DEAR MAN conversation practice

DBT interpersonal effectiveness | Adolescents and adults

Use DEAR MAN with your counselor to prepare a clear request or a respectful no. DEAR helps you plan what to say; MAN guides how you stay with it. You can rehearse without having the conversation. The other person may still say no.

Choose a situation where speaking directly is reasonably safe. If you fear punishment, coercion, or harm, plan for safety with your counselor instead. Teens can ask a safe adult for support. You do not have to confront anyone.

1. Choose one conversation

Who is involved, and what specific situation do I want to address?

2. Decide what matters

What outcome am I asking for? What also matters for the relationship and my self-respect?

3. Plan for support

When and how could I talk? What support or signs to pause should I plan for?

Educational skills practice, not a complete treatment plan.

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D Describe

What did I observe? Use specific events or words, without labels or guesses about motives.

E Express

What do I feel or think about this? Use an honest "I" statement without treating my interpretation as a fact.

A Assert

What exactly am I asking for or saying no to? State a clear, specific request or limit.

R Reinforce

What helpful effect could follow? Name a realistic benefit and how I can acknowledge cooperation. Avoid threats or promises I cannot keep.

DEAR is the message. Practice saying it briefly in your own words. You do not need to justify every feeling or persuade someone that your needs are valid.

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M Mindful

What short phrase will bring me back to my goal? I can repeat it calmly, listen to relevant concerns, and avoid arguing about side issues. If needed, I can pause rather than keep pushing.

A Appear confident

How will I speak clearly and respectfully, even if I feel nervous? Choose a steady pace, comfortable posture, notes, or another way to communicate. Eye contact is optional; adapt to my needs and culture.

N Negotiate

What reasonable alternatives can I offer or ask about? What can change, and what limit needs to stay? I do not have to bargain away safety, consent, or self-respect. What safe step can I take if we do not agree?

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A short example

Situation: I want quiet time to finish schoolwork or work at home.

Describe: "The TV was on while I was working here last night."

Express: "I felt frustrated because it was hard to concentrate."

Assert: "Would you use headphones from 7 to 8 tonight?"

Reinforce: "That would help me finish on time. I would appreciate it."

Mindful: If the topic shifts, return to "I am asking about 7 to 8 tonight."

Appear confident: Speak at a steady pace and read from notes if helpful.

Negotiate: "Would another quiet hour work? If not, I can use the study room."

Practice my message

Combine my DEAR notes into a short script. Rehearse MAN with my counselor.

After rehearsal or a conversation

What did I do effectively? What would I adjust or discuss with my counselor, regardless of whether the answer was yes?

DEAR MAN is a DBT skill developed by Marsha M. Linehan. Original practice prompts.