



Mastering Relationships: Take-Home DBT Skills – DEAR MAN

Connecting with others in meaningful ways requires interpersonal skills. When emotions run high, it's easy to damage relationships through conflict or avoidance. Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) offers the DEAR MAN strategy to help you express your needs and improve interactions with others. Let's break it down.

Describe the Situation

Start by objectively describing the situation without judgment or interpretation. Stick to the facts - who, what, where, and when.

- ▶ “Yesterday when I asked if you’d be home for dinner and you said yes...”
- ▶ “When you didn’t answer my texts or call me back all weekend...”

Keep it brief and unemotional. This grounds the conversation in shared reality.

Express Your Feelings and Opinions

Next, share your feelings and opinions about the situation. Use “I” statements to avoid blaming.

- “I felt worried and confused when I didn’t hear from you.”
- “I get frustrated when plans change at the last minute.”

Take ownership of your internal experience. Give the other person insight into your perspective.

Assert Your Needs and Request

Now make a specific request for what you need or want from the other person. Ask for one thing at a time.

- “I’d appreciate a call or text if plans change so I’m not left wondering.”
- “I would like it if you could be on time for things/events we’ve scheduled together.”

Reinforce Positively

If they’ve met your requests in the past, note that to reinforce their positive behavior.

- “You used to let me know if you’d be late, which I found really helpful.”
- “You’re usually good about responding to my calls, and I want to acknowledge that.”

People are more receptive when their efforts are recognized.

Stay Mindful

Throughout the interaction, keep your tone respectful and avoid judgment or accusations. Take a breath before responding if needed. Being mindful prevents escalation.

Appear Confident

Use assertive body language and eye contact to demonstrate self-assurance, even if you don't feel confident. Avoid nervous giggling or self-deprecating remarks. You have the right to express your needs.

Negotiate Toward Agreement

Be open to compromise to reach mutual understanding. Consider their opinions and needs too. How can you both get your needs met?

- "I'm willing to adjust my schedule if you give me advance notice."
- "We could agree to check-in if plans aren't firm yet."

Flexibility strengthens relationships. But know your dealbreakers for self-respect.

End Respectfully

Close the conversation positively, expressing hope for mutual understanding and care for your shared relationship.

- "I want us to be on the same page going forward."
- "I value our friendship and want us both to feel heard."

With practice, these skills become second nature for maintaining loving relationships amid conflict. You've got this!

Now try it yourself.

Complete the exercise on the next page to help you practice how to use DEAR Man to help your master relationships.

Think of a challenging situation you are experiencing or have experienced in the Pas the could have had a better outcome if you were able to communicate assertively and clearly.



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