

# The Diary Card: Monitoring What Is Important

■ **CORE CONCEPT:** The diary card is an essential tool to build awareness and skill use.

DBT uses diary cards to track anything that is important to your well-being, treatment, and/or process of change as well as the skills you practice. In many ways the diary card is like an abbreviated journal that guides your progress, and it provides a wealth of information that allows your therapist to support you and set priorities for your time in session together.

Some DBT therapists and programs use a standard diary card that monitors issues common to DBT clients, and other therapists and programs create specialized diary cards for particular client populations (e.g., children, adolescents, people with chronic pain) or even for each individual client. Examples of a standard diary card and a blank one for you to customize are included in this section.

Standard diary cards usually track three key areas of concern for many DBT clients: urges to act on suicide (called “SI,” for suicide ideation), urges to act on self-injury (called “SIB,” for self-injurious behavior), and urges to act on therapy-interfering behaviors (called “TIB,” for therapy-interfering behavior). Urges toward suicidal behavior relate to any action that could or would result in your death; urges toward self-injury relate to any nonlethal action that causes harm and/or tissue damage; and urges toward therapy-interfering behavior relate to any action that would interrupt or otherwise interfere with having an effective course of treatment. Common therapy-interfering behavior includes being late to or absent from appointments, avoiding talking about relevant issues, violating boundaries in relationships, and not following skill plans.

In addition to tracking SI, SIB, and TIB, people with substance abuse and/or other addictions will typically track urges to engage in those addictive behaviors, and people with eating disorders will track urges to engage in overeating, bingeing, purging, and/or restriction and over-exercising, depending on the particular areas of concern.

To round out the diary card, there is space to list the skills you practiced, space to write down feelings, and space to record gratefulness. Some therapists and programs will also have clients monitor their treatment goals and objectives on the diary card.

Diary cards are typically completed every day, preferably at the same time, with information from the previous 24 hours from time it is filled out. Most people spend 5 to 15 minutes to thoughtfully complete the card. Forgetting to fill it out or choosing not to fill it out can be considered TIBs.

Some people feel overwhelmed when they first learn about the diary card, and they may initially struggle to complete it. If that happens for you, stick with it. It will get easier and will be a great aid to you reaching your goals. If you are not sure whether a diary card is worthwhile for you, consider these benefits of completing one consistently:

- What you track and monitor on the diary card is what changes. Observing and describing what you experience and being accountable to yourself to practice skills keep you moving forward.
- You will notice patterns in your emotions, urges, and symptoms over time, and this awareness will make you more effective in using your skills.
- You will be able to validate your emotions and reinforce your efforts and effective skill use, eventually seeing positive changes over time.

- When something is not improving, or even getting worse, you can rally your resources and skills around addressing it.
- You and/or your therapist can quickly see what is happening and determine your priorities, which will better guide your sessions and make better use of your time together.

To get started, you can either use the standard diary card provided or customize your own.

# Diary Card Instructions

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- **CORE CONCEPT:** The diary card develops awareness and accountability to help you build a satisfying life.

Follow these directions:

- Fill out your diary card *every* day. Do it thoughtfully and bring the card to all sessions.
- For the Medications (RX) section, use Y (yes) if you took all medications as prescribed. If you missed any medications, or if you did not take them as prescribed, use N (no).
- For the Depression (DEP), Anxiety (ANX), and Anger (ANG) sections, use a scale of 10 to 0 and rate the *range* of your feelings by noting the highest and lowest levels (e.g., 8–4 for ANX) or, alternatively, rate your average levels (e.g., 7 for DEP).
- For the Suicidal Ideation (SI), Self-Injurious Behavior (SIB), and Therapy-Interfering Behavior (TIB) sections, use a scale of 10 to 0 and rate the *range* of your urges by noting the highest and lowest levels or, alternatively, rate your average levels. Additionally, use a Y (yes) or N (no) to note whether you *acted* on SI, SIB, or TIB urges or if you took any planning steps toward acting on them (e.g., 9–3/N or, alternatively, 6/N for SIB urges). (Note: People with substance abuse, other addictions, or eating disorder behaviors can record urges and action under either SIB or TIB or under one of the “Other” columns on this diary card.)
- For the Energy section, use a scale of 10 to 0 and rate the *range* of your energy level or, alternatively, rate your average level or energy.
- For the Sleep section, note the total number of hours of sleep. Make a slash mark (/) through the number if the sleep was not restful or was broken.
- For the Eat section, use Y (yes) for *any* efforts to eat healthy foods in a balanced manner. If you did not make any efforts, use N (no).
- For the EX (Exercise) section, use Y for *any* efforts to get movement into your day in a balanced manner. If you did not make any efforts, use N (no).
- For the Other sections, track any other symptoms, urges, behaviors, or issues important to your treatment.
- Under each category list the skills (see Appendix 1: Master Skills List) you used to address and manage what you recorded in that area (e.g., for DEP, you might list PL, O2E, and DM).
- On the back side of the diary card, write down your feelings, positive events, and what you are grateful for each day.
- Keep your diary cards. They are for you to track and monitor your progress.

If you use the blank diary card:

- Determine, perhaps with the help of your therapist, what you need to and want to monitor on the diary card. You will probably borrow from the categories above as well as develop your own customized areas.
- It is recommended that you follow the same principles and guidelines listed above even if the content of your diary card is different.

# Standard Diary Card (Front)

	RX	DEP	ANX	ANG	SI	SIB	TIB	Energy	Sleep	Eat	EX	Other	Other
<b>MON</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													
<b>TUE</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													
<b>WED</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													
<b>THU</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													
<b>FRI</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													
<b>SAT</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													
<b>SUN</b>													
<b>Skills</b>													

# Standard Diary Card (Back)

	Feelings	Positive Experiences	Gratefulness
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			



# Blank Diary Card (Back)

	Feelings	Positive Experiences	Gratefulness
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			