A Staircase of Small Steps - Clinician dialogue

Guide a collaborative conversation about a staircase of small steps while checking fit and participant choice.

Mental health professionals | 15 minutes

Fictional example: Riley wants to attend a group and starts by requesting information.

Invite and obtain permission

Offer: "Would it be useful to explore a staircase of small steps using an ordinary or fictional example? We can adapt it, observe, or stop." Ask what the person wants from the conversation.

Elicit before teaching

Ask: "How does this show up, if at all, in your own words?" Offer this idea tentatively: A staircase can show progress with pauses and alternative routes. Ask what fits and what does not.

Guide the task

Build three manageable steps toward a chosen aim, adding supports and an accessible route if steps do not fit. Ask for permission before giving an example. Use this fictional illustration if useful: Riley wants to attend a group and starts by requesting information.

Reflect and check accuracy

Reflect only what was offered: "I heard you describe ___. What did I miss?" Ask: What is the next feasible step, including a needed accommodation? Avoid assigning motives or interpreting silence as agreement.

Respond to a mismatch

If the person rejects the frame, say: "Thank you for correcting it. What would be more useful?" Return to their language or choose a different approach.

Close with agency

Ask which observation, question, or support request the person wants to keep. Confirm a manageable ending and appropriate follow-up; do not turn a tentative possibility into a homework obligation.

Reflection

What would tell me to adapt, stop, or seek supervision?

Scope and adaptation

An original DBT-informed house metaphor for educational reflection, not an official standardized DBT assessment, diagnostic drawing test, or comprehensive DBT. The maker defines meanings. Offer another metaphor if housing is sensitive, and allow omissions or fiction. Do not interpret rooms, colors, or omissions as evidence of pathology or safety.

Original AI-assisted educational draft; independent clinical review pending. Version 1.0. Background: Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training: Fundamentals. Full source links and scope: library.morethantherapy.org/recovery/resources/DBH-A15-3