



# Denver DBT and Psychotherapy, INC

## How to Complete A Diary Card (DC)

**Step 1:** Fill out the top dark grey section

- **Write in your initials and the date you completed it.**

- **“How often did you fill out this card?”**

Over the past week, did you fill out the card once, twice, daily, etc.? Circle the appropriate number. One day per week means you recorded the events of the entire week in one sitting. This will make it significantly more difficult for you to accurately remember details from each day’s events. Ideally, you will circle either 5-6 days/week or 7 days/week (meaning you filled the card out each day).

Helpful Tips to get in the habit of filling the diary card out daily:

Fill out your DC at the same time every day (i.e., upon waking up, before going to bed, after brushing teeth, etc.). Set an alert on your phone to remind you to fill out your DC.

What if I forget to fill out my DC?

If you forget or are unable to fill out your DC on certain days, it is OKAY. Just go back when you remember or as soon as you are able and complete the days that you missed.

- **Target Behavior**

What is a target behavior?

A target behavior is a behavior that you would like to change. If you have multiple behaviors that you would like to target for change, start with the behavior that is hindering your life the most (i.e. regularly yelling at your partner when you value the relationship and your partner is fed up is likely hindering you more than not exercising as much as you’d like. Ideally, your behavior of yelling at your partner will decrease as you learn new skills and, with time, you can switch the target behavior to exercise).

A behavior is something that is measurable (can be tracked) and observable (can be seen or identified by self and others).

Examples of target behaviors: reducing the amount of cigarettes smoked; leaving the house more often; attending more social functions; going on daily walks; decreasing avoidance or procrastination.

What a target behavior is not: A target behavior is not a thought or a feeling- you cannot measure a thought and it is not observable by others.

How to turn thoughts/feelings into target behaviors:

“I want to be less sad” can translate to the target behavior of spending less time isolating, engaging in pleasurable activities or spending more time with family and friends.

“I want to ruminate less” becomes target behavior by (each day) writing down one thing you’re ruminating (overthinking/spinning) about and turning the rumination into facts or engaging in a productive activity (when you notice yourself ruminating).

## **Step 2:**

- **“Urges” and “Actions”** How strong was your urge to use (or avoid) your target behavior? Rate the intensity with which you experienced urges to engage in your target behavior on a scale from 0 (no urges at all) to 5 (the strongest, most intense urges possible).

Did you give in to your urge (action)? If so, how intense was the action?

Example: My urge to smoke a cigarette was a 5 and I only smoked 2 cigarettes (when I usually would have smoked an entire pack). Urge=5 Action=1

**A DBT victory is a high urge and a low action.**

- **Medication/Meditation (Med.)**

If you are not taking medication, you will only measure meditation. Please write down how many minutes you meditate each day.

Here are some meditation tools designed to help you cultivate a daily practice: Headspace App (Discount code: CALMTEAM), Insight Timer App (free), Calm App, Waking Up App, Ten Percent Happier App.

If you are taking medication:

Do you ever forget/skip doses of medication? If NO, there is no need to measure medication; instead, simply log your minutes of meditation. If YES, measure both the frequency with which you miss your medication (by giving yourself a check when you remember your meds) and your meditate (put a side slash in each box and give yourself a check when you take your medication and then a number for the amount of minutes you spend meditating).

- **Rating Emotions**

Rate your overall daily emotions on a scale of 0-5.

Example: You are experiencing very little anger until you drive home from work and someone cuts you off in traffic. This causes your anger to spike and you scream in your car. By the time you’re home, your anger has subsided and you return to baseline.

Because your anger level was low or nonexistent most of the day, you would likely rate your overall anger as a 0 or 1. However, there was a moment where you experienced a spike in your anger; thus, a 0 or 1 would not reflect your traffic experience. Mark your spike in a parenthesis like this:

Anger

1 (4)\*

\* The number in the parenthesis represents getting cut off in traffic (or whatever incident spiked your emotion).

- **“Other”** column

Write down two emotions that you would like to measure (most people choose emotions that they would like to become more aware of, increase or decrease): joy, jealousy, guilt, shame, etc.

- **Used Skills** (0-7 scale)

This assesses how you use and relate to your DBT skills.

Example #1: You wake up feeling depressed and anxious and think, “I should probably use a skill; I’ll try distracting with an activity.” You go for a 20-minute walk while listening to music; when you return, you’re feeling better. This would be a 5. You “tried, could use (the skills)” and they “helped”.

Example #2: You wake up feeling depressed and anxious. You think, “I should probably use a skill.” Then you think, “Forget it; if DBT were working, I wouldn’t feel this bad. I just want to lay here and sulk.” You spend the day in bed. This would be a 1. You “thought about” using a skill but didn’t because you “didn’t want to”.

Example #3: You wake up feeling depressed and anxious. It doesn’t even occur to you to use a skill. This would be a 0. You did not think about using a skill and did not use a skill.

Example #4: You wake up feeling depressed and anxious. Automatically, you decide to go for a walk. You come back from the walk feeling just as depressed and anxious. This would be a 6. You did not have to think about or try using a skill; you just did it. However, it did not alleviate your suffering.

While the above examples depict skills used in a single instance, the number placed in the skill box represents the overall skill use for the day.

- **Reinforcement (R)**

Did you reinforce yourself for a job well done? Example: It was extremely difficult to get yourself out of the house but you went for a 20 minute walk. After the walk you could reinforce skillful behavior by: treating yourself to a cup of tea at the local coffee shop; saying to yourself, “Nice job, it would have been really easy to stay in bed” or “Even though I was feeling X, I was able to do something positive for myself.”

You may also choose to reinforce yourself for success with your target behavior. If, by the end of the week, your action number is a 2 or below, reinforcement could be taking yourself to a movie you’ve wanted to see, buying yourself flowers, treating yourself to a massage, etc.

### **Step 3:**

- **Daily log:**

**Gratitude practice-** List 3 things you are thankful/grateful for (in the environment, about yourself and/or about others). Do your best to be mindful while doing this rather than rushing through the exercise in a disconnected way. This means taking 30 seconds to a minute (or more) to thoughtfully and “heartfully” reflect on the things for which you are grateful.

Examples: “I am grateful for my health.” You might reflect that, in this moment, you are not experiencing any pain and/or you’ve recovered from the cold you caught recently (ideally allow yourself to feel your lack of physical discomfort). “I am grateful for access to clean drinking water” This could lead to a reflection that, in some third world

countries, much of the day can be spent trying to access clean water. You might open to feelings of gratitude, feeling fortunate that we currently have an abundant supply of safe water to drink. “I am a really good listener.” You might then reflect on how often people confide in you and how you deeply value what they say and take the time to hear them. It could feel good to acknowledge that you give people a gift each time you listen to them.

**Write a few sentences about how DBT is going.** Examples: “Skill of radical acceptance is really interesting but it has been challenging when it comes to accepting my close friend’s illness. Practicing radical acceptance in this situation feels overwhelming and I plan to discuss that during homework time”; “I like the idea of mindfulness, but I struggle being mindful moment-to-moment, especially when I’m stressed”; “The DEAR MAN skill really came in handy when discussing Thanksgiving plans with my relatives. I was nervous but it felt like a victory to try it.”

#### **Step 4:**

- Back of card: **Skills** used

Once you have several skills in your arsenal (after your initial few weeks in group), check off which of those skills you used each day. Please note that you are not responsible for practicing skills that are unfamiliar. This means that you should only attend to the skills that were taught during your time in group. Throughout your weeks and months in DBT, you will obtain more skills. Eventually, the “Skills” section will help you measure the skills you use frequently and serve as a reminder of skills you might be forgetting to practice.

How to use the back of the card to promote progress and increase your use of skills:  
Review which skills you frequently use and which you tend to overlook. Go through your notes/binder to refresh yourself on skills that you may be less familiar/comfortable with and challenge yourself to incorporate them into your daily life.

#### A Final Note:

We know that reading through this and starting the diary card can feel quite overwhelming. The best way to learn is to give it a shot and let go of fears around making mistakes. It will get significantly easier with practice!