

Using a Diary Card to Manage Intense Emotions

Objective

To use the Diary Card tool to manage intense emotions and decrease the likelihood of engaging in self-harming behavior.

You Should Know

The use of diary cards in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is an effective tool if you have intense emotions or want to harm yourself, and it is a helpful tool for monitoring yourself on a day-to-day basis. Here are the ways a Diary Card can help you:

1. **Recall.** A lot can happen during the course of one week – or even during one day! When you complete a diary card every day, it helps you remember what helped you.
2. **Notice behavior patterns.** You might do things repeatedly without even realizing it. Completing a diary card can help you identify unhealthy behavior patterns that lead to intense emotions and actions you might later regret. Once you identify these patterns, you can more easily change them.
3. **Increase self-awareness.** You might sometimes think, “I don’t know how I feel,” or “I don’t know why I did that!” Completing a diary card can help you look at your behavior to find the answers to these types of questions.
4. **Skill recognition.** You might be learning new skills in therapy, or you might have things that you have found help you cope. You can acknowledge what helps you by describing what you are doing on your diary card.
5. **Skills recall.** Looking at a diary card on a daily basis reminds you of what works, and increases the likelihood you will use them when you are having a hard time.
6. **Trigger identification.** Completing your diary card will help you identify how people, places, thoughts, and things affect you.
7. **Mindfulness.** Completing a diary card helps you look at what you did well and recognize not everything is “bad.” Things that made you laugh or feel good also deserve acknowledgment.
8. **Self-validation.** Sometimes it might be hard to validate yourself. As you complete your diary card, you will become more aware of the healthy behaviors and skills you are using, making self-validation easier.
9. **Progress recognition.** If you complete your diary card each day, you will see the changes you are making in your life. As the weeks and months pass, you can look back at your emotions and urges to see how they have changed.

Diary cards allow you to record your intense emotions, self-harm, substance use, or suicidal thoughts and urges. You can include skills you use to cope with these thoughts and behaviors. You can identify links between triggers, situations, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Use the app! If you would rather not make copies of this worksheet, you can use the Diary Card app, which is free to use. In addition to a daily diary card log, there are 28 DBT skills to choose from. Your entries are collated to give you a weekly or monthly view – or any date range you want. You can add notes, set up a notification to remind you to fill it in each day, and share it on social media or email. Learn more about the app [here](https://www.diarycard.net/) (<https://www.diarycard.net/>).

What to Do

Review the sample diary card, then make copies of the blank form so you can fill it in each day (*or use the app, described above, on your smart phone or tablet*). Note the date and whether or not you had suicidal thoughts. Then rate your depression, anxiety, and anger from 1 to 10, where 1 = none, to 10 = extreme; the worst I have ever experienced. Then describe the specific actions you take.

Diary Card Sample

Date: 10/15

Depression: 6

Anxiety: 8

Anger: 2

Suicidal thoughts: N Y

Triggers: *I spilled my coffee and I was late to work. Later in the day I had an argument with my friend. My sister made a mean comment to me.*

Destructive behaviors I engaged in today: *I drank six beers and then lashed out at my friend.*

Skills used: *Distraction, mindfulness. I went on a 3-mile walk.*

Self-soothing: *I walked outside and focused on the sights and sounds around me.*

Distraction: *I tried to watch a movie on Netflix, but I had trouble focusing.*

Opposite Action: *When I was anxious, I tried to face my fears.*

Mindfulness: *For 5 minutes I focused on my breath.*

Interpersonal effectiveness: *I sat down and talked with a friend about a problem we had, and we sorted it out.*

Positive Steps I took today: *I reached out to my friend; I didn't get into an argument with my sister when she made a mean comment; I resisted the urge to cut myself.*

Notes: *I was really proud of myself for using skills to distract myself and pull myself out of moments of severe anxiety. I was feeling really down about myself, but at the end of the day I realized I did really well making myself feel better.*

Diary Card

Date: _____

Depression: _____

Anxiety: _____

Anger: _____

Suicidal thoughts: N Y

Triggers: _____

Destructive behaviors I engaged in today:

Skills used: _____

Self-soothing: _____

Distraction: _____

Opposite Action: _____

Mindfulness: _____

Interpersonal effectiveness: _____

Positive Steps I took today:

Notes:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
