

The ABC technique



ABC's Worksheet example

The ABC technique can be used to help you cope with almost any upsetting situation.

You can use it 'at the time' or to learn from events that you have found difficult. It takes practice, but we promise it is worth the effort!

The idea builds on what we have already learned: we react to situations because of our thoughts and beliefs. Sometimes our beliefs can be unhelpful and get us into loads of trouble. We can examine our beliefs to see whether they are helpful or not.

The ABC tool pulls this together and helps us identify helpful, healthy and rational beliefs that will help us cope with difficult situations. The idea is simple; change how events affect us by changing our beliefs. These are the steps we take to do an ABC:

Activating event is the thing that happened that set things in motion. If someone says 'Everton scored a goal, which made me really angry' then 'Everton scoring a goal' is A - the activating event.

Belief is what you believe about the activating event. So the belief might be "my team will be relegated and this would be unbearable and humiliating".

Consequence is how you feel and then how you act as a result of what you believe about the event. So Everton scores and you think that is a humiliation, then you will be angry and upset. The ABC shows that how we feel depends on what we believe.

Dispute is what we can do to question the beliefs. We ask ourselves whether the Beliefs are true, rational and helpful to us.

Effective new belief. This is a new helpful or rational belief we can use to replace the unhelpful belief. By practicing this we can cope better with unpleasant events, even relegation.

In practice it is best to use this in a slightly different order.

We usually start with C – the consequence. We notice that we are furious or are having a terrible urge.

Then we try and see what came before that, what was the trigger, the activating event or A. Ask yourself 'What happened to make me feel this way'.

Then try and work out your thoughts or beliefs that meant this event had this effect on you. If you had no thoughts or beliefs, it would not have mattered at all! Write these in as B.

We then Dispute these beliefs, question them and decide whether they are true and helpful, or irrational and unhelpful.

If they are unhelpful, we identify new healthy or Effective beliefs that we can practice in future to help us cope better.

ABC Worksheet

<p>Think of the Activating event...</p>	<p>What was the situation leading to how you felt? What was the single most upsetting thing about the situation?</p> <p><i>My partner treated me unfairly.</i></p>
<p>Think about your Beliefs about the event...</p>	<p>What were you telling yourself about the Adversity to make you feel this? What were you demanding? Was it an 'I must or I should' or 'they must or they should'? Was it something 'awful' or 'unbearable' or were you putting yourself/others/life down?</p> <p><i>My partner <u>must</u> treat me better than this – it is unbearable.</i></p>
<p>Think about the Consequences of this event...</p>	<p>How did this make you feel? What was the negative emotion? Did you feel anger, anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, envy or jealousy? What did feeling this way make you do or want to do?</p> <p><i>I'm really angry and desperately want to use (eg. go to the pub and get drunk) to calm down and feel better.</i></p>
<p>Dispute the belief</p>	<p>Turn the belief into a question and answer it. Ask yourself...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I rationally support this belief? • What evidence exists of the falseness of this belief? • Does any evidence exist of the truth of this belief? • What are the worst things that could actually happen to me if I don't get what I think I must? • What good things could I make happen if I don't get what I think I must? <p><i>Does my partner have to treat me better? No they don't – I would prefer that they did but there is no law of the universe that they must. Can I control what they do? No I can't. Was this actually unbearable? No it wasn't, it was unpleasant but not unbearable. Will getting drunk help me feel better? In the long run, no it will not. So these beliefs are not helpful or rational – my beliefs are getting in the way of what I really want – it is the beliefs that are causing my urges not my partner.</i></p>
<p>Effective belief</p>	<p>To think more rationally strive for new beliefs that are...flexible preferences; anti-awfulizing; high frustration tolerance; acceptance. How would holding these new beliefs affect the way you felt at C? How would feeling this way affect the way you behaved?</p> <p><i>While I really don't like to be treated like this, I accept I can't control what my partner does.</i></p> <p><i>This is unpleasant and I am annoyed, but it won't kill me and it is not worth risking my recovery over this.</i></p>

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Think about your Beliefs about the event...	What were you telling yourself about the Adversity to make you feel this? What were you demanding? Was it an 'I must or I should' or 'they must or they should'? Was it something 'awful' or 'unbearable' or were you putting yourself/others/life down?
Think about the Consequences of this event...	How did this make you feel? What was the negative emotion? Did you feel anger, anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, envy or jealousy? What did feeling this way make you do or want to do?
Dispute the belief	Turn the belief into a question and answer it. Ask yourself... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can I rationally support this belief?• What evidence exists of the falseness of this belief?• Does any evidence exist of the truth of this belief?• What are the worst things that could actually happen to me if I don't get what I think I must?• What good things could I make happen if I don't get what I think I must?
Effective belief	To think more rationally strive for new beliefs that are...flexible preferences; anti-awfulizing; high frustration tolerance; acceptance. How would holding these new beliefs affect the way you felt at C? How would feeling this way affect the way you behaved?

Techniques for Disputing Irrational Beliefs (DIBS)

Q1 What self-defeating irrational belief do I want to dispute and surrender?

ANSWER: I must receive love from someone for whom I really care about.

Q2 Can I rationally support this belief?

ANSWER: No.

Q3 What evidence exists of the falseness of this belief?

ANSWER: Many indications exist that the belief that I must receive love from someone for whom I really care is false:

- a) No law of the universe exists that says that someone I care for must love me (although I would find it nice if that person did!).
- b) If I do not receive love from one person, I can still get it from others and find happiness that way.
- c) If no one I care for ever cares for me, which is very unlikely, I can still find enjoyment in friendships, in work, in books, and in other things.
- d) If someone I deeply care for rejects me, that will be most unfortunate; but I will hardly die!
- e) Even though I have not had much luck in winning great love in the past, that hardly proves that I must gain it now.
- f) No evidence exists for any absolutistic must. Consequently, no proof exists that I must always have anything, including love.
- g) Many people exist in the world who never get the kind of love they crave and who still lead happy lives.
- h) At times during my life I know that I have remained unloved and happy; so I most probably can feel happy again under unloving conditions.
- i) If I get rejected by someone for whom I truly care, that may mean that I possess some poor, unlovable traits. But that hardly means that I am a rotten, worthless, totally un-lovable individual.
- j) Even if I had such poor traits that no one could ever love me, I would still not have to down myself as a lowly, bad individual.

Q4 Does any evidence exist of the truth of this belief?

ANSWER: No, not really. Considerable evidence exists that if I love someone dearly and never am loved in return that I will then find myself disadvantaged, inconvenienced, frustrated, and deprived. I certainly would prefer, therefore, not to get rejected. But no amount of inconvenience amounts to a horror. I can still stand frustration and loneliness. They hardly make the world awful. Nor does rejection make me a failure. Clearly, then, no evidence exists that I must receive love from someone for whom I really care.

Q5 What are the worst things that could actually happen to me if I don't get what I think I must (or do get what I think I must not get)?

ANSWER: If I don't get the love I think I must receive:

- a) I would get deprived of various possible pleasures and conveniences.
- b) I would feel inconvenienced by having to keep looking for love elsewhere.
- c) I might never gain the love I want, and thereby continue indefinitely to feel deprived and disadvantaged.
- d) Other people might down me and consider me pretty worthless for getting rejected—and that would be annoying and unpleasant.
- e) I might settle for pleasures other than and worse than those I could receive in a good love relationship; and I would find that distinctly undesirable.
- f) I might remain alone much of the time; which again would be unpleasant.
- g) Various other kinds of misfortunes and deprivations might occur in my life—none of which I need define as awful, terrible, or unbearable.

Q6 What good things could I make happen if I don't get what I think I must (or do get what I think I must not get)?

- a) If the person I truly care for does not return my love, I could devote more time and energy to winning someone else's love—and probably find someone better for me.
- b) I could devote myself to other enjoyable pursuits that have little to do with loving or relating, such as work or artistic endeavours.
- c) I could find it challenging and enjoyable to teach myself to live happily without love.
- d) I could work at achieving a philosophy of fully accepting myself even when I do not get the love I crave.