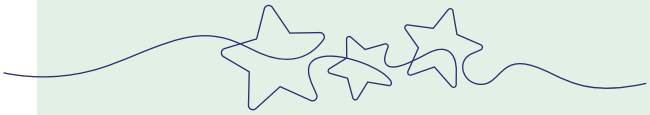
Building mastery



Building mastery is a dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) skill designed to strengthen emotional regulation by boosting confidence and resilience while reducing stress and overwhelming feelings. This skill, which focuses on getting better at something by practicing small actions over time, can positively impact many areas of life. It boosts your confidence, enhances your skills and keeps you in control during challenging times. Instead of expecting overnight change, building mastery is all about choosing one area you want to improve and working on it a little bit at a time. Each small success boosts your confidence and builds your ability to handle stress, challenges and new situations.

How to build mastery

1. **Pick one skill to work on.** Examples include staying organized, managing stress, improving communication, focusing on studying or practicing self-care.
2. **Start small—really small.** Choose steps you can actually do every day, like five minutes of practice or one small action.
3. **Practice consistently.** Even tiny amounts count. What matters is showing up, not being perfect.
4. **Notice your progress.** Pay attention to what's getting easier or what you're proud of. Celebrate small wins.
5. **Keep going, even when it's hard.** Mastery builds slowly, but each step makes the next one easier. Over time, you will achieve bigger goals.



20 ideas for building mastery (for teens)

If you are confused about where to start, we've included a few ideas below to help you get on the right track.

Academic & organization

1. Do homework for 10 minutes before checking your phone.
2. Practice using a planner or calendar each morning.
3. Organize one small part of your space each day (desk, backpack or one shelf).
4. Review class notes for five minutes a day to strengthen study habits.
5. Break big projects into tiny steps and finish one step daily.

Emotional & mental skills

6. Practice a coping skill every day (deep breathing, grounding or journaling).
7. Check in with your emotions once a day and name what you're feeling.
8. Use a positive affirmation each morning to build confidence.
9. Sit with discomfort for one minute instead of avoiding it immediately.
10. Try a short mindfulness exercise like noticing five things around you.

Social & communication skills

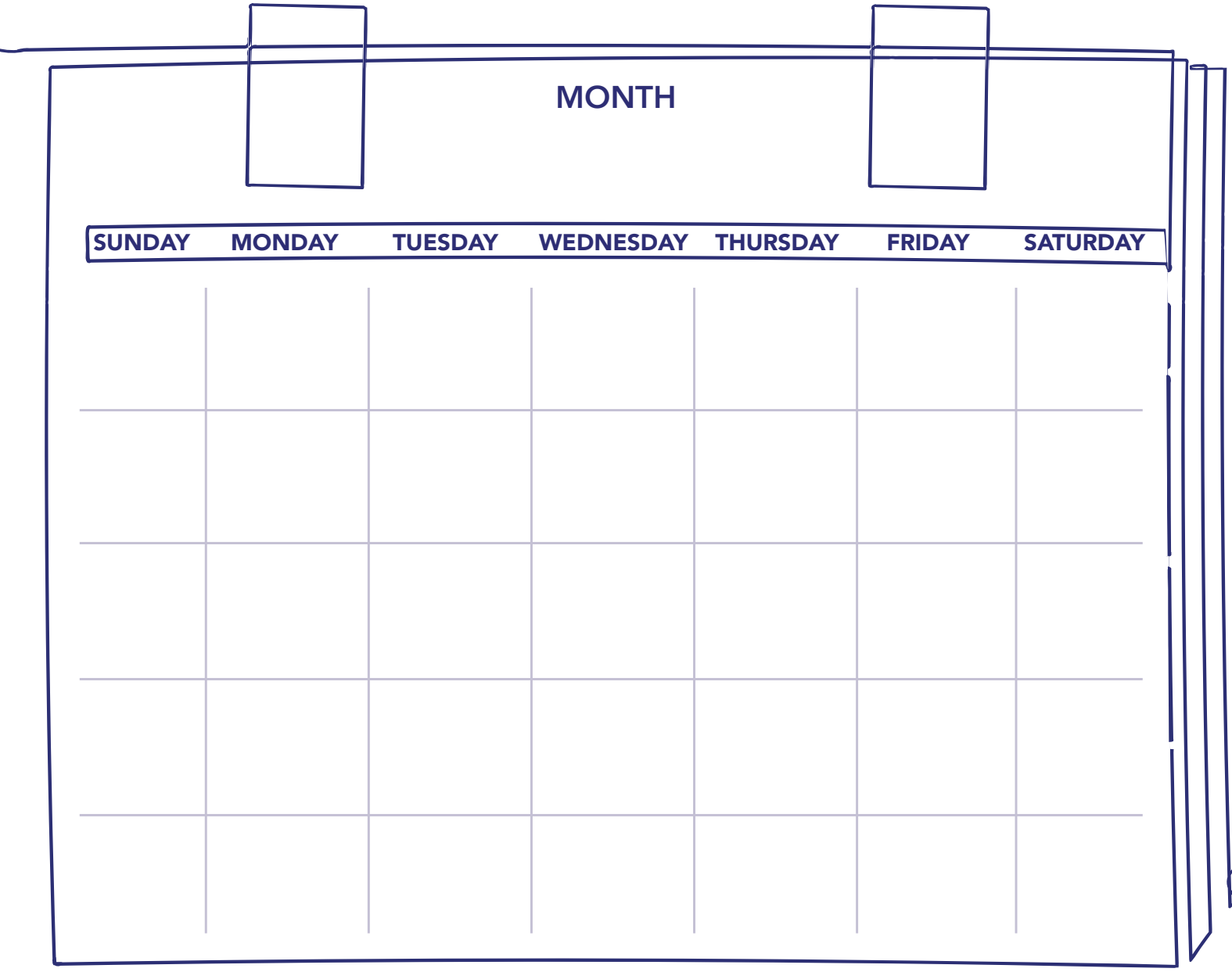
11. Say hello to one new person or make small talk once a day.
12. Practice speaking up in class at least once a week.
13. Set a goal to listen fully in one conversation each day.
14. Work on asking for help from teachers, friends or adults when you need it.
15. Practice setting a small boundary (e.g., "I need a minute" or "Not right now").

Health & lifestyle

16. Go for a short walk daily or stretch for five minutes.
17. Choose one healthy habit to build (drink water first thing in the morning, get to bed on time or limit screen time).
18. Practice a skill-based hobby (art, music, sports or coding) for a few minutes each day.
19. Prepare one thing the night before to make mornings easier.
20. Show up consistently to a team, club or routine, even when motivation is low.

Building mastery tracker

Use this calendar to write down how you built mastery each day. Remember building mastery helps build confidence and resilience over time. It also helps improve our ability to regulate our emotions. The more consistent you are, the greater the outcomes.



Common Thread
by Wolfson Children's