

Wellness Tips Embracing Both/And

Humans have a tendency to fall into dichotomous thinking – characterizing things, experiences, or people in either/or terms. Good or bad. Right or wrong. Positive or negative. We say “yes, but...”.

When it comes to our well-being, though, functioning from an either/or state of mind is not helpful. Doing so can create rigidity in our thoughts, beliefs, and behavior. It forecloses on possibility. It does not allow for the shades of gray that are inevitable when living a human life.

Instead, it can be more effective to acknowledge two conflicting facts and recognize both can be true at the same time. Contradictions co-exist and interact. This is called dialectics. By walking the middle path – *embracing both/and* – we are more easily able to integrate facts that otherwise seem to be contradictory opposites, thus moving closer to the truth.

Transformational change can occur when there is consideration of both sides of the dialectic. By remaining mindful of each truth, it allows us to be more flexible in our approach to ourselves, other people, and situations we find ourselves in. It helps us accept reality rather than resist it. It opens the possibility of problems being approached in more than one way. It helps us find balance between opposing life forces (e.g., doing vs being, self-denial vs self-indulgence). It allows us to soften when we may otherwise dig in.

How do we practice walking the middle path? Notice when your narrative has words like “*but*” in it. The word *but* usually serves to invalidate whatever came before it. When you’d typically say *but*, try saying “*and*” instead. “Yes, *and*...”. The use of *and* allows for both to be true at the same time.



Addressing dialectics is a core component for several third-wave behavioral therapy treatments, such as Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Feel free to research/explore more online if interested. Or, if you’d like to talk with someone about dialectical dilemmas in your life feel free to contact the MSCC to talk with a counselor or schedule an appointment:

Check out the MSCC Website for past Wellness Tips:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

Remember, life is really hard at times - be gentle with yourself and others!

Rebecca Stinson, PhD, ABPP

Senior Behavioral Health Clinician

Medical Student Counseling Center

Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine

University of Iowa

Pronouns: she/her