



The Massachusetts Psychological Association
2023 Annual Conference

Raising the Next Generation: Innovation to Address the Evolving Needs of Youth and the Profession

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Norwood, MA

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy for the Transition to College (1.5CE)

Presented by Leah Benjamin, PsyD; Shahawna Kim, PsyD; Megan Carreiro, MS

The mental health of college students has been on a consistent decline throughout the past decade with data supporting an overall increase in anxiety and depression among students, reflecting a growing mental health crisis among this population (Lipson et al., 2022). More students are entering college with preexisting mental health conditions, and their mental health may decline further in college without sufficient transitional support (Linden et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that worsening mental health problems while in college can have long-term adverse outcomes on a student's capability to function and succeed academically, socially, occupationally, and psychologically (e.g., Brieler et al., 2015). Conversely, positive mental health among students has been positively associated with academic achievement, on-task learning, and improved classroom attendance (e.g., Lehr et al., 2004). Providing mental health interventions may lead to more students adapting and thriving throughout their college journey. Given the high prevalence of mental health challenges and stress-related difficulties when entering college, there is a growing interest in using mindfulness and cognitive behavioral practices to foster positive mental health during this transitional period. As the transition to college is a vulnerable period for young adults, intervening with these evidence-based practices may be beneficial for incoming college students. Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), a comprehensive and skills-based treatment, may be particularly well-suited for college students and the challenges they face.

Some research suggests that DBT skills training offered as a stand-alone intervention during college can lead to greater psychological well-being and adaptive skill use among students (e.g., Uliaszek et al., 2016). DBT for the Transition to College is a new, yet unstudied, intervention that offers a brief DBT skills group to college-bound students prior to beginning college. This intervention was designed to help students learn skills to effectively manage some of the challenges they are likely to face when living on a college campus. This novel intervention 1) provides evidence-based DBT skills, 2) is tailored to meet the transitional needs of college students, and (3) is brief and can be offered within a 2-week period. At the same time, there is no existing research on the feasibility of the intervention. The outcome of this innovative program has the potential to provide meaningful information about a new approach to supporting the mental health needs of vulnerable college students. This workshop aims to further expand upon the need for innovative interventions for young adults as they transition to college. Presenters will review the ways that DBT for the Transition to College can be applied, including overviewing ways that DBT skills can be tailored for this specific population.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will summarize and describe the mental health crisis among college students, particularly as it applies to the social and emotional challenges associated with the transition and adjustment to college;
- Participants will analyze the research evidence on Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) as it applies to adolescents and young adults, and demonstrate how DBT skills can be applied to college student populations;
- Participants will utilize and apply innovative adaptations for DBT skills for early career college students.

Dr. Leah Benjamin is a licensed clinical psychologist working at The Concord Center. She specializes in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) for adolescents and adults with anxiety disorders, depression, personality disorders, and body focused repetitive behaviors (BFRBs). Dr. Benjamin is trained in the Comprehensive Behavioral Model (ComB) for BFRBs, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for Adolescents, and is foundationally trained DBT therapist.

Dr. Benjamin graduated from Brandeis University with a B.A. in Psychology and Gender Studies. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree, she worked for several years at various programs within McLean's 3East Continuum of Care. Dr. Benjamin then attended graduate school and received her Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology from Antioch University New England. She completed clinical training at a greater-Boston area high school, as well as at the counseling center at Brandeis University. She then completed her pre-doctoral internship at Suffolk University's Counseling, Health, and Wellness Center, and her post-doctoral fellowship at the Brandeis University Counseling Center.

Dr. Benjamin is also passionate about groups, outreach, training, and consultation. She is a teen Mental Health First Aid instructor, and enjoys collaborating with other organizations to help attend to the mental health needs of their communities. She has recently consulted with the Jewish Education Project, Fusion Academy, Middlesex School, and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston. Dr. Benjamin is also an active volunteer with Take This, a nonprofit organization dedicated to decreasing stigma and increasing support for mental health in the game enthusiast community and inside the game industry.

Dr. Shahawna Kim is a licensed clinical psychologist working at The Concord Center. She specializes in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for adolescents and adults with Borderline Personality Disorder, depression, and anxiety-related issues. Dr. Kim is foundationally trained in DBT, as well as intensively trained in Dialectical Behavior Therapy Prolonged Exposure (DBT PE) for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. She also specializes in the treatment of adolescents with eating disorders using Family-Based Treatment (Maudsley family therapy).

Dr. Kim graduated cum laude from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Sociology. She then went on to receive her M.A. in Forensic Psychology at John Jay College. Finally, she received her Psy.D. from William James College (formerly known as the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology). Dr. Kim has trained in a variety of settings including Walden Behavioral Care in their adolescent intensive outpatient program (IOP) for eating disorders, and the UMass Adolescent Continuing Care Unit at Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital. Dr. Kim also trained at McLean Hospital as one of the Beckwith-Hughey fellows on the 3East Intensive DBT residential unit, and then continued on as a therapist for the program for a further five years. While at 3East she delivered fully adherent DBT to adolescents ranging from 13 to 21 and provided eating disorder consultations and trainings for the patients and staff.

Megan Carreiro, M.S. is a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology doctoral program at Suffolk University. She received her BA in Psychology at Framingham State University and her MS in Neuroscience & Education at Columbia University, Teachers College. Her master's thesis examined the effects of PTSD and suicidal ideation on executive functioning in older adolescents. While in her master's program, Megan worked as a Kindergarten science teacher in Harlem and as a research assistant at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. Prior to entering Suffolk's PhD program, she worked as a clinical research coordinator at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Her research and clinical interests center on addressing ways to foster healthy developmental outcomes during adolescence. Specifically, she is interested in mentoring interventions and trauma-informed care programs for underserved and underrepresented youth.