

DBT Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills for Substance Abuse: DEAR WOMAN Skill and Boundaries

This handout provides therapists with a structured approach to teaching clients the DEAR WOMAN skill, tailored for scenarios related to substance abuse. Derived from dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), the DEAR WOMAN skill equips clients with strategies to improve interpersonal effectiveness, especially in the context of addiction. You'll learn the steps within that skill, see strategies for setting healthy boundaries in the face of substance abuse triggers, and explore the role of validation in therapeutic interactions.

DEAR WOMAN Skill

The DEAR WOMAN skill can be instrumental for clients navigating the interpersonal challenges addiction often presents. Each letter provides a guideline:

- **Describe the situation:** advise clients to be clear about the event or behavior causing concern. For example, "During group therapy, I felt dismissed when you interrupted my sharing."
- **Express feelings:** encourage clients to articulate their emotions related to the incident, such as, "It made me feel unimportant and unheard."
- **Assert yourself:** teach clients to state their needs or set boundaries. For instance, "I'd appreciate it if I could share without interruptions."

- **Reinforce:** help clients to emphasize their message, as in, “Being able to speak openly is important for my recovery process.”
- **Whole situation:** guide clients to assess the broader context, like recognizing that a peer’s anxiety might possibly lead to interruptions.
- **Observe reactions:** clients should be attentive to the reactions of others and, if met with defensiveness, can say something like, “I’m just sharing my feelings. Can we discuss this calmly?”
- **Mindfulness:** remind clients to stay grounded and focused on the intention behind their conversation.
- **Appear confident:** encourage self-assurance married with being respectful.
- **Negotiate:** instruct clients to engage in mutual dialogue, for instance, “How can we communicate better in the future?”

Boundaries and Positive Reinforcements

Setting clear boundaries is essential, especially in the recovery journey. For instance, when clients are in triggering situations, like a friend offering them a drink, they can assertively respond with, “I value our friendship, but for the sake of my recovery, I can’t be around alcohol right now.” This stance maintains connections while emphasizing the importance of maintaining a recovery-focused environment.

The Role of Validation in Therapy

Validation is crucial, especially for clients with a substance abuse history. Many have faced invalidation, exacerbating their struggles. Guide clients to discern triggers from past instances of invalidation. This understanding will aid them in challenging current perceptions, enabling them to find a balanced perspective that melds rational thought with emotional validation.

Key Points

- The DEAR WOMAN skill is a comprehensive tool for substance use. It assists clients in navigating interpersonal challenges linked to addiction through expressing feelings clearly, asserting boundaries, and seeking mutual understanding.
- It's essential for clients to set and maintain boundaries during triggering situations, for healthier interactions and prioritization of their journeys toward change, if they wish to achieve recovery successfully.
- Recognizing and validating client experiences, especially against past instances of invalidation, is pivotal in building trust. It enables clients to challenge and reshape perceptions, and develop a balanced perspective.