

# ADVANCE REVIEW COPY

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## 120-Day DBT Journey

For Late-Diagnosed Neurodivergent Adults

by Adam Pale

Piacentini Editions

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This ARC contains only a partial excerpt of the full book  
(Introduction + Days 1–7 of 120).

The complete edition is available on Amazon:  
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120-DAY DBT JOURNEY

# FOR LATE-DIAGNOSED NEURODIVERGENT ADULTS

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*A Structured Daily Workbook to Regulate Your Nervous System,  
Process Your Late Diagnosis, and Build the Life  
Your Brain Was Always Capable Of*

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For Adults with ADHD, Autism, and AuDHD

## **Disclaimer**

This workbook is for educational and personal growth purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment, therapy, or medical advice. If you are in crisis, please contact a qualified professional or crisis support line.

DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy) is an evidence-based approach developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan. This workbook adapts DBT principles for neurodivergent adults and is not an official clinical DBT manual.

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Printed in the United States of America

## INTRODUCTION

# The Diagnosis Didn't Break You. It Explained You.

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*You probably weren't supposed to find this book yet.*

You were supposed to find it after years more of trying — after one more therapist who didn't quite get it, one more productivity system that worked for three weeks before collapsing, one more morning of waking up exhausted from being someone you weren't sure was really you.

But here you are.

Maybe the diagnosis is recent — still sharp-edged, still something you turn over in your hands wondering how to hold it. Maybe it's been a few years and you're still figuring out what it changes. Maybe you're not officially diagnosed yet, but something in you recognised yourself in a way that felt like finally seeing your reflection clearly for the first time.

*Whenever and however you got here: welcome.*

**This is not a book about what's wrong with you.**

**It's a book about what was missing.**

For most of your life, you were handed tools designed for a different brain and told that your inability to use them consistently was a personal failure. The planner that worked for everyone else but not you. The breathing exercise that felt pointless in the middle of a meltdown. The therapist who kept asking you to 'challenge your thoughts' when your nervous system was too dysregulated to think clearly.

**You weren't failing the tools. The tools were failing you.**

DBT — Dialectical Behavior Therapy — is one of the most evidence-based approaches to emotional regulation that exists. But like most psychological frameworks, it was developed without neurodivergent brains at the centre of its design.

This workbook is different. Every skill in these 120 days has been adapted for the specific experience of being a late-diagnosed neurodivergent adult.

*You don't have to do this perfectly.*

*You don't have to start on a Monday.*

*You don't have to complete every day without missing one.*

**You just have to keep coming back. That's the whole practice.**

*With honesty and care,*

**The Author**

SECTION 1.1

# What Is DBT — And Why Did Standard Approaches Miss You?

DBT — Dialectical Behavior Therapy — was developed in the late 1980s by psychologist Marsha Linehan. Research showed it effective for a wide range of experiences, including the emotional intensity common in neurodivergent adults. It is built around four skill areas:

## THE FOUR MODULES

**Module 1 — Mindfulness (Days 1–30):** Observing what's happening inside and around you without immediately reacting.

**Module 2 — Distress Tolerance (Days 31–60):** Getting through hard moments without making them worse.

**Module 3 — Emotion Regulation (Days 61–90):** Understanding and working with your emotions rather than against them.

**Module 4 — Interpersonal Effectiveness (Days 91–120):** Navigating relationships in ways that honour both your needs and theirs.

## Why Standard DBT Often Falls Short for ND Adults

The standard DBT model doesn't account for how differently the neurodivergent nervous system regulates. When you're in sensory overload, 'notice your thoughts' is neurologically inaccessible. When RSD is active, 'check the facts' requires trusting your perception at the exact moment your brain says it can't be trusted. None of this means DBT can't work for you — it means it needs to be taught differently for your brain. That's what this programme does.

# Your Late-Diagnosis Brain: A Brief Owner's Manual

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*Before you start building new skills, it helps to understand the machinery.*

## Your Window of Tolerance Is Narrower

Everyone has a 'window of tolerance' — a zone of nervous system activation in which you can process information and engage with the world. For most neurodivergent adults, this window is narrower than average. You move from regulated to overwhelmed faster, and recovery takes longer.

## Your Emotional Intensity Is Real — and Neurological

Research consistently shows that many neurodivergent individuals experience emotions more intensely and for longer durations. This isn't immaturity. For many late-diagnosed adults, this intensity was pathologised: you were 'too emotional,' 'too reactive.'

## You Learned to Mask — and Masking Has a Cost

Masking is the process of suppressing or camouflaging neurodivergent traits to appear more neurotypical. Almost every late-diagnosed adult has done it. Masking takes an enormous amount of cognitive and emotional energy.

## You May Have Difficulty Identifying Emotions in Real Time

A significant proportion of autistic and ADHD adults experience alexithymia — reduced ability to recognise and name emotions as they're happening. This doesn't mean you don't have emotions. It means the signal-to-label translation is slower or noisier. The Describe and Emotion Regulation skills in this workbook are designed with this reality in mind. You will not be asked to 'just notice how you feel' as though that is straightforward — because for many ND adults, it isn't.

## Your Executive Function Works Differently Under Stress

The daily structure of this programme is designed to minimise executive demand: same format every day, same sequence, no decisions required about what to do next. This isn't about being prescriptive. It's about removing the friction that often prevents neurodivergent people from using skills they actually have. When the format is predictable, your executive function can focus on the practice — not on figuring out what the practice is.

# How This Programme Works (And How to Make It Work for You)

This programme is 120 days long, divided into four modules of 30 days each. Every single day in this workbook has exactly the same structure:

## THE STRUCTURE OF EVERY DAY

1. **The Late-Diagnosis Lens** — Why this skill was harder before you knew what you know now.
2. **Today's Skill** — A clear, plain-language explanation.
3. **Practice** — A concrete exercise with a time estimate.
4. **Low-Energy Version** — A 60-second alternative for hard days.
5. **Reflection** — Questions and space to write your thoughts.
6. **Evening Check-In** — Three simple scales: body, emotions, energy.

**That's it. Every day. Same structure. No surprises.**

## What to Do When You Miss a Day

You will miss days. Missing days is not failure. Failure would be not opening the book again.

**When you miss days: don't go back. Don't try to catch up. Pick up the next day in the sequence and keep going. You're building a habit, not completing a test.**

## What to Do When a Skill Feels Impossible

Use the Low-Energy Version. Always. Without guilt. On the days when you use it, you are not doing less. You are doing the right amount for that day.

## A Note on the Evening Check-In

At the end of every day, three scales (1–5) track your body, emotions, and energy. Over 120 days, these become data — a map of your own nervous system you've never had before. You can't regulate what you can't track.

SECTION 1.4

# Your 120-Day Tracker

Fill in a circle each day you complete your practice — full version or low-energy. This is your map. Watch it fill.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110
111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120

Dark = Module 1: Mindfulness | Medium-dark = Module 2: Distress Tolerance | Dark grey = Module 3: Emotion Regulation | Black = Module 4: Interpersonal Effectiveness

## MODULE 1

# MINDFULNESS

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*Learning to Be Here*

**Days 1 – 30**

Mindfulness is often the first place neurodivergent people give up on DBT. The word has accumulated a cultural weight that makes it feel inaccessible — 'clear your mind,' ocean sounds, meditation cushions. For a brain that generates thoughts at the velocity of a browser with too many tabs, this framing doesn't just feel unhelpful — it feels like another way to fail.

So we reframe it entirely. Mindfulness, in the DBT sense, is not about emptiness. It's about **noticing**. Noticing what's happening inside and around you, right now, without immediately judging it or trying to change it.

# 1

## What Is Your Mind Doing Right Now?

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

Before you knew your brain was wired differently, "paying attention" felt like something you either could or couldn't do — and the answer was often couldn't. What nobody told you was that your brain wasn't refusing to pay attention — it was paying attention to everything simultaneously. Today is the first day you start learning the difference.

### TODAY'S SKILL

The first mindfulness skill isn't a technique. It's a question: What is my mind doing right now? Your mind is doing something right now — planning, judging, wandering, or somewhere in between. None of these states are wrong. The skill is simply to notice which one you're in. This is called the Observer position — the part of you that can watch your mind without being identical to it. You have one. It's right there, reading these words and simultaneously noticing that it's reading them.

### PRACTICE (3–5 minutes)

Set a timer for 3 minutes. Sit or lie down — this is not a posture exercise. Ask yourself: What is my mind doing right now? Then just watch. Don't try to stop or change the thoughts. Notice them like cars passing outside a window. When the timer ends, write down what you observed. Not what you think you should have observed — what actually happened.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

Pause wherever you are. Look at one object for 5 seconds. Ask: What was my mind just doing? Write one word.

**REFLECTION**

*What did you observe your mind doing? Was it mostly in the past, present, or future?*

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*Was there a moment you drifted and came back? What brought you back?*

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*What surprised you, if anything?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN		
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Did I complete today's practice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Full version	<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Not today

# 2

## One Brain, Many Channels

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

Most mindfulness instructions assume a single quiet mental stream. Your experience might feel more like several radio stations playing simultaneously. This used to be called "distractibility." Today we call it what it is: a different kind of attention — one that can be worked with.

### TODAY'S SKILL

Today we go one layer deeper: noticing that your mind can be doing several things at once — and that this is not a malfunction. Neurodivergent minds often process input in parallel rather than in sequence. This is not attention deficit. This is attention abundance — directed everywhere at once. Today's skill is labelling without merging: noticing what's happening in your mind without becoming absorbed in any one stream. Think of yourself as an air traffic controller who can see multiple planes without flying any of them.

### PRACTICE (4 minutes)

Set a timer for 4 minutes. Allow your mind to be exactly as busy as it is. Don't try to quiet it. Your only task: every time you notice a thought, feeling, or sensation, label it with one word. Planning. Worrying. Remembering. Sensation. Judging. Wandering. When the timer ends, write which labels came up most often.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

Set a 60-second timer. Notice three different things your mind does. Write one word for each.

**REFLECTION**

*What did you notice today? Which labels came up most often?*

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*Did labelling feel strange, helpful, or something in between?*

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*Is there a channel your mind visits most often? What do you notice about that?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN		
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Did I complete today's practice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Full version	<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Not today

# 3

## The Body as Data

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

For many neurodivergent adults, the connection between mind and body was severed early — not by choice, but by necessity. If you spent years learning to override your body's signals to keep functioning in environments that weren't designed for you, tuning back in can feel unfamiliar, or even threatening. This is one of the most important places the programme begins.

### TODAY'S SKILL

In DBT, body awareness is a foundation of mindfulness — because the body is often faster than the mind. Your nervous system registers a threat before your conscious mind has processed it. Today's skill is body scanning — moving attention slowly through your body and noticing what's there, without trying to change it. You're not trying to relax. You're collecting information. Note for sensory-sensitive readers: if any part feels activating or uncomfortable, open your eyes, look around the room, and return when ready — or move to the Low-Energy Version.

### PRACTICE (5 minutes)

Set a timer for 5 minutes. Sit or lie down comfortably. Starting at the top of your head, move attention downward: head, face, neck, shoulders, chest, arms, stomach, hips, legs, feet. About 20 seconds per area. For each area: Is there tension or ease? Warmth or cool? Any sensation, or numbness? Don't try to change anything — just notice. Write two or three things you observed.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

One hand on chest, one on stomach. Two slow breaths. Notice which rises more. Write one word describing what you feel in your body right now.

**REFLECTION**

*Were there areas easy to feel, and areas that felt blank or numb?*

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*Did any part feel uncomfortable or activating? What did you notice there?*

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*What is your body telling you about today?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN		
BODY	EMOTIONS	ENERGY
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Did I complete today's practice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Full version	<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Not today

# 4

## Wise Mind — Your Inner Compass

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

One of the most disorienting parts of late diagnosis is realizing that many "bad" decisions were actually reasonable adaptations to information you didn't have. But there were also moments — quiet ones — when you knew something was wrong or right before you had words for it. That knowing is your Wise Mind. It didn't stop working when the world drowned it out.

### TODAY'S SKILL

In DBT, there are three mind states. Emotion Mind is when feelings drive everything. Reasonable Mind is when logic is in charge and feelings are pushed aside. Wise Mind is where both coexist: you feel emotions without being controlled by them, and think clearly without losing what matters to you. Wise Mind isn't always loud. For many neurodivergent adults — especially those told their perceptions were wrong — it can feel like a very faint signal. The practice is learning to turn up the volume. Wise Mind often speaks in sensations: a feeling of settling, rightness, clarity that cuts through noise. Today you begin mapping that signal.

### PRACTICE (6 minutes)

Think of a decision you made — large or small — that felt genuinely right. Not because it worked out perfectly, but because it felt aligned with something deep in you. Notice what happens in your body as you recall it. Where do you feel it? Warmth, weight, stillness, expansion? Now think of a decision that felt slightly off. Notice what's different in your body. Write down the contrast. You're mapping the physical signature of your Wise Mind.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

Think of one time you "just knew" something — and it turned out to be right. Write one sentence about what that felt like in your body.

**REFLECTION**

*What physical sensations did you associate with the "right" decision? Where in your body?*

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*How is that different from the feeling of an anxious or purely emotion-driven decision?*

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*When was the last time you remember accessing something like Wise Mind?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN		
BODY	EMOTIONS	ENERGY
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Did I complete today's practice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Full version	<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Not today

# 5

## Non-Judgmental Observation

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

Many late-diagnosed adults were judged constantly — for how they learned, reacted, communicated, felt. Over time, that external judgement became internal. The critical voice that calls you "too much" or "not enough" isn't your voice — it's the accumulated verdicts of people who didn't understand you. Today's skill is about separating observation from evaluation.

### TODAY'S SKILL

In DBT, observing non-judgmentally means noticing what's happening without layering evaluation on top. Not "I'm having a bad day" but "I'm having a day with a lot of intensity." This isn't toxic positivity. It's the difference between describing and judging. A description is neutral: I cried for ten minutes. A judgement adds a verdict: I fell apart, again, like always. Your internal judge has had decades of practice. You will notice it interrupting observation with evaluation. When it does — that's the practice. Just notice the judgement, without judging the judgement.

### PRACTICE (5–7 minutes)

For 5 minutes, write a stream-of-consciousness description of today as if you were a journalist reporting facts. No interpretations, no verdicts. Every time you notice evaluative language ("I was bad at...", "I failed...", "I shouldn't have..."), circle it. Don't fix it — just mark it. At the end, count how many judgements appeared. Don't judge that number.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

Write one sentence describing this exact moment — where you are, what you're doing, how you feel physically — without using the words good, bad, should, or wrong.

**REFLECTION**

*How often did the inner judge appear? In what kinds of moments?*

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*What's the difference in your body between a judgement and a neutral observation?*

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*What would it mean to apply this lens to yourself more consistently?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN														
BODY					EMOTIONS					ENERGY				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Did I complete today's practice?					<input type="checkbox"/> Full version					<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Not today				

# 6

## Wise Mind When You Don't Trust Yourself

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

Late diagnosis often comes with a particular wound: having been gaslit, dismissed, or corrected so many times that you stopped trusting your own perception. The Wise Mind skill assumes you have access to your inner knowing — but what if years of being told you're wrong have buried it? This day is specifically for you.

### TODAY'S SKILL

Accessing Wise Mind when your self-trust has been eroded requires a slightly different entry point. Instead of looking for certainty, we look for resonance — the quiet sense of something fitting or not fitting. Think of resonance as a tuning fork. You don't need to know the "right" answer. You just need to notice: does this feel in tune with who I actually am, or does it feel like a performance? This is harder than it sounds when you've performed for decades. It takes practice. Today is one repetition.

### PRACTICE (5 minutes)

Sit quietly for 3 minutes. Bring to mind something you're currently unsure about — a decision, a relationship, a direction. Ask yourself: If I couldn't fail, and no one was watching, what would I do? Don't analyse the answer. Just notice what arises. Then ask: Does that answer feel like mine, or like what I think I'm supposed to say? Write whatever comes.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

Ask yourself one question: What do I actually want right now? Write the first answer that comes — not the one that sounds reasonable.

**REFLECTION**

*What arose when you asked "if no one was watching"? Did it surprise you?*

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*How do you distinguish between your voice and the voice of what you're supposed to want?*

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*What would it take to trust your own perception a little more?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN																			
BODY					EMOTIONS					ENERGY									
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5					
Did I complete today's practice?					<input type="checkbox"/> Full version					<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy					<input type="checkbox"/> Not today				

# 7

## The Hypervigilance Habit

### THE LATE-DIAGNOSIS LENS

Many neurodivergent adults developed hypervigilance as a survival tool — scanning constantly for social cues, signs of disapproval, or signals that you've gotten something wrong. It worked. It kept you safe in environments that were unpredictable. The problem is that hypervigilance and mindfulness are nearly opposite states, and your nervous system may not know how to distinguish between them yet.

### TODAY'S SKILL

Hypervigilance is a state of elevated alertness — your attention is directed outward, scanning for threat. It can feel like focus, like productivity, like "just being responsible." But it is exhausting, and it keeps you one step removed from your actual present experience. Mindfulness directs attention differently: inward, and to what is actually happening right now — not what might happen. The shift from hypervigilant scanning to present-moment noticing is one of the most significant changes this programme builds. You won't switch it off in a day. But you can begin to recognise when hypervigilance is running — and that recognition is the first step toward choice.

### PRACTICE (4–5 minutes)

Set a timer for 4 minutes. Sit or stand wherever you are. Notice where your attention is right now. Is it directed outward — scanning the room, monitoring others, checking for signals? Or is it directed inward — on your body, your breath, your immediate sensory experience? Don't try to force a change. Just notice which mode is active. If it's hypervigilance, acknowledge it: This is my nervous system doing what it learned to do. I don't need to fix it right now. Write what you noticed.

### LOW-ENERGY VERSION (60 seconds)

Place one hand on your chest. Ask: Am I scanning for threat right now, or am I actually here? Write yes or no.

**REFLECTION**

*Was your attention directed inward or outward during the practice?*

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*Do you recognise hypervigilance as a familiar state? When does it tend to run?*

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*What does your body feel like in hypervigilance vs. genuine calm?*

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EVENING CHECK-IN		
BODY	EMOTIONS	ENERGY
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Did I complete today's practice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Full version	<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Not today

MODULE 1: MINDFULNESS

# Week 1 Review

*Days 1–7.*

**REFLECTION**

*What worked this week? Which skill felt most useful or accessible?*

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*What didn't work, or what felt hardest?*

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*What do you want to carry into next week?*

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**CONSISTENCY OVER PERFECTION. SELF-TRUST OVER PRESSURE.**

# Did this resonate with you?

Your review makes a real difference.

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You've just read the Introduction and the first 7 days of the 120-Day DBT Journey — a workbook written specifically for late-diagnosed neurodivergent adults.

If this excerpt felt relevant to your experience, we'd be incredibly grateful if you'd consider leaving an honest review on Amazon.

You don't need to have read the whole book.  
A few sentences about what resonated — or didn't — is enough.  
Real, honest reviews are the most valuable thing a reader can give.

## Leave your review on Amazon:

[www.amazon.com/dp/B0GXX76PGN](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0GXX76PGN)

Search: "120-Day DBT Journey" on Amazon

## Want to continue the journey?

The complete 120-day workbook — all four modules — is available now.  
Paperback edition · Ships to the US and worldwide.