

## CHAPTER 1

# Introducing the Skills System

The Skills System is a set of nine skills and three system rules that helps the individual cope with life's challenges. This emotion regulation skills curriculum was developed to help the individual organize her internal and external experiences in ways that decrease discomfort and problematic behaviors, while increasing positive affect and goal-directed actions. This simple framework guides the person through the process of becoming aware of the current moment (mindfulness), directing attention, and activating behaviors that are in service of personal goals. The individual learns to follow steps that mobilize inner wisdom ("Wise Mind"; Linehan, 2025a) in each unique situation. As the skills and the System Tools (guidelines for assembling skills chains) are integrated into the context of the person's life, often effective coping behaviors increase. Each situation provides the individual with an opportunity for self-discovery and for active participation in events; she can move ahead effectively.

## BENEFITS OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM

### User-Friendly for Individuals with Learning Challenges

Learning new, more adaptive patterns of behavior is a challenging task for anyone. This is especially difficult when the individual must manage complicating factors such as mental health issues, intellectual impairment, physical problems, or other difficult life circumstances. These life challenges may increase stress and impact the individual's ability to learn new information. The Skills System, teaching strategies, and curriculum contained in this book are designed to help individuals who experience learning challenges. For example, an individual who experiences certain mental health challenges and/or an intellectual disability may have difficulty focusing attention, remembering information, and utilizing concepts within complex situations. The Skills System itself and the teaching strategies contained in this book and the accompanying *Emotion Regulation Skills System Workbook, Second Edition*, are constructed to maximize learning, integration, and ultimately generalization of the skills into life contexts. Even an

individual who cannot read or write can learn to use the Skills System and participate in Skills System instruction.

## DBT Skills for the Challenged Learner

The Skills System was developed as an accessible alternative for individuals with cognitive impairment who were participating in dialectical behavior therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993a). DBT has two main delivery modes: individual therapy and skills training group. The skills curriculum (Linehan, 2025a) is broken down into four modules. The individual learns skills in the areas of mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness in the skills group and discusses implementation of the strategies in real-life settings during individual therapy.

The standard DBT skills (Linehan, 2025a) were not specifically designed for individuals with learning challenges. The multisyllabic terms, complex mnemonics, use of abstract language, modular teaching process, and lack of structure to facilitate integration of the divergent elements can create barriers for vulnerable learners (Kurban, 2024; Sweller, 2022; Sweller, van Merriënboer, & Pass, 2019; Kalyuga, 2011; Paas & Sweller, 2012; Sweller, 1988, 2010). Although the terms and format of the standard skills are challenging, the general concepts are vastly helpful for this population. The practitioner must make an informed clinical assessment and decide whether an individual with learning challenges can comprehend essential components of the standard DBT skills through enhanced teaching strategies or if key aspects of DBT will be lost. For certain individuals with significant learning deficits, merely modifying the teaching of the standard curriculum is not sufficient to capture the essence of DBT in a way that promotes generalization of the concepts. The current studies on DBT state that the skills curriculum requires adaptation (Patterson, Williams, & Jones, 2020; Brown, 2019; McNair, Woodrow, & Hare, 2017; Brown, Brown, & Dibiasio, 2013; Haq, 2013; Sakdalan & Collier, 2012).

This DBT-informed version may not look like DBT, because semantic sacrifices were necessary to enable this population access to the essence of DBT. The Skills System utilizes DBT principles, while the language and format are adjusted to address the needs of individuals who experience learning challenges. There may be cases when the Skills System is learned first and the standard DBT skills are added later in treatment.

As with the first edition, this book will be used by people who have DBT training and those who do not. Practitioners with various levels of training may be interested in the ways the Skills System concepts map on to DBT skills. Rather than attempting to duplicate Linehan's expert teaching, text boxes follow each description of the Skills System skills in Chapter 2. There and in the remaining chapters of this book, text boxes contain reference information for the foundational standard DBT concepts and teaching points in the *DBT Skills Training Manual, Revised Edition* (Linehan, 2025a) that are relevant to the Skills System skills and/or skills training procedure. These references help the DBT practitioner better understand how DBT concepts are integrated into each element of the Skills System. The text boxes allow DBT practitioners to know where to look for related DBT information, and non-DBT clinicians can skim the information if it detracts from the learning process. If a clinician is unfamiliar with DBT, it is recommended that he do self-study of the DBT skills manuals or attend DBT trainings to deepen his knowledge about the foundations of the Skills System.

## APPLICATIONS OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM

Many people have experiences or physiology that complicate learning as well as their ability to demonstrate effective emotion regulation behaviors. Each person has unique clusters of strengths and deficits, abilities and disabilities. Any individual, with a diagnosed learning impairment or otherwise, may be prone to overwhelming emotions, unclear thinking, or unproductive actions. All people have the capacity to make impulsive decisions that hinder the accomplishment of personal goals. Even individuals who practice adaptive coping behaviors experience overwhelming circumstances that can stress such capacities. The Skills System materials are user-friendly concepts that are accessible to learners of all abilities.

The utilization of the Skills System is expanding, along with the resources to improve access. As mentioned in the Preface, the Skills System was originally designed for adults participating in DBT who experience cognitive impairment. Now, the model is integrated into many other treatments in addition to DBT, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, positive behavioral supports, applied behavior analysis, trauma-informed treatment, and person-centered supports. Practitioners treating clients with differing academic/intellectual abilities and mental health diagnoses teach the model. The Skills System is used with children and adolescents; there are handouts specifically designed for elementary and high school-age youth (some are provided in the online Appendices of the accompanying *Skills System Workbook*). In an effort to improve access, Skills System materials in the manuals and online resources are translated into languages other than English (see <https://skillssystem.com/do-you-want-to-translate-skills-system-materials-into-a-different-language>).

The Skills System model has been used in many different therapeutic settings. Hospitals as well as residential, day, vocational, corrections, and outpatient programs have implemented the Skills System concepts. In these types of settings, individuals receive skills instruction. Staff are trained to be skills coaches (Chapter 8). Clinicians use the Skills System as a therapeutic tool in individual therapy. The ancillary materials available on the Skills System website are useful for training staff, as well as family members or other people in the client's life.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SKILLS SYSTEM

There are nine skills in the Skills System; these nine skills form the Skills List. There are also three System Tools that guide utilization of the skills and assembly of skills chains. An individual who tends to become overwhelmed by emotion, has difficulty focusing on thoughts that are in service of personal goals, and/or reacts impulsively to urges may benefit from learning step-by-step progressions to manage these factors. A person with these issues often has difficulty transitioning successfully from one strategy to the next in traditional coping skills education that provides individual elements without offering a system to guide implementation. The unified structure of the Skills System assists the person in remembering strategies and moving fluidly through a multistep coping progression, while experiencing intense emotional, cognitive, and behavioral regulation problems. As the individual learns the skills and the system, she integrates the capacity to successfully experience a full range of human emotions, practice self-determination, and acquire the means to navigate toward goals even in challenging circumstances.

The first three skills in the Skills System comprise a core progression that serves as the foundation for skills use. This sequence begins when an individual experiences a situation that prompts awareness; she begins by getting a Clear Picture (Skill 1) of the moment. Six steps lead the person to become aware of information within the current moment. This is crucial, because often individuals with self-regulation problems focus attention on the past or future rather than the present. Not only does focusing on the current moment give the person accurate information to use in making decisions, but it also allows for more in-depth processing of the experience. Mindfulness is a core DBT concept; Clear Picture leads the individual through steps of being mindfully aware in every situation.

Once the person gets a Clear Picture, he shifts to On-Track Thinking (Skill 2). In On-Track Thinking, the individual moves through a simple four-step sequence that leads her through the process of mapping out an effective coping plan. This cognitive framework serves to guide the individual's thinking patterns to promote emotion regulation and goal-directed behaviors. As the person learns the adaptive cognitive structure during instruction, practices it within his life context, and experiences positive reinforcement, the functional thinking patterns become increasingly sophisticated and automatic over time.

On-Track Thinking requires the individual to Make a Skills Plan. This component links the remaining skills together in a chain. Three simple rules (System Tools) determine which skills will be helpful and how many to use within the context of the present moment. Depending on the individual's self-reported level of emotional arousal (using the Feelings Rating Scale), she knows whether using more interactive skills (Skills 6–9) are options (using the Categories of Skills). The person learns that at high levels of emotional (and cognitive) arousal, it is necessary to choose more solitary skills (Skills 1–5) that function to reduce the sensations of uncomfortable feelings, to divert attention from problematic urges to effective actions, to minimize risks, and to improve focus. At all levels of escalation, the individual Makes a Plan to choose a sufficient number of skills (using the Recipe for Skills), targeting specifically the most effective skills according to the demands of the situation.

Next, the individual takes an On-Track Action (Skill 3). On-Track Actions are the behaviors the individual mobilizes to move in the direction of his goal. Therefore, the person gets a Clear Picture, does On-Track Thinking, and executes a series of On-Track Actions. If the individual is over a Level 3 emotion, he may engage in a Safety Plan (Skill 4) or New-Me Activities (Skill 5). If under a Level 3, the person can also use Calm-Only skills, which are Problem Solving (Skill 6), Expressing Myself (Skill 7), Getting It Right (Skill 8), and Relationship Care (Skill 9). Once a cluster of skills has been completed or the circumstances change, the individual returns to do Clear Picture again to become aware of the new situation that has evolved.

Initially, the individual conceptualizes the Skills System as a series of linear events; when a sequence of skills is finished, she returns to doing Clear Picture, On-Track Thinking, On-Track Action, and so on, repeating the process in each subsequent situation. As the individual integrates the Skills System, she is more able to utilize Clear Picture and On-Track Thinking throughout the coping process in a dynamic, transactional pattern to adjust On-Track Actions. Even individuals with significant cognitive impairment gradually improve the ability to make subtle adjustments; this flexibility can enhance the person's success in reaching goals and in maintaining On-Track Relationships. The Skills System is a structured yet malleable framework that can help an individual reduce reliance on avoidant behaviors, bear increased responsibili-

ties, and fully engage in the human experience. Table 1.1 lists the skills on the Skills List and the System Tools.

THE SKILLS LIST

The following section includes brief descriptions of each of the skills and System Tools. This is intended as an initial exposure to the information. These concepts are presented in greater detail in Chapter 2. This introduction serves as a skeleton on which more information will be layered in the following chapters.

Getting Started with a Clear Picture

The first skill in the Skills System is Clear Picture; the metaphor of a television represents having a clear versus fuzzy vision of a situation. Clear Picture guides the individual through steps that bring focused attention to six aspects of her present experience to gain clarity. The first of the Clear Picture Do’s prompts the individual to focus on her breath. Next, she shifts attention to notice what is happening around her. Once the individual has awareness of the environment, attention is then shifted to doing a Body Check; bringing attention to the body begins a series of self-reflections that help orient the person to her internal experience. The person then labels and rates her emotions and notices thoughts and urges.

There are two important facets of this skill: (1) gaining accurate information about these important internal and external experiences in the present moment, as they are, and (2)

| TABLE 1.1. Skills List and System Tools |                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Skills List                             | System Tools                                                                                      |
| <b>All-the-Time Skills</b>              | A. Feelings Rating Scale                                                                          |
| 1. Clear Picture                        | 0- to 5-point scale for rating the intensity of emotions.                                         |
| 2. On-Track Thinking                    |                                                                                                   |
| 3. On-Track Action                      |                                                                                                   |
| 4. Safety Plan                          | B. Categories of Skills                                                                           |
| 5. New-Me Activities                    | Skills 1–5 are All-The-Time skills.                                                               |
|                                         | Skills 6–9 are Calm-Only skills.                                                                  |
| <b>Calm-Only Skills</b>                 | C. Recipe for Skills                                                                              |
| 6. Problem Solving                      | Add one skill for every level of emotion (e.g., at a Level 2 emotion, use at least three skills). |
| 7. Expressing Myself                    |                                                                                                   |
| 8. Getting It Right                     |                                                                                                   |
| 9. Relationship Care                    |                                                                                                   |

effectively shifting attention. Some individuals who experience cognitive deficits and/or self-regulation problems have difficulty shifting attention in ways that effectively manage their level of arousal. The Clear Picture skill trains the person to see her moment as it is, creating a base from which to move in the direction of her goals.

## Using On-Track Thinking

Once the individual has a Clear Picture of his internal and external circumstances in the moment, he strategically transfers attention to Skill 2, which is On-Track Thinking. The name “On-Track” uses the metaphor of a train to represent the concept of the individual moving incrementally toward a destination or goal. Thus, the image of “off-track” communicates circumstances that are not in service of the goal.

On-Track Thinking offers the person a series of four tasks to complete to create an effective thinking process. This sequence—(1) stop and Check It, (2) Turn It, (3) Cheerleading, (4) Make a Skills Plan—provides an adaptive cognitive structuring template for the individual to follow in each situation. This process helps the person reflect on desired outcomes, appraise whether taking action on the urge supports his goal, generate on-track thoughts to support adaptive behavior, and create a plan to reach his goal.

## Taking an On-Track Action

Once the individual gets a Clear Picture and does On-Track Thinking, she uses Skill 3, which is On-Track Action. The reuse of the word “On-Track” is designed to reinforce the concept that the person transitions from On-Track Thinking to On-Track Action. It is challenging for any person to alter problematic patterns of behavior; On-Track Actions mobilize new, adaptive actions that are directly related to personal goals. It is useful to have On-Track Thoughts, but without On-Track Actions, the individual may revert to problematic behaviors. Using Clear Picture and On-Track Thinking, and taking On-Track Actions are ways to act in “Wise Mind” (Linehan, 2025a). The combined term “123 Wise Mind” communicates that to demonstrate wisdom consistently in context, it may be helpful to be mindful (Clear Picture), generate strategic thinking (On-Track Thinking), and engage in goal-directed actions (On-Track Action).

There are five different elements of the On-Track Action skill. First, this skill includes any action that the individual takes in the direction of his goal. An action is considered on-track if the person has taken time to be self-aware within the present moment (Clear Picture) and has made an effective decision (On-Track Thinking). The remaining functions of On-Track Actions include knowing when to Switch Tracks, make an On-Track Action Plan, Accept the Situation, and/or Turn the Page. Each of these concepts give the individual tools to proactively or reactively manage off-track urges and difficult situations.

## Managing Risky Situations with Safety Plans

During the process of getting a Clear Picture and doing On-Track Thinking, the person may identify possible risks that may impede her progress toward goals. In a situation such as this, the individual may take the On-Track Action to create and execute a Safety Plan. Safety Plans,

Skill 4 in the Skills System, provide a framework that assists in evaluating the level of risk and in choosing the appropriate responses to manage the circumstances. It is important that the person be fully aware of risks, understand various options for managing the problems, and have the ability to implement actions that neither unnecessarily avoid situations nor recklessly engage in risky ones.

## Doing New-Me Activities

New-Me Activities, Skill 5,<sup>1</sup> are activities that the person engages in throughout each day. The term “New-Me Activities” represents activities that position the person on-track to personal goals. Developing a broad array of preferred New-Me Activities can help an individual improve self-regulation and satisfaction.

New-Me Activities serve four basic functions. Focus New-Me Activities assist the individual in focusing attention, while other activities promote distraction. Some activities help the person feel good; others are intended to be fun. The individual does Solo New-Me Activities by herself, while Partnership New-Me Activities include other people. The individual learns to evaluate what his needs are in the moment and to choose a New-Me Activity that fits best.

## Problem Solving

The individual may determine that she has a problem or the urge to take action impulsively to change a situation. Problem Solving helps the person strategically evaluate when and how to solve problems, so that she reaches personal goals. The individual may have previous experiences that involved rushed, ill-planned, or extreme responses that not only fail to repair difficulties but also augment problems. Learning when to solve problems is just as important as knowing how to do it.

The Quick Fix process is used to address small problems, while a more comprehensive, multistep Problem Solving is best to use when fixing medium and large problems. During Problem Solving, the individual takes time to gain clarity about the problem, reviews multiple options for solving it, and checks the fit of the choices. The person develops Plans A, B, and C to prepare for inevitable obstacles that occur.

## Expressing Myself

Expressing Myself, Skill 7, involves the individual communicating what is on his mind or in his heart. Choosing from myriad communication methods and determining when to communicate are important decisions. A person may have a habit of expressing himself while at high levels of emotional arousal. Although this may serve to purge distress, provide distraction, or mobilize the individual in challenging situations, such impulsive expression often damages relationships or causes other problems. The Expressing Myself skill helps the individual strategically and

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<sup>1</sup>The terms “Old-Me” and “New-Me” were used by Haaven, Little, and Petre-Miller in their book *Treating Intellectually Disabled Sex Offenders* (1989). Although the term “New-Me” is used in many other forums, a special acknowledgment of these authors’ contribution to the field of disabilities is warranted. I thank James Haaven for his support.

effectively utilize communication to reach personal goals. The person learns to use other skills, such as New-Me Activities, to reduce emotions at times when he is experiencing discomfort, rather than venting on others.

## Getting It Right

The person may be in a situation where she needs to get something from another person. Getting It Right, Skill 8, is used specifically for acquiring what the individual wants or needs. Getting needs met is a vital skill; unfortunately, skill deficits in this area have often contributed to cycles of ineffective behavior and high levels of dissatisfaction. When the person makes requests while at a high level of emotional arousal, she fails to elicit help and may reduce the likelihood that her needs will be met. It is essential to have the capacity to make requests, self-advocate, and negotiate to reach personal goals.

Getting It Right provides the individual with a simple framework to get what he wants from another person. The individual learns to be in the Right Mind, talk to the Right Person at the Right Time and Place, use the Right Tone, and say the Right Words. The Right Words include using Sugar (being polite), Explaining the Situation, Asking for What You Want, Listening, and Seal a Deal (SEALS).

## Relationship Care

Our relationships with ourselves and others are primary parts of our lives that can cause us joy and suffering. Relationship Care helps us manage our relationship with ourselves and the world around us. Being human, each of us experiences countless urges each day that potentially harm our relationships.

Relationship Care, Skill 9, is designed to help the individual effectively assess relationship situations so that he can make personal decisions that improve his quality of life. Many life problems are fueled by ill-timed and impulsive relationship behaviors. While it is challenging to manage changing forces that are continually transacting as part of the human experience, the individual increases mastery within relationships when he gains the ability to use Relationship Care and the other skills effectively.

Relationship Care assists the person in improving her self-relationship and interactions with other people. Building On-Track Relationships, balancing On-Track Relationships, and changing off-track relationships are the essential components. As the individual becomes more aware of her personal needs and learns how various actions either enhance personal connections or lead to creating distance between people, she is better able to actively manage interactions with others.

## SYSTEM TOOLS

A person who has coping skills deficits and self-regulation problems may have difficulty accurately evaluating internal and external experiences. Additionally, the person may not have the

ability to monitor his levels of self-regulation strategically to choose behaviors that achieve desired outcomes. The Skills System is designed to help an individual develop coping tools and the ability to use the skills to create a life worth living. The System Tools are simple concepts that guide the individual's use of the nine skills on the Skills List. There are three System Tools: the Feelings Rating Scale, the Categories of Skills, and the Recipe for Skills.

## Feelings Rating Scale

The Feelings Rating Scale is a simple 6-point (0–5) scale that the individual uses to rate the intensity of sensations she is feeling. It is an important tool to help the person be aware of and organize her current experiences. The scale concretizes the abstract experience of emotions, which is particularly important for an individual who has intellectual impairments.

Through the skills training experience, the individual learns to differentiate emotional experiences and categorize the feelings rating. A feeling rated 0 means that the person is not experiencing sensations related to the emotion. A feeling rated 1 means the person is experiencing a tiny amount of the sensation from the emotion. A feeling is rated 2 when the individual has a small amount of sensation. An emotion is rated 3 when a medium level of emotion is felt. Generally, the individual's ability to focus and control behavior is intact when emotions are rated between 0 and 3; above a 3, the person's cognitive and behavioral control abilities may be compromised. A feeling rated 4 is a strong emotion; often some kind of behavioral dyscontrol or urge to have off-track actions is present. A feeling is rated 5 when the individual becomes overwhelmed and exhibits behavior that harms self, others, or property.

The scale serves a dual purpose: (1) The Feelings Rating Scale helps the person get a Clear Picture of the current moment, and (2) the individual uses the rating to determine which skills (Categories of Skills) and how many skills to use in the situation (Recipe for Skills) in On-Track Thinking. The person learns that at lower levels of arousal, she has the capacity to think clearly and interact effectively; therefore, it is possible to use interactive skills at that time. Conversely, a higher rating communicates to the individual that she will have more difficulty thinking clearly and interacting effectively with other people. At high-rated levels of feelings, more skills are indicated to manage the experience, and the goal at that point is to reduce arousal. The Feelings Rating Scale helps the individual build the capacity to manage impulses and productively wait until she is in the proper mindset to utilize interactive skills.

## Categories of Skills

Many behavioral problems result when an individual engages in interactive skills at high levels of emotion. While it is natural to experience strong urges to take action to fix situations, express feelings, address a demand that needs be met, and exert control over people, acting on these urges often fails to help the individual reach long-term personal goals. The Categories of Skills help the individual know which skills are effective at given levels of arousal.

There are two Categories of Skills. Skills 1–5 (Clear Picture, On-Track Thinking, On-Track Action, Safety Plan, and New-Me Activities) are called All-the-Time skills. All-the-Time skills can be used at any level of emotion, from 0 to 5. The other Category of Skills is called Calm-

Only skills. The person can use Skills 6–9 (Problem Solving, Expressing Myself, Getting It Right, and Relationship Care) only when he is at or below a Level 3 emotion. Therefore, the person can utilize all nine skills if he is at or below a Level 3 emotion and just Skills 1–5 if he is over a Level 3 emotion.

## Recipe for Skills

Another common pitfall is when a person does not chain enough skills within a situation. When high levels of emotions trigger body sensations, the effects can be uncomfortable and long-lasting. It is essential that the person chain together multiple skills to use multiple strategies to span the extended duration of the feeling experience.

The Recipe for Skills calls for using at least one more skill than the level of emotion, including 0. For example, if an individual is at a Level 2 emotion, at least three skills must be used. If the individual is at a Level 5 emotion, at least six skills are needed. In this case, since the person is over a Level 3 emotion, it is necessary for the person to use an extra All-the-Time skill (e.g., using two On-Track Actions or two New-Me Activities), rather than having the sixth skill be from the Calm-Only category. The Recipe highlights the minimum number of skills; doing more skills than the Recipe dictates is often helpful.

The goal of the Recipe for Skills is to ensure that the person plans and executes enough skills. The number of skills changes relative to the severity of the situation; the intensity of the event is calibrated through the emotional impact the circumstance has on the individual. It is not uncommon for individuals with emotion regulation problems to rush through insufficient strategies that do not adequately address the multiple components of complex internal and external situations.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

When an individual begins learning the Skills System in a skills group or one-on-one instruction, her ability to recall all of the concepts and terms is expectedly inconsistent. Group teaching strategies continually expose individuals to the Skills List and the System Tools within the contexts of their lives. This revolving approach allows the individual to cobble together comprehension over time. Suggestions for structuring skills instruction, teaching strategies, and implementing a 12-week curriculum are presented in Chapters 4–7.

Relatively early in skills training, the individual learns to be increasingly mindful of the present moment. The individual becomes able to take a quick snapshot of internal and external factors using the Clear Picture Do's. With practice, the person increases his speed and accuracy in these tasks.

The information gathered during the Clear Picture Do's is used to help the individual generate On-Track Thinking. For example, the feelings rating score (e.g., Level 4, Angry) guides him to choose which Category of Skills will be helpful at his current level of emotion. The individual learns that All-the-Time skills (1–5) may be utilized at any level of emotion, while Calm-

Only skills (6–9) are only used when he is below a Level 3 emotion. In the previous example, at a Level 4 emotion, the individual would engage only in All-the-Time skills and not utilize Calm-Only skills. All-the-Time skills allow the individual to reregulate prior to engaging in the more interactive Calm-Only skills. Additionally, the individual learns to use ample skills for the situation. The Recipe for Skills sets guidelines for the minimum number of skills. Quickly the individual learns the adage: The more skills, the better.

On-Track Thinking is a relatively complex skill; mastery is slow and builds over time. The individual may initially have primitive self-dialogue. Often, as skills capacities develop, more sophistication evolves. For example, the person may initially self-reflect and think, “I feel angry at Level 4; I need to go to my room.” As self-awareness continues to evolve, self-statements become more elaborated: “I am at Level 4 anger; I have to use my All-the-Time skills. I have the urge to use Expressing Myself skills, but I must wait until I am below a Level 3 emotion. If I do it now, I will yell. Instead, I will do a Safety Plan and New-Me Activities. I have to use my skills, because I want to reach my goals. I can do this.”

Throughout the skills training experience, the individual often becomes aware of (and committed to) taking On-Track Actions versus off-track actions. The individual may have the ability to notice an urge and move away rather than being aggressive. Over time, with more group discussions and practice, the chains are elaborated. The mindfulness (Clear Picture) training paired with the cognitive structuring (On-Track Thinking) offers the individual a framework that guides him toward taking effective, self-determined On-Track Actions (123 Wise Mind). The individual may become increasingly able to strategically intertwine various combinations of skills to manage oscillating internal and external needs. The nine skills and three System Tools are repeated, practiced, and reinforced so that the adaptive coping patterns become default settings.

## Integration within Living and Learning Environments

The Skills System may provide a therapeutic language base and adaptive coping skills model for many different environments. The Skills System can be helpful in inpatient, residential, outpatient, classroom, vocational, and/or home settings. Parents can partner with their children to learn and use the material together. The preliminary research is currently limited, yet the opportunities for future study and exploration are broad.

The visual nature of the Skills System can promote integration within environments. The visual aid materials can provide visual cues that prompt skill use for individuals and skills coaches. Programs mount skills posters and personalized decorations throughout the site. When the model becomes immersed in the Skills System, many creative programmatic, group, and individualized interventions are possible.

There are many benefits of integrating the Skills System into program settings. The Skills System provides common language and a framework of information related to managing emotions, thoughts, and actions. This shared framework and language facilitate learning. When individuals and support providers both actively engage in positive relating behaviors, opportunities for adaptive learning and relating increase. For example, there are multiple benefits for individuals and staff who take part in peer skills tutoring activities. Ideally, individuals and sup-

port providers learn how to cope effectively and are able to engage in positive social behaviors that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal.

## TRANSITION TO CHAPTER 2

This chapter offered a brief overview of the Skills System concepts. Chapter 2 presents a more detailed explanation of the nine core skills and the subskills with those strategies. The chapter also explains the System Tools that help the individual use skills within the context of their lives.