



DEAR Communication Tool

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I was talking with a colleague from a senior school recently who told me about how the students immediately go on their phones when they leave classrooms and enter the hallways, and that he was "...sure they are all losing their ability to communicate." When people have said this to me, I think they are often surprised by my response, which is:

"I can relate to your concerns - but let's also think about those people we know who didn't grow up with much screen time but also struggle with effective communication."

However, I don't mean to say that a preponderance of screen time is not impacting children's communication skills - I believe there surely are effects. Sadly, there is practically no published research that compares communication skills of today's youth to those of youth in the past. I would love to see data for such things as frequency of eye contact, ability to confidently talk to people of all ages, and confidence in expressing uncomfortable thoughts and emotions.

I am a big believer that communication is a teachable skill. We can all learn more productive ways to handle in-person interactions. I want to share a communication tool that comes from a field of therapy, called DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy), and created by Marcia Linehan. It's called **DEAR**, and it is great to use when anyone is about to ask for something that they are nervous about.

- D = Describe the situation
- E = Emotion you are feeling about the issue
- A = Ask for what you want
- R = Reiterate how it will benefit both of you if this can be worked out

An example I used with some of the boys this week, went as follows: you have a friend that is frequently off in the corner on his phone when you are with him. This is one way to approach it using DEAR:

- D = Describe to your friend that you see him checking his phone much of the time you are together
- E = Because of this you feel distant (the emotion) when you hang out
- A = Ask him if they could try hanging out just one day with their phones entirely out of view
- R = Reiterate that you think they would both have a better time together