, the feeling of being competent and under control.

When you are willing to choose the best ends and the best means of achieving those ends you are activating Wise Mind.

Sometimes you may access wisdom when suddenly confronted by another person. Someone may say something insightful that unlocks an inner door. Wise Mind may be the calm that follows the storm - an experience immediately following a crisis or enormous chaos. It is suddenly getting to the heart of a matter, seeing or knowing something directly and clearly. It is grasping the whole picture instead of only parts. It is calmly "feeling" the right choice in a dilemma, when the feeling comes from deep within rather from a current emotional state. Wise Mind feels like all the pieces fit together.

Self-agency and self-awareness are part of putting the pieces together. Self-agency is the feeling you have when you are in control of your own behavior. Rather than feeling your behavior just happens, self-agency owns the behavior and takes responsibility for it. Self-awareness is the sense you have that your different roles, feelings, attitudes, and mental states fit together coherently. You will develop self-agency and self-awareness as you

develop mindfulness, regulate your emotions, be effective interpersonally, and tolerate distress.

Meditation and Wise Mind

Mindfulness is crucial to Wise Mind. One of the best ways to develop mindfulness is through mindfulness exercises like meditation. One of the simplest meditation exercises is to follow your breathing. When you meditate on your breath, you can find Wise Mind in the physical center found at the bottom of your inhalation. You can develop the ability to find your center during meditation and get to know this calm centered place well. If you learn where your center is and how it feels, you can go to this place, confident that you are responding in Wise Mind. Although meditation may be unfamiliar, you can cultivate the ability to be mindful.

Meditation and mindfulness develop your ability to observe what is going on within yourself in any situation. One way that people commonly experience this is to step back from one's thoughts and feelings and release your attachment to these mental phenomena. The goal here is to reflect on your thinking and feeling, independent of the circumstances, observing what is going on in one's mind like watching clouds drift through the sky.

Qualities of Wise Mind

Wise Mind is calm. It is almost always quiet and peaceful. Herbert Benson, MD of Harvard Medical School was one of the first to research the therapeutic value of meditation. He found that meditation could elicit what he called the "Relaxation Response," which is the physiological opposite of stress and hypertension. Meditation heals the damage of stress.

In Wise Mind, you are in control of emotional mind. Behavior is not mood dependent (controlled by one's emotions) but at the service of one's inner wisdom. Eventually, objective self-observation and self-description are attainable from this slightly detached point of view. In fact, you can learn to experience extreme emotions like anger or fear while staying in Wise Mind. This takes lots of practice - for everybody. Likewise, in Wise Mind, you are able to access the knowledge of reasonable mind.

Wise Mind is courageous, i.e. feels scared but does what is needed in the situation. Willingness is doing what is needed in each situation. Willingness often requires courage.

Wise Mind is confident. Self-confidence is knowing you can handle whatever problems in life comes along. When Wise Mind becomes clear, fear disappears.

Coherent sense of self: In Wise Mind, you can maintain your own feelings, opinions and decisions when around others. Self-description, a core mindfulness skill, helps you know yourself and resist unhealthy urges to please others (conform to pressure and change one's mind). At the same time, you are strong enough not to be defensive when presented with alternative views that warrant your consideration.

Clear sense of self: you can see more clearly who you are when you are quiet and peaceful. Self-observation develops self-understanding and accurate perception. The opposite of "automatic pilot" or doing something without thinking. Wise Mind is "being in the present on purpose."

Wise Mind helps you cope effectively with change by drawing upon inner resources. Wise mind is that part of each person that can know and experience truth. It is where the person knows something in a centered way and can focus on what is effective and functional.

Conflict resolution is possible in Wise Mind. Not trapped in all-or-nothing thinking, one is able to integrate information from emotion mind and reasonable mind and connect to others with compassion. In this calm, centered place you can focus on what is effective and functional.

Through mindfulness, you will develop the skills that access your Wise Mind. With Wise Mind as the basis for problem solving, you will improve the quality of your life.

References

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