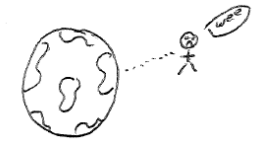
Lisa is a young woman who has had marked difficulties with intense emotions and risk behaviours when she was referred for Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). This is her story in her own words.

(Note: There is reference made to risk behaviours in this piece)

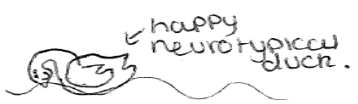
Before DBT

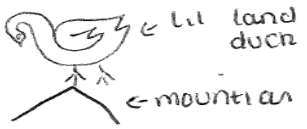


I struggled with my emotional regulation numbness, feeling like I had floated off the earth, dissociation, anxiety catastrophising made me want to pull my hair out like when I dropped 50p in the pickle jar act work and couldn't sleep in case I had infected everyone and killed someone with a compromised immune system (DISASTER)!!

I can't put into words how I felt when things were bad, hopeless, helpless and despair are words that describe it but they are not powerful enough to actually explain the physical and emotional turmoil that resulted in the actions I took.

Everything felt out of control all the time and everyone else could just manage. I know they may be ducks chilling on the surface but me, I was an aquaphobic duck lost at sea, frantically flapping in need of a lifeguard.





I felt out of control, I would make plans to study, save and then act on impulse → and then spiral.

I felt useless and terrified of what my future would look like.

I felt I didn't know who I was, I would watch others and copy them to fit in.

I sought help from services but was "too complicated" to cure in 6 weeks. Therapists, CBT, psychologists, crisis, GPs

→ everyone I saw suggested different labels.

→ left me confused.

→ a bit like my childhood experiences of Clarks with long narrow feet and high instep. Paved from college to college left with unpractical half fitting shoes.



Learnt coping mechanisms → self-harm, alcohol, substances, restricting diet, binging/purging.

Suicidal thoughts → overdoses

→ I don't know that I ever wanted to die. But I felt what I now know is overwhelmed coupled with no self-worth or belief. Alongside not understanding why I was different, why overwhelming and out of my control, a

tainty about the future and a fear of change

→ and sprinkle some shame.

Risky behaviours to feel things.

I would jump to conclusions "can't clean my room", "everyone else can", "lazy → useless", "call yourself a Uni student", "you deserve to die."

Scared to tell my parents, in case they hated me, were disappointed or took my control away.

I had friends like loads for the first time ever but they were not real friends and this led to feeling isolated, alone and awful.

Diagnosed with BPD over the phone and felt like this was forever and there was no hope, not cure, stuck.

Confused → constantly told I was "too much", "overly sensitive" and then services telling me everyone feels this way.

I know services did their best to help me with limited time and resources but most of the time that felt like being given a shit planter and being put in a swimming pool.

In summary, I was a gal who didn't know who she was, wanted to achieve so much but was impulsive. Tried to control unpredictability by any means possible. Couldn't cope with rejection or change so plaud herself in situations bound to lead to rejection or change. Engaged in unhealthy coping mechanisms, felt so much shame about that. She engaged in unhealthy coping mechanisms to cope with it.

I really believed I would feel like this forever.

Couldn't recognise emotions 0-100.

Although ambivalent at first, I began to see progress and this helped me to engage more and see results.

<u>DBT</u>

I will be honest after years of services doing their upmost to help but the shoe never fitting, I was sceptical.

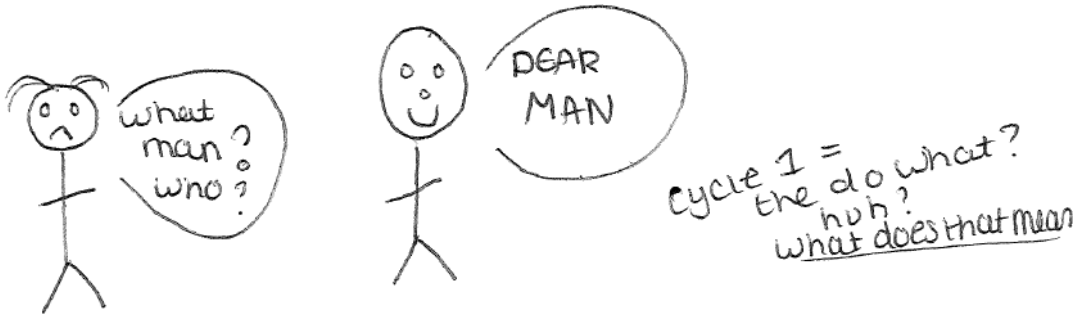
But I was willing to give anything a go at this point and then at least I have tried.

Coming to DBT was terrifying → like going to group for the first time. But once you go it's kind like a sign of relief → here is a group of people who don't judge you, don't have hidden agendas and actually have been through and feel things just as strongly and confusingly as you do.



One to one's at times were tough because they don't ignore elephants in the room → they invite a whole heard in. but this allowed me to address difficult topics.

<u>Cycle 1</u>



<u>Cycle 2</u>



<u>Cycle 3</u> → the old hand wise out cycle



The DBT team

One of the reasons DBT has been successful for me is the team. They understand the road is wild. They were never disappointed when I relapsed but helped me to understand why. They never stopped believing in me, never give up, never thought I was complicated or silly. Validated my feelings and never shied from difficult topics.

You are never a problem patient, too challenging or too much. They never made me feel like 'this is just my job, soooo '. I felt supported and that they wanted me to do well. They celebrated my wins but helped pick me back up when things didn't go well, re-equipped me with tools and sent me back to try again.

Certain elements of DBT, like the structured diary cards, didn't work for me. That never meant I was untreatable or the therapy wasn't for me. Instead, it was personalised to allow me to get the most out of it.

When I started DBT, the team sort of stood in my corner, believed in me and supported me when I couldn't. after a while, we did that together and now I can occupy my own corner.

I think the therapeutic relationships in DBT, have supported me to get well, because of the companionate, person centred care that is delivered. For me this supported my growth, engagement and recovery in DBT. But has also carved on to underpin my practice as a nurse In that I aspire to be able to deliver the same quality of care, with the same person centred approach and to always believe in my patients' ability. Because I now not only stand in my own corner, but I am able to do that for my patients as the team once did for me.

Group → terrifying but useful. Allowed feedback, successes from skills are inspiring. Support from others. Sharing own successes and others genuinely caring. Being in a group of people who understand was the first time I can remember where I was just me, no mask and people liked me.

DBT

Taught me to recognise emotions, problem solve and recognise that two opposites can be true.

It's allowed me to understand what makes me more emotionally vulnerable and things I need to sustain wellness.

DBT is different to other therapies in that at first, we focused on crisis management. Like others. But then delved deeper understanding what led to crisis and skills used to avoid this and then on quality of life aspects.

Skills coaching

Due to the small nature of the team, unlike previous interactions with services, it's always someone who knows you, hat helps and doesn't.

Allowed me to talk through problems occurring in between sessions, identify skills that I could use and reminded me how to apply these.

Ahh ADHD

Having flitted from therapist to therapist, I had never been fully myself or honest. Opening up in DBT after a while, being truthful and myself it was suggested I had ADHD.

At first → I was like another label and no, that's not me.

My diagnosis and medication changed things for me.

I suddenly understood difficulties in my childhood, not fitting in, my fear of loud noises I never grew out of (sorry DAD), why I found tasks such as cleaning difficult, why I was impulsive, why everything felt out of control. Why I didn't know who I was. Why I copied other. And most importantly, why I am terrified of mascots.



My ADHD diagnosis has been an emeralds shoe moment.

It's allowed me to be hinder to myself about things I find hard. Put adjustments in place to offer me support.

Allowed me to just be me.

Meds reduced impulsivity which has brought more stability in my life.

Life now

Life still has its ups and downs. But not in the same way. More of a curve ball sent to throw you off. But there are manageable. What would have once sent me spiralling into crisis, doesn't. I feel I have expected reactions to situations. I have skills I can use to navigate there → and I am, as always, still working on things.

I no longer have a diagnosis of BPD! That label I thought was for life and meant nothing would ever improve. I am not wrong about much… But I was wrong there. With my DBT skills, the DBT journey and my ADHD medications I no longer meet the criteria.

My family knows. This has led to improved relationships with them. I don't have as many friends but I have a stable friend group. Where my relationships no longer exist in chaos and unpredictability.

Oooooh, most importantly → the girl who didn't think she could achieve anything and struggled to get from day to day… is a full blown mental health nurse, in full time employment and not to start tooting trumpets. Although it can be a tough job, I am coping well with it.

I am in a long term relationship.

I am getting better at saying 'no' and having a work life balance – unless the question is "Do you want to go to McDonalds?" → always a 'yes'.

I feel like I can cope!

I no longer have suicidal thoughts (okay, occasionally they creep up on me) but when this has happened, I can identify factors and vulnerabilities which has led me here. I am able to identify steps I can take to help myself.

My contact with services is limited. I see my psychiatrist for ADHD meds but that's about it.

One of the things with DBT is you never really leave. So I am a member of the graduate group. This isn't therapy but peer support and this for me has not only eased the transition out of an intensive therapy but allowed me to make lifelong friends who have been through the same therapy as me and allows me to keep my skills up to date.

I can advocate for my needs.

I am both incredibly proud and grateful to be a DBT graduate. At times in my journey I questioned it and wanted to give up. The process is hard and emotional and requires perseverance and work. But the support of the DBT team, my 1:1, the group and the graduate group I believe has changed the course of my life. I never had a light bulb moment. But slowly skills no longer became effort I have to practice but things that I automatically do in my life. I don't know what things would have been like without it. But I am very glad though all the tougher moments I stuck it out. And glad that the first day when I debated pressing that bell, I did.