How to Think and Act Dialectically

1. There is always more than one side to anything that exists. Look for both sides.
   - Ask Wise Mind: What am I missing? Where is the kernel of truth in the other side?
   - Let go of extremes: Change “either-or” to “both-and,” “always” or “never” to “sometimes.”
   - Balance opposites: Validate both sides when you disagree, accept reality, and work to change.
   - Make lemonade out of lemons.
   - Embrace confusion: Enter the paradox of yes and no, or true and not true.
   - Play devil’s advocate: Argue each side of your own position with equal passion.
   - Use metaphors and storytelling to unstick and free the mind.

2. Be aware that you are connected.
   - Treat others as you want them to treat you.
   - Look for similarities among people instead of differences.
   - Notice the physical connections among all things.

3. Embrace change.
   - Throw yourself into change: Allow it. Embrace it.
   - Practice radical acceptance of change when rules, circumstances, people, and relationships change in ways you don’t like.
   - Practice getting used to change: Make small changes to practice this (e.g., purposely change where you sit, who you talk with, what route you take when going to a familiar place).

4. Change is transactional: Remember that you affect your environment and your environment affects you.
   - Pay attention to your effect on others and how they affect you.
   - Practice letting go of blame by looking for how your own and others’ behaviors are caused by many interactions over time.
   - Remind yourself that all things, including all behaviors, are caused.

Important Opposites to Balance

1. Accepting reality AND working to change it.
2. Validating yourself and others AND acknowledging errors.
3. Working AND resting.
4. Doing things you need to do AND doing things you want to do.
5. Working on improving yourself AND accepting yourself exactly as you are.
7. Emotion regulation AND emotion acceptance.
8. Mastering something on your own AND asking for help.
10. Openness AND privacy.
11. Trust AND suspicion.
12. Watching and observing AND participating.
13. Taking from others AND giving to others.
14. Focusing on yourself AND focusing on others.
15. Others: __________________________
16. Others: __________________________
17. Others: __________________________
IDENTIFYING DIALECTICS

For each group, check the most dialectical response.

1A. Pay attention to your effect on others.  1B. Assume that others’ reactions to you are unrelated to your treatment of them.

5A. Examine a difficult relationship by looking at how the interactions over time between you and the other person may be problematic.  5B. Assume that difficulties in a relationship are caused completely by you or by the other person.

Saying:

2A. “I know I am right about this.”  2B. “I can see your point of view, even though I do not agree with it.”  2C. “The way you are thinking doesn’t make any sense.”

6A. “It is hopeless. I cannot do it.”  6B. “This is a breeze. I’ve got no problems.”  6C. “This is really hard for me, and I am going to keep trying.”

Saying:

3A. “Everyone always treats me unfairly.”  3B. “I believe the coach should reconsider his decision to cut me from the team.”  3C. “Coaches know best who to keep on teams and who to cut.”

7A. When you disagree with someone, be sure and be very clear about your point of view.  7B. When you disagree with someone, try and see their point of view.

4A. Judge friends as disloyal and uncaring if they start changing in ways you don’t like.  4B. Accept that interests change.

8A. Demand that relationships be stable without changing.  8B. Embrace change and see it as inevitable.