

DEAR MAN

A skill for effective communication

DEAR MAN is a DBT interpersonal effectiveness skill that can help you ask for what you need, set boundaries, say no, and navigate difficult conversations while maintaining respect for yourself and others.

DEAR describes what to say; MAN describes how to stay effective while saying it.

WHEN CAN I USE IT

- Ask for something
- Set a boundary
- Say no
- Express how you feel
- Address a problem or conflict



D



Describe

Clearly and neutrally describe the facts of the situation.

Example:

"When our plans changed at the last minute..."

E



Express

Share how you feel, using clear 'I' statements.

Example:

"I felt disappointed and stressed..."

A



Assert

Clearly ask for what you want or need.

Example:

"I'd like you to let me know earlier if plans need to change."

R



Reinforce

Explain why this would help or what the positive outcome would be.

Example:

"That would help me plan better and reduce stress for both of us."

M



Mindful

Stay focused on your main point. Don't get pulled into side issues.

Communication tips:

- Use a calm, steady voice
- Keep bringing the conversation back to your original point
- If the other person tries to derail the conversation, gently return to the original issue
- Avoid over-explaining, defending, or arguing
- If you or the other person are outside the window of tolerance, it is okay to park the conversation and come back later

Example:

"I want to stay with the original point for now." or "I think we should pause and come back to this when we're both calmer."

A



Appear Confident

Use a calm voice, steady posture, and clear eye contact if appropriate.

Example:

"Speak clearly and steadily, while keeping your body language open."

N



Negotiate

Be willing to look for a workable compromise or alternative.

Example:

"What could we do that would work for both of us?"

TIPS TO REMEMBER



Be clear and specific



Use 'I' statements



Respect both sides



Stay calm



Practice helps



Use page 2 to practise your own DEAR MAN script.



REFERENCES

- Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT Skills Training Manual* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Adapted from DBT interpersonal effectiveness resources.

- McKay, M., Wood, J. C., & Brantley, J. (2019). *The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook* (2nd ed.). New Harbinger.

DEAR MAN Practice Sheet

Plan your message before a difficult conversation

Use this page to practise what you want to say. You do not need to write a perfect script. Aim for clear, respectful, and workable communication.

The situation

What happened?

What is the main issue?

My goal

What do I want or need?

What outcome would be helpful?

Before I start

What matters to me in this conversation? _____

What might help me stay regulated? _____

If needed, how could I pause or park the conversation respectfully? _____

D



Describe.

State the facts briefly and neutrally.

E



Express.

How do I feel about this?
Use an "I" statement.

A



Assert.

What am I asking for,
saying no to, or setting
as a boundary?

R



Reinforce.

Why would this help?
What positive outcome
could follow?

M



Mindful.

How will I stay on
my main point?

- ☐ I can bring the conversation back to the original point if it gets derailed.
- ☐ I can avoid over-explaining, defending, or arguing.
- ☐ If either of us goes outside our window of tolerance, I can pause and come back later.

A



Appear Confident.

How do I want to sound,
sit, stand, or hold myself?

N



Negotiate.

Where can I be flexible?
What alternative could
work for both of us?

My DEAR MAN script



Keep it clear



Use "I"
statements

HELPFUL REMINDERS



Return to
the point



Pause if
needed



Progress,
not perfection

REFERENCES

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