

DEAR MAN

DBT: Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

The DEAR MAN skill from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) helps you communicate your needs and set boundaries effectively while maintaining healthy relationships. The DEAR part of the skill is all about structuring your message so it's clear, respectful, and effective. The MAN part of the skill is about your tone, presence, and behavior during the conversation.

D

Describe

- Describe what happened in a short, neutral, specific way. Stick to the facts, rather than blaming or criticizing.
- Focus on describing *what* happened rather than *why* it happened.
- ✓ “We agreed to meet up, but you didn’t show up or respond when I reached out to check in”
- ✗ “You stood me up, you’re so inconsiderate”

E

Express

- Share your emotions about the situation using “I feel” statements.
- Avoid judgmental or accusatory language, and keep your tone steady and respectful.
- Don’t assume the other person knows how you feel.
- ✓ “I felt disappointed and hurt”
- ✗ “You did this to hurt me”

A

Assert

- Assert your needs clearly, directly, and specifically.
- Use confident but polite language.
- Avoid apologizing for asking your needs to be met.
- Don’t assume the other person knows what you want or need.
- ✓ “If your plans change, I need you to let me know in advance”
- ✗ “I’m sorry, I know it’s asking a lot, but it would really help if...”

R

Reinforce

- Explain the positive outcome for both of you if your request is met.
- Be realistic and specific about the benefits.
- Reinforce the desired behavior after the fact by saying thank you.
- ✓ “A heads up makes it much easier to understand your needs and to reschedule my day”
- ✗ “This is so basic. I can’t believe you don’t get it.”

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



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M

(Be)
Mindful

- Stay focused on your goal. Be a “broken record” if you need to by bringing the conversation back to the point repeatedly.
- Ignore distractions - including if the other person tries to change the subject, divert you, or insult you. Don't take the bait.
- ✓ “Next time, please let me know if your plans change”
- ✗ “I'm not being ‘needy,’ how could you say that?...”

A

Appear
Confident

- To appear confident, use a calm, steady voice, good eye contact, a calm and neutral facial expression, and sit or stand up straight.
- Avoid yelling, whispering, staring at the floor, fidgeting, etc.
- Practice beforehand to build your confidence.
- ✓ “This is important to me”
- ✗ “Maybe you're right, maybe I'm asking too much, never mind...”

N

Negotiate

- Offer solutions, and ask for their ideas for solutions, too.
- Suggest a compromise, but make sure it respects your needs.
- Ask, “What do you think we should do?”
- Focus on realistic solutions.
- ✓ “How about you text me if your plans change?”
- ✗ “You HAVE to call me at least 24 hours in advance.”

On the next page, you can put all these ideas to work by planning what to say in a specific conversation.



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Decide what you would like to say in advance:

D: Describe the facts of the situation; avoid criticizing or blaming

E: Express your emotions using “I feel” statements

A: Assert your needs clearly; avoid apologizing for your needs

R: Reinforce the positive outcome if your request is met

You said you'd be open to discussing our household budget soon. I've brought it up a few times in the last couple of weeks, but none of those times worked for you, and you haven't suggested any other times that do work.

I'm feeling worried and frustrated. We have some big expenses coming up this year, and I want to avoid credit card debt as much as I can. I'm worried if we don't plan ahead, we'll be in a bad financial position. I feel frustrated that I am being proactive about this and you have not offered a time that works for you.

I need you to look at your calendar and find a few times in the next week that work. When we discuss the budget, I want you to be ready to work together and find solutions with me.

Making a plan together would really help me feel more calm, and should reduce our arguments about how much we're spending. It will help us be ready for our expenses and protect our credit as much as we can.

Think through how you will respond if the conversation gets difficult:

M: (Stay) Mindful by staying focused on your goal, ignoring distractions, and being a broken record. What do you want to stay focused on?

He might say, "This isn't a big deal, we'll figure it out eventually." I want to repeat that this is important to me and our future and it's time to discuss our budget.

A: Appear Confident by standing up straight and making eye contact.

If things get difficult, what might you need to resist doing (e.g., yelling, whispering, looking down)?

Sometimes I can get loud or start lecturing when I get upset. I'll need to resist that and try to stay calm and listen as much as I talk.

N: Negotiate by offering and asking for solutions; be willing to compromise but respect your own needs. What are a few alternative solutions that are acceptable to you?

I'd be open to looking at his calendar together. If he needs more time to prepare, I'd be open to waiting a week. If he feels overwhelmed by budgeting altogether, we could find a way to get advice or help.

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://www.ChoosingTherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



[Free Mental Health Worksheets](#)

Search our collection of therapy worksheets by mental health topic, therapy modality, or demographic group. Our free, psychologist-developed worksheets make therapy exercises understandable and relevant to daily life. Find worksheets for help with ADHD, anxiety, depression, relationship difficulties, and other common mental health challenges.