

# Using D.E.A.R. M.A.N. to Develop Effective Interpersonal Communication Skills

## Objective

To use the Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) communication skill D.E.A.R. M.A.N. to improve your relationships.

## What to Know

D.E.A.R. M.A.N. is a process you can practice to assertively express your needs and wants. Included in the Interpersonal Effectiveness module of DBT, the focus is on improving communication and relationships. Each letter in D.E.A.R. M.A.N. stands for a specific step in the communication process:

**D**escribe the current situation or the facts without judgment or your own interpretation. Tell the person exactly what you are reacting to and stick to observable and concrete details.

**E**xpress your feelings, needs, wants, and opinions about the situation using “I” statements. Be clear and assertive and avoid assuming the other person knows how you feel.

**A**ssert yourself by asking for what you want or need using a confident and respectful tone. Say “no” if appropriate and use clear, specific, and concise statements. Do not assume others know what you want.

**R**einforce (reward) positive outcomes or benefits of meeting needs or wants, both for yourself and for others. Focus on the advantages by explaining the positive and clarifying any negative consequences.

Be **M**indful of your objectives and priorities while focusing on your goals. Avoid distraction and getting off-topic. Maintain your position and keep asking for what you want, or say, “No,” and express your opinion. Repeat yourself if necessary and ignore attacks, threats, or negative comments.

**A**ppear confident, effective, and competent. Use a confident tone of voice and physical manner. Make good eye contact and try not to stammer, whisper, stare at the floor, or retreat. Avoid apologizing excessively or sounding uncertain.

**N**egotiate and find a solution that works for both parties. Be open to feedback and willing to find common ground. Offer and ask for solutions to the problem. If you say no, you may offer to do something else or to solve the problem in other ways.

Here is an example of a situation where you can use D.E.A.R. M.A.N.: Your boss has assigned extra projects and you have been working late for several weeks to catch up. You are feeling increasingly stressed out and it is impacting your work-life balance. It is time to have a

conversation with your supervisor. Using D.E.A.R. M.A.N., you might approach the conversation in this way.

**Describe:** “Because of the extra projects assigned to me, I've been consistently working late for the past few weeks.”

**Express:** “I’m feeling overwhelmed and stressed out. Working late is affecting my personal life, and I'm finding it difficult to maintain my commitments and follow through with responsibilities outside of work.”

**Assert:** “I’d like to discuss potential solutions to help me achieve a better work-life balance.”

**Reinforce:** “By addressing this issue, it will improve my overall well-being and productivity at work, which benefits both me and the company.”

**Mindful:** “Let’s discuss solutions that work for both of us. I’m open to your feedback and suggestions.”

**Appear confident:** During the conversation, maintain eye contact, use a confident tone of voice, and avoid apologizing.

**Negotiate:** “Can we explore options such as flexible work hours, redistributing my workload, or optimizing my productivity during regular working hours?”

Using the D.E.A.R. M.A.N. skill can help you communicate effectively, assert your needs, and navigate interpersonal situations with clarity and confidence. Using this skill increases the likelihood of successful and effective communication and promotes healthy and assertive interpersonal interactions.

## **What to Do**

Use this worksheet to create a plan for requesting something you want or need from someone where the situation is uncertain, emotionally triggering, or likely to involve conflict.

Describe the situation.

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Write down the steps to this process using the situation you described above. Refer to the above example if you get stuck.

**D**escribe the current situation or the facts without judgment or your own interpretation.

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**E**xpress your feelings, needs, wants, and opinions about the situation using “I” statements.

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**A**ssert yourself by asking for what you want or need – or say no. Use clear, specific, and concise statements.

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**R**einforce (reward) positive outcomes or benefits, both for yourself and for the other person. Highlight the advantages or potential win-win situation.

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How can you be **M**indful throughout the interaction?

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How can you be **A**ppear confident, effective, and competent?

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**N**egotiate and find a solution that works for both parties.

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Next, find a partner that can help you role-play the D.E.A.R. M.A.N. skill. Who can help you?

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After practicing this skill a few times with your partner, write about your experience.

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Are you going to address the situation with the actual person involved? Why or why not?

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### **Reflections on This Exercise**

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

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