



Asking for What You Need: The DEAR MAN Skill

An explainer and conversation planning worksheet · Created by Simar Gill Lowther, MACP, RP (CRPO)

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At a glance

- Many people struggle to ask for what they need without feeling pushy or guilty.
- DEAR MAN is a step-by-step DBT skill for clear, respectful requests.
- Planning a hard conversation in advance makes it much more likely to go well.

Why asking is hard

If you grew up feeling your needs were a burden, or that asking led to conflict, you may avoid asking altogether, hint instead of asking directly, or wait until you're so frustrated it comes out as anger. DEAR MAN gives structure so you can ask clearly and calmly.

The DEAR MAN steps

Step	What it means	Example
D: Describe	Stick to the facts of the situation.	"I've picked the kids up from school every day this month."
E: Express	Share your feelings using "I" statements.	"I'm feeling exhausted and a bit resentful."
A: Assert	Ask clearly for what you want, or say no clearly.	"I'd like us to split pick-ups, three days and two days."
R: Reinforce	Explain the benefit to them or the relationship.	"I think it would make our evenings less tense."
M: Mindful	Stay focused on your goal. Don't get sidetracked.	Gently return to the request if the topic drifts.
A: Appear confident	Steady voice, eye contact, upright posture.	Even if you feel nervous inside.
N: Negotiate	Be willing to give to get. Look for solutions.	"What if I do Mondays and Fridays?"

What the research says

DEAR MAN is part of the interpersonal effectiveness module of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, an evidence-based treatment (Linehan, 2015).

Assertiveness skills are linked with better wellbeing and can be improved through practice (Speed, Goldstein & Goldfried, 2018).

Tool: My DEAR MAN Conversation Plan

Step	What I'll say
Describe	
Express	
Assert	
Reinforce	
Mindful (my main goal)	
Appear confident (how I'll carry myself)	
Negotiate (what I could offer)	

Before the conversation, decide

What matters most here: getting what I want, keeping the relationship, or keeping my self-respect?

Strategies to try

- **Write it out first.** Reading your plan beforehand helps you stay on track.
- **Pick a good time.** Avoid starting when either of you is tired, hungry, or rushed.
- **Use "broken record."** If the other person keeps arguing, calmly repeat your request.
- **Accept the outcome.** You can ask skillfully and still hear no. Your self-respect remains intact.

Strategies you may not have heard of

These less common, evidence-informed techniques go beyond the usual advice. Try one at a time and notice what works for you.

- **Pair it with GIVE and FAST.** In DBT, GIVE (gentle, interested, validate, easy manner) protects the relationship, and FAST (fair, no over-apologizing, stick to values, truthful) protects self-respect.
- **Choose your intensity.** Decide how strongly to ask, from a gentle hint to a firm request, based on the situation, your priorities, and the relationship.
- **Role-play it, then switch.** Practise with a friend, then swap roles so you hear how your request lands.
- **Prepare a graceful exit.** Plan what you'll say if the answer is no: "Thanks for hearing me. I'll think about other options."

Journal prompts

Take your time with these. Write freely; there are no right answers.

What is something I've been needing but haven't asked for?

What stops me from asking directly?

How do I usually react when someone says no to me?

What would change if I asked for what I needed more often?

When to reach out for support

If asking for what you need feels impossible, or conversations often end in conflict or shutting down, therapy can help you build confidence and communication skills.

Insightful Journey Inc. offers therapy in person in Oshawa and virtually across Ontario, in English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. Direct billing available.

[Book a free consultation](#) · 647-982-2527 (call, text, or WhatsApp)

In crisis? Call or text 9-8-8, or call 911.

This resource is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for professional assessment or care.

References

Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT skills training manual (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Speed, B. C., Goldstein, B. L., & Goldfried, M. R. (2018). Assertiveness training: A forgotten evidence-based treatment. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 25(1), e12216.

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