

SKILLS CHEAT SHEET

1. Validation (Marsha Linehan – evidence-based DBT skill) – use: to counter your own judgments, to help emotionally regulate the other/your self (self-validation), to build connection, to turn towards a bid for connection (Gottman) – a way to affirm/listen responsively, BEFORE making your own point. More comprehensive than standard reflective listening. Does NOT = agreement, alignment with a position or endorsement. The purpose is basically to convey understanding and solidify the relationship. Literally ANY thought/feeling/behavior can be validated, except a negative judgment.

1) It's **understandable/reasonable** that you would . . .

Think (specify thought/s) → **Feel** (specify feeling/s) → **Behave** (specify) **the way you do/are**

2) **Given Your**

- **Biology** (sleep, food/water deprivation, chronic illness, broken arm, etc.)
- **History** (e.g. early betrayal that might appear similar to current situation, previous history of the dynamic in your relationship, etc.)
- **Current Context** (e.g. being in front of a group of your peers, meeting your birth mother for the first time, having a gun held to your head, etc.)

3) **AND . . . (not “but” because it would negate the previous validation!!) . . . Make a clear request for specific behavior you DO want here** Complaints, whining, and resentment are unspoken requests for specific *desired* behaviors.

e.g. It's understandable and reasonable that you'd be worried and anxious, and a little snarky with me, given that you haven't eaten yet and this is the first time one of your kids has left home . . . and I'm wondering if you'd be willing to talk about that and use a kinder tone with me?

2. Assertiveness (Airlines developed to counter suppression of critical co-pilot observations of danger due to “respect” for hierarchy/chain of command when danger was unnoticed by pilot – co-created with Judy Stevens-Long)

A) **Personal Greeting:** “Hey Bob!”

B) **Neutral observation** of the Challenge (observe and describe the way a camera would, *without judgment*): “I notice that . . . the red light is on for engine #2”

C) **Offer a win-win Solution** that considers *both* persons needs/wants:

“I wonder if . . . we should radio the control tower?” (wondering out loud is effective with children as well as adults)

D) **Solicit Feedback:** What do you think?

3. “Soft” Start-Ups for Necessary but Difficult Conversations (Gottman's) The first 3 minutes of a conversation predict not only how the conversation will go but also *how the relationship* will go! **Soft Start-Up formula:**

**I feel X, about *What* (Observe/describe the “what” - NOT what's “wrong” with *Whom!*)
+ Respectful request for *specific effective* behavior (I want X)**

e.g. I feel upset that the garbage is starting to smell – would you take it out please?
(versus “Why do you always make me remind you to do the obvious?”)

69% of conflicts are unresolvable and don't change over 5, 10, 15, or 20 years! There are inherent differences between people that don't change. The “Masters” of relationships find respectful ways to dialogue around these ongoing challenges/differences, to *manage* inevitable conflict early before there's too much negativity, and to accept unchangeable differences. The “Disasters” down-spiral into negative attributions and resentments that don't get discussed constructively – they don't offer/give the benefit of the doubt. Masters notice, address and reliably take responsibility for at least part of the regrettable incidents that invariably transpire in *all* relationships. “Disasters” attack or defend. *Defensiveness = a covert attack that negates responsibility, blames implicitly. Conflicts aren't “resolved” in effective relationships. They're managed effectively.*

4. Horsemen of the Apocalypse Predict Relationship Failures & Their Antidotes: **Criticism**

(Validation, then Assertiveness &/or Soft Start Up), **Defensiveness** – indirectly blames the other (Take genuine responsibility for at least part of the problem; Give benefit of the doubt; Listen for possible Bid for Connection by responding with Validation of other's experience), **Contempt** e.g. Looks down upon, sarcasm, expresses lack of respect, sighs/rolls eyes when other speaks (Self-disclose – use I-statements; use Soft Start-Up; Risk vulnerability rather than devaluing the other), **Stonewalling** e.g. “forget it,” silent treatment, walks away (Self-soothe and regulate intense affects; Take at least 20 min break and DISTRACT mind – do NOT think about the conflict or emotion dysregulation will increase. State clearly when will return so other isn't abandoned, and *come* back, even if you need to request a longer break; Assert and/or use Soft Start-Up). Impact of these **4 even worse during divorce process!**