

DBT Skills: Assertiveness (DEAR MAN)

DEAR MAN is an acronym to help you remember a behavioral strategy that can make it more likely that you get what you want from other people. It is not a Jedi mind control trick. It is a strategy to help you assert yourself to other people while maintaining healthy relationships. The DEAR MAN strategy is part of [Dialectical Behavioral Therapy](#), an evidence-based form of therapy designed to help you live your best life. There are seven steps to DEAR MAN.

D – Describe the situation.

When you describe the situation, stick to the facts. It is a good idea to try to remove yourself from the situation and speak as if you were an impartial third party.

For example, imagine that your teenage son has been coming home after the curfew you set for him. You could describe the situation by saying, “You have been late coming home three times this week.”

E – Express how you feel about the situation.

Avoid getting upset. Express how you feel using **I-statements**. When you express your feelings, beliefs, and needs starting with the word “I”, then you are using an **I-statement**. **I-statements** are important because they keep communication open.

In the example, you might say, “I worry about you when it is late, and I don’t know where you are.” Your son will be more likely to continue engaging with you if you use **I-statements** rather than if you said, “You are irresponsible.” or “You make me worry.”

A – Assert yourself.

Assert yourself does not mean being aggressive. It means asking directly for what you want. Asserting yourself can be uncomfortable, but keep in mind that people cannot read your mind. By clearly expressing what you want or need, you are helping other people to support you.

Looking at the example, you might tell your son, “I need you to come home on time.”

R – Reinforce your request.

In relationships, we reward each other for doing things that we like all the time. This could be something as simple as saying, “Thank you.” or baking a cake for someone who has done something nice for you.

For example, you might tell your son, “I would be more willing to let you spend time with your friends if you show me that you can be responsible.”

M – Mindfulness is vital.

Keep your focus on what you want. Avoid distractions. If the person that you are asserting yourself to attacks you personally, hold your ground. Ignore attacks.

If your son begins to verbally attack you, do your best to remain composed and focused.

A – Appear confident.

For many people, asserting yourself is uncomfortable. You might not feel confident, but that does not mean you cannot look confident.

When you are talking with your son, make eye contact. Speak calmly, clearly and loudly.

N – Negotiate.

The ideal outcome is where both parties feel like they have won. This means listening to the other person. Interpersonal effectiveness is not about dictating to other people what they should do. To be effective, you have to be open to what the other person has to say.

In our example, your son might argue that he comes home late due to circumstances beyond his control. You might settle on a compromise that satisfies both of you. For example, you might reach an agreement that your son must call home if he is going to be late.

Not only does using the DEAR MAN skill help you get what you want, it helps you preserve your relationships in the process. This strategy is one of the many ways that DBT can help you to live your best life.