

THE

D.E.A.N.

EFFECT™

WORKBOOK

*A practical SEL tool for real feelings,
real decisions, and better next steps.*

DECIDE • EVALUATE • ALIGN • NAVIGATE

One tool. Every stage of growing.

Name: _____

KellyDeansBooks.com

START HERE

Welcome to the D.E.A.N. Effect™ Workbook

A cycle for pausing, thinking clearly, and choosing what comes next.

The D.E.A.N. Effect™ is built around four questions: What matters most right now? What is really happening? Does my response match who I want to be? What is my next best move?

This is not a one-time checklist. It is a cycle we return to.

Use this workbook for your own reflection, or use the guided pages with a child, teen, student, athlete, client, or family member. You do not need to complete every page in order. Start with the part that fits the moment.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ A real situation happening now | ☐ A decision I need to make |
| ☐ A conflict or misunderstanding | ☐ A mistake I want to repair |
| ☐ A boundary I need to protect | ☐ A feeling I am trying to understand |

What brought me to this workbook today?

What would feel different if I handled this moment well?

THE CYCLE

The D.E.A.N. Effect™

Decide → Evaluate → Align → Navigate → Repeat

D DECIDE What matters most right now?	E EVALUATE What is really happening?
A ALIGN Does my response match who I want to be?	N NAVIGATE What is my next best move?

You can enter the cycle anywhere. Sometimes the first thing you need is clarity. Sometimes you already know what happened and need to align with your values. Sometimes the only question you can answer is, “What can I do next?” The purpose is not perfect thinking. The purpose is a better next step.

Which step feels hardest for me most often?

Which step do I naturally do well?

STEP 1

D

DECIDE

What matters most right now?

Every choice starts with clarity. Before we react, we decide what matters most in this moment.

Pause. Choose on purpose. That changes everything.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Being understood | ☐ Solving the problem |
| ☐ Protecting a boundary | ☐ Repairing something |
| ☐ Asking for help | ☐ Staying true to myself |
| ☐ Taking care of my safety or well-being | ☐ Something else |

What matters most to me in this moment?

What does not need my attention right now?

PRACTICE

DECIDE with clarity

Separate what matters from everything competing for your attention.

What am I reacting to?

What outcome am I hoping for?

What do I actually need?

What can wait?

One sentence that names what matters most:

When we decide what matters, we stop reacting to everything else.

STEP 2

E EVALUATE

What is really happening?

Look at the facts, not only the story your brain creates. Clarity helps us make better choices.

Curiosity over assumptions. Clarity over confusion.

What actually happened? Just the facts.

What story is my brain telling me about what it means?

What evidence do I have?

PRACTICE

FACT • STORY • EVIDENCE • POSSIBILITY

Slow the story down before you decide what it means.

FACTS *What can I observe or verify?*

STORY *What am I assuming or interpreting?*

EVIDENCE *What supports or challenges my story?*

WHAT ELSE COULD BE TRUE? *What are other possible explanations?*

If we rush to conclusions, we usually rush to regret.

STEP 3

A

ALIGN

Does my response match who I want to be?

Alignment keeps us grounded in our values, boundaries, and goals - not just in the moment, but in who we are becoming.

It is not about being perfect. It is about being intentional.

Does this align with my values? What matters most to me?

Does this respect my boundaries? What do I need and what will I not accept?

Does this support my goals? Is this moving me toward the life I want to build?

Does this reflect who I want to be in this moment?

VALUES + BOUNDARIES CHECK-IN

Alignment does not mean being nice at your own expense.

Use this page to name what you want your response to protect and represent.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Honesty | ☐ Respect | ☐ Courage |
| ☐ Kindness | ☐ Fairness | ☐ Responsibility |
| ☐ Peace | ☐ Growth | ☐ Family |
| ☐ Friendship | ☐ Self-respect | ☐ Consistency |

The value I most want to lead with here is:

A boundary I need to protect is:

A response that would feel aligned is:

A response that might feel good for five minutes but would not fit who I want to be is:

STEP 4

N

NAVIGATE

What is my next best move?

Navigation is not about solving everything at once. It is choosing the next step that moves you forward.

You do not need the whole map. You need the next right step.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Speak up | ☐ Ask for help |
| ☐ Repair the mistake | ☐ Take a pause |
| ☐ Set a boundary | ☐ Gather more information |
| ☐ Try again | ☐ Let something go |

What could I do next?

What is the smallest useful next step?

When will I take that step?

PRACTICE

CHOOSE THE NEXT MOVE

Turn insight into action.

☐ **SPEAK UP** — What needs to be said clearly?

☐ **ASK FOR HELP** — Who can support me right now?

☐ **REPAIR** — What can I own, fix, or make right?

☐ **PAUSE** — What needs time before I respond?

☐ **SET A BOUNDARY** — What do I need to protect?

☐ **TRY AGAIN** — What would a better second attempt look like?

When we navigate with intention, we stop drifting through the moment.

PUT IT TOGETHER

WORK THROUGH A REAL MOMENT

Use all four steps on one situation.

The situation:

D

DECIDE — *What matters most right now?*

E

EVALUATE — *What is really happening?*

A

ALIGN — *Does my response match who I want to be?*

N

NAVIGATE — *What is my next best move?*

KEEP IT SIMPLE

THE 60-SECOND D.E.A.N. RESET

When you do not have time for a full worksheet.

One breath. Four questions. One next step.

D DECIDE

What matters most right now?

E EVALUATE

What do I actually know?

A ALIGN

What response fits who I want to be?

N NAVIGATE

What can I do next?



THE SAME TOOL GROWS WITH US

SAME CYCLE. DIFFERENT LANGUAGE.

The situations change. The D.E.A.N. Effect™ stays usable.

EARLY CHILDHOOD	<i>“What happened?”</i> <i>“What can we do next?”</i>
GROWING KIDS	<i>“What do I know?”</i> <i>“What do I need?”</i>
TWEENS + TEENS	<i>“Fact or assumption?”</i> <i>“What fits who I am?”</i>
ADULTS	<i>“What deserves my energy?”</i> <i>“What moves me forward?”</i>

The goal is not to force adult language onto children. The goal is to keep the cycle intact while using questions that fit the person in front of you.

Which version of the language feels most useful for me or the person I support?

USE IT WITH SOMEONE ELSE

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Keep the questions concrete, brief, and calm.

Young children may not have the words for every feeling yet. Start with what happened, what they notice, and what could happen next.

Guide the thinking. Do not rush to fix the feeling.

- ☐ What happened?
- ☐ Show me where you felt it in your body.
- ☐ What do you need right now?
- ☐ What can we do next?
- ☐ Do you want help or do you want to try first?
- ☐ What would help make it right?

A situation I can practice this with:

Words I want to remember to use:

USE IT WITH SOMEONE ELSE

GROWING KIDS

Build language for needs, choices, and repair.

As children grow, invite them to identify what they know, what they need, and what choice could help them move forward.

- ☐ What do you know for sure?
- ☐ What do you think might be happening?
- ☐ What do you need?
- ☐ What matters most here?
- ☐ Is there something you need to own or repair?
- ☐ What could you try next?

A situation I want to help a child work through:

How can I ask questions without taking over?

What would building capacity look like here?

USE IT WITH SOMEONE ELSE

TWEENS + TEENS

Make room for autonomy, identity, and assumptions.

Tweens and teens are often navigating friendship, belonging, pressure, embarrassment, boundaries, and identity. The D.E.A.N. cycle gives them a structure without requiring an adult to take over the decision.

- ☐ What is fact and what is assumption?
- ☐ What matters most to you here?
- ☐ What choice fits who you want to be?
- ☐ What boundary do you need?
- ☐ What part is yours to repair?
- ☐ What is your next best move?

What situation is creating the most pressure right now?

What would support without control look like?

USE IT FOR YOURSELF

ADULTS

The same questions work when the stakes, relationships, and responsibilities get bigger.

For adults, D.E.A.N. can be used for difficult conversations, work decisions, parenting, boundaries, relationships, mistakes, and moments when too many things are competing for your energy.

☐ What deserves my energy?

☐ What am I assuming?

☐ What do I need to protect?

☐ What am I responsible for - and what am I not responsible for?

☐ What response reflects who I want to be?

☐ What moves me forward?

What deserves my energy today?

What am I carrying that may not be mine to carry?

What would moving forward look like?



FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, COACHES + COUNSELORS

GUIDE, DON'T GRAB THE WHEEL.

Ask better questions. Build better next steps.

Children and teens do not always need us to fix the moment. Sometimes they need us to help them think through it.

D — DECIDE	<i>“What matters most here?”</i>
E — EVALUATE	<i>“Walk me through what happened.”</i>
A — ALIGN	<i>“What choice feels like you at your best?”</i>
N — NAVIGATE	<i>“What could you do next?”</i>

The goal is not control. The goal is capacity.

Where am I most likely to “grab the wheel”?

What question could I ask instead?

PRACTICE

SCENARIO LAB

There is not one perfect answer. Practice the cycle.

FRIENDSHIP

A friend walks past without speaking. Your first thought is, "They are mad at me."

D: _____ E: _____ A: _____ N: _____

MISTAKE

You say something quickly and realize it hurt someone. You feel embarrassed and want to avoid the conversation.

D: _____ E: _____ A: _____ N: _____

BOUNDARY

Someone keeps asking for your time after you have already said you are overwhelmed.

D: _____ E: _____ A: _____ N: _____

A real scenario I want to practice:

BUILD THE HABIT

WEEKLY D.E.A.N. REFLECTION

Notice the pattern, not just the outcome.

A moment I handled well this week:

What I DECIDED mattered:

What I EVALUATED more clearly:

How I ALIGNED with my values or boundaries:

How I NAVIGATED the next step:

Something I want to try differently next time:

MAKE IT YOURS

MY D.E.A.N. PLAN

Create the language you want to return to when emotions are high.

When I notice I am reacting quickly, I want to remind myself:

A question that helps me DECIDE:

A question that helps me EVALUATE:

A question that helps me ALIGN:

A question that helps me NAVIGATE:

A person I can ask for support when I need it:

Real feelings. Real decisions. Better next steps.

NOTES + REAL-LIFE MOMENTS

Use this page for situations you want to revisit.

CONTINUE THE PRACTICE

THE BOOKS TELL THE STORY.

The D.E.A.N. Effect™ gives the tool.

Stories can give children a safe place to recognize hard feelings before they are ready to explain those feelings in their own lives.

LEXIE Overwhelm • honesty • repair	HARLEE Confidence • pressure • trying again
MATEO Voice • emotion • creativity	HARPER Friendship • assumptions • belonging
DEAN Leadership • character • choices	AVA Courage • uncertainty • perseverance
<i>One tool. Every stage of growing.</i>	

Explore books, resources, and the D.E.A.N. Effect™ at

KellyDeansBooks.com

© 2026 Kelly Dean. All rights reserved.