

FOR FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS

# DBT Skills for Friends and Family

A short primer on three things that change how families support a loved one with BPD or strong emotions: the biosocial model, validation, and asking for change.

## The biosocial model, in plain language

Marsha Linehan, who developed DBT, described BPD as a transaction between two things: a person who feels emotions more intensely and for longer than most, and an environment that — for many reasons — didn't consistently treat those emotions as valid.

It is not a moral failing. It is not bad parenting. It is a fit problem between a sensitive system and a world that often misunderstands sensitivity. Naming this changes the conversation: from blame to skills.

## Three pointers on validation

Validation does not mean agreement. It means communicating that the other person's experience makes sense given their context. Three things that help:

- 1. Be present.** Put the phone down. Eyes on them. The body language matters more than the words.
- 2. Reflect what's there.** "That sounds really hard" is validation. "You're right and I'm wrong" is not — that's capitulation.
- 3. Name what makes sense.** Even when you disagree with the conclusion, you can usually find the part of the feeling that fits the situation. Name that part.

## Asking for change without escalating

When you do need to ask for something, the order matters. A simplified version of the DBT skill DEAR MAN:

**Describe** the situation in facts, not interpretations.

**Express** how it affects you, in one or two sentences. Use "I".

**Assert** the specific request. Concrete, small, doable.

**Reinforce** what's good for them about agreeing.

Stay **Mindful** (return to the request if the conversation drifts), **Appear confident**, and be willing to **Negotiate**.

## Take care of yourself, too

Caregivers carry real load. The DBT skill PLEASE is a reminder that the body sets a floor for emotional balance: treat **Physical** illness, balance **Eating**, avoid mood-**Altering** substances, balance **Sleep**, and get **Exercise**. None of this is wellness theater. It's the floor.

## Want to learn this with other families?

Our 8-week Friends and Family DBT class teaches these skills, step by step, alongside other caregivers. Online. Four cohorts a year.

**Visit:** [frtc.ltd/friends-and-family-dbt](https://frtc.ltd/friends-and-family-dbt) | **Email:** [contact@frtc.ltd](mailto:contact@frtc.ltd)

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