

DEAR MAN: Asking for What You Need

DBT Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills — Client Handout

Most difficult conversations have **three goals at once**: getting what you want, keeping the relationship intact, and keeping your self-respect. Trying to do all three on the fly is why hard conversations so often go sideways.

These skills separate the three goals so you can plan for each one. **DEAR MAN** is how you ask. **GIVE** protects the relationship while you ask. **FAST** protects your self-respect. Before a conversation, decide which goal matters most — that tells you where to put your effort.

DEAR MAN — HOW TO MAKE A REQUEST OR SAY NO

D Describe the situation. Stick to the facts, as a neutral observer would see them. No interpretations, no motives, no history.

"The last three times we planned dinner, you canceled the same day."

E Express how you feel about it. Use "I" statements. Don't assume the other person already knows — and don't expect them to read your mind.

"I feel disappointed, and I've started to feel like I'm not a priority."

A Assert what you want. Ask clearly, or say no clearly. Be specific and concrete. Hinting is not asking.

"I'd like us to pick one night a week and treat it as locked in."

R Reinforce — explain the payoff. Say what's in it for them, or what the positive result will be. Reward cooperation when you get it.

"If it's on the calendar, I'll stop checking in about it — and I think we'd both look forward to it."

M Stay Mindful of your goal. Keep returning to your request. Use the **broken record**: calmly repeat it. **Ignore attacks** — don't defend, don't counterattack, don't get pulled into a side argument.

"I hear that work is overwhelming. I'd still like one night we protect."

A Appear confident. Steady voice, upright posture, comfortable eye contact. No whispering, no apologizing for asking, no nervous laugh. You don't have to *feel* confident to appear confident.

N Negotiate. Be willing to give to get. Offer alternatives, or turn the tables: ask *them* to solve it.

"I'm open to which night. What would work on your end?"

HOW TO PRACTICE THIS

Don't start with the hardest conversation in your life. Build one DEAR MAN for something small and low-stakes — asking a coworker to return a borrowed item, asking a friend to pick the restaurant — and say it out loud before you use it. The skill needs to be familiar *before* you need it under stress. Page 4 is a worksheet for drafting one.

Two Worked Examples

The same skill, used to ask for something and to say no

EXAMPLE 1 — ASKING: REQUESTING A DEADLINE EXTENSION AT WORK

DESCRIBE	"I was assigned the Q3 analysis on Monday, and two new client escalations came in on Tuesday."
EXPRESS	"I'm concerned that if I split my attention three ways, the analysis won't be at the standard we need."
ASSERT	"I'd like to move the analysis deadline to Friday."
REINFORCE	"That way you get a report you can take straight to the client meeting, and the escalations get handled today."
MINDFUL	If pushed: <i>"I understand the timeline is tight. Friday is what I need to do this well."</i> Repeat as needed.
CONFIDENT	Even tone. No "sorry to bother you," no "this is probably stupid, but..."
NEGOTIATE	"If Friday is impossible, I could send you the summary Wednesday and the full analysis Friday. Which is more useful?"

EXAMPLE 2 — SAYING NO: DECLINING A FAMILY REQUEST

DESCRIBE	"You've asked me to host the holiday again this year."
EXPRESS	"I love having everyone here, and I'm also worn down — I've hosted the last four."
ASSERT	"I'm not going to host this year."
REINFORCE	"If I'm not running the day, I'll actually be present for it, and I'd rather be with everyone than in the kitchen."
MINDFUL	If guilt is applied: <i>"I know this is disappointing. I'm not hosting this year."</i>
CONFIDENT	One clear no. Not five reasons — over-explaining invites negotiation you didn't offer.
NEGOTIATE	"I'm glad to bring two dishes and help clean up wherever we land."

TROUBLESHOOTING

- **"I said all of it and still got a no."** DEAR MAN raises your odds; it can't guarantee an outcome. A request delivered well and declined is still a success in skill terms.
- **You get derailed onto a different fight.** That's the cue for broken record. Name it once — "I want to talk about that, and not right now" — then return to your ask.
- **You apologize your way through the request.** Cut every "sorry," "I know you're busy," and "this is silly" from your opening line. Write the first sentence out in advance.
- **You escalate instead of clarifying.** Volume is not assertiveness. If heat is rising, slow the pace and shorten the sentence.
- **You skip Describe and open with Express.** Starting at feeling puts the other person on defense. Facts first — they're the hardest part to argue with.
- **Bad timing.** The best-built DEAR MAN fails at 11pm, mid-argument, or over text. Ask for a time first.
- **You don't actually know what you want.** If you can't finish "I would like you to..." in one sentence, you aren't ready for the conversation yet — that's the work to do first.

GIVE and FAST

Keeping the relationship, and keeping your self-respect

DEAR MAN gets your request across. These two skills determine what the conversation costs you. Use them *alongside* DEAR MAN, not instead of it.

GIVE — PROTECTING THE RELATIONSHIP

- G Be Gentle.** No attacks, no threats, no judging, no name-calling. Also no sneering, eye-rolling, or walking out mid-sentence — disrespect delivered without words still lands.
- I Act Interested.** Listen to their side without interrupting. Be patient if they need a moment. Face them; put the phone down. If they can't talk now, ask when they can.
- V Validate.** Show you understand their position, out loud. Validating is not agreeing and it's not conceding.
"I can see why that feels like I'm dumping this on you."
- E Use an Easy manner.** A little humor, a smile, a lighter tone. Soft sell over hard sell. People say yes more readily to someone who seems easy to be around.

FAST — PROTECTING YOUR SELF-RESPECT

- F Be Fair.** To them *and* to yourself. Chronically over-giving breeds resentment; that's not fairness, it's a slow bill coming due.
- A No unnecessary Apologies.** No apologizing for having a request, an opinion, a need, or for taking up space. Save apologies for things you're actually sorry for.
- S Stick to your values.** Don't sell out what matters to you to be liked, to end the discomfort, or to get the yes. Know what's negotiable for you before you walk in.
- T Be Truthful.** No lying, no exaggerating, no acting helpless when you're not. Small untruths buy short-term relief and cost long-term credibility — including with yourself.

CHOOSING YOUR PRIORITY

You can't always maximize all three. Ask yourself: **is the outcome, the relationship, or my self-respect most important here?** Asking a stranger to stop cutting in line — outcome. Raising a hard topic with your partner — relationship. Being pressured to do something you find wrong — self-respect. Naming the priority in advance tells you what to lead with and what you're willing to trade.

SOAR Educational and Mental Health Therapy

169 Dayton St, Ridgewood, NJ 07450 • 201-458-0850 • nan@soartherapy.org

Practice Worksheet: Build Your DEAR MAN

Pick one real conversation you've been avoiding. Draft it here before you have it.

The situation and who I need to talk to — *one or two sentences*

My priority in this conversation — *check one*

☐ Getting the outcome ☐ Keeping the relationship ☐ Keeping my self-respect

D — Describe — *just the facts, no interpretation*

E — Express — *"I feel..."*

A — Assert — *"I would like you to..." or "I'm not going to..." (one sentence)*

R — Reinforce — *what's the benefit to them, or the good result?*

M — Mindful — *what's the likely derail, and what's my broken-record line?*

A — Appear confident — *what will I do with my voice, posture, and eye contact?*

N — Negotiate — *what am I willing to give? What's my alternative offer?*

When and where will I have it?

Afterward: what worked? What would I change?

Adapted from the interpersonal effectiveness module of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Linehan, M. M., *DBT Skills Training Manual*, 2nd ed., Guilford Press, 2015). For use in therapy with your clinician; not a substitute for treatment.