

Job Loss, Divorce or Death in the Family: Radical Acceptance is Key to Getting Back on Track.

All of us have experienced radical acceptance at some point in our lives. To understand how Radical Acceptance works, try to focus on a time in your life when you've actually accepted something radically, completely, and totally. Think back to a time when you had a great loss: someone you loved has died, or you were unable to get something important that you really wanted, like a job.

Focus on that thing you wanted that you didn't get or that loss you experienced. Now, sit back, close your eyes and go back in time, right before you got that tragic or disappointing news. Imagine that time again. Go through that period of time when you weren't accepting your loss. Next, move to imagining the time when you *did* accept it.

Most of us are able to find some time in our life when this acceptance has occurred, and that's what we mean by Radical Acceptance. With this acceptance, you will have a sense of letting go of that struggle. Before, you were struggling. Now you are not - and this gives you a sense of being centered within yourself. It gives you a greater sense of peace. You may still have a lot of sadness and that's normal. Acceptance often goes with a lot of sadness, but even in the midst of that sadness, there's a sense of a burden being lifted. If you have really accepted, you feel ready to move on with your life and make the next best decision rather than being immobilized by the pain or remaining stuck in what happened.

Three parts to radical acceptance:

- accepting that reality is what it is
- accepting the fact that there is a legitimate reason for your pain
- accepting that life can be worth living, even in the midst of painful events

Inner Harbour teaches *Radical Acceptance*. Here's the premise: suppose you had a really serious problem or event in your life that caused serious pain or trauma, such as abuse, the death of a loved one, or a permanent disability. What are your options? You can choose to be miserable or you can *accept the reality* of your situation.

One of our clients, Shawn W. (not his real name) recently lost his mother while staying with us. He was already feeling like he had lost everything in life, even hope. Now, his mother's death felt like a fatal blow.

Shawn took out his anger on everyone around him and tried to push them away. He refused to talk about his loss and pretended that it didn't happen. As a result, he ended up feeling even more lost and lonely. He was suffering. But once he started to acknowledge his loss and put it into words, he had a way to work through his pain. The

pain was still there, but he had radically accepted that his mother was gone. He saw that he was not alone and there were others who still loved and cared for him.

At Inner Harbour, the process of radical acceptance is an important skill that we integrate into our daily treatment as a part of DBT, our clinical model. It not only helps them deal with the pain and losses of the past; it helps to prepare them for those hurts that are a part of everyone's life process.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy, - DBT for short – is a treatment approach for people who are experiencing intense, negative emotions that interfere with their daily lives. These emotions may be expressed outwardly in destructive ways such as angry outbursts, or inwardly by avoided behaviors such as suicide attempts, substance abuse, or impulsive actions.

The goal of DBT at Inner Harbour is to teach our youth more effective ways to regulate their emotions, deal with distressing situations in their lives, and to improve relationships with the people around them. As the term *dialectical* suggests, the process involves the use of reasoning and dialogue. At Inner Harbour, our clients learn how to move from being out of control or emotionally shut down, to learning how to experience their emotions more fully. The result: they are better prepared to return to a more normal life.