

The ABC of CBT Mini Workbook: Identifying and Disputing Self-Talk

CBT persuades us that events, no matter how challenging, only influence how we feel and behave. Our attributional style (how we are explaining it to ourselves) and our trippy nervous systems will together create our feelings and behaviours. What are you thinking?

Use this classic model to map, examine, and edit distorted thinking by separating:



The ABC of CBT

The ABC column form is the staple CBT worksheet. It helps us to build awareness of our 'attributional style' (how we explain the world to ourselves). Noodle around with it. These simple formats help to build awareness and regulation of *how* we think. They help us to separate beliefs and thoughts from events and feelings, and to see patterns and bad habits over time - and most importantly to see that our thoughts are often irrational, illogical, and unhelpful (that's humans for you!), so that we can dispute them and replace them with rational, evidence-based, cool self-talk instead – which will help to build emotional intelligence, and to regulate our feelings, and our choice of behaviours – to get better outcomes, to be happier and healthier.' Think different, feel different, behave different'.

Simple example:



Try it yourself – start journaling:

A	B	C	D

See the following ABC examples that show clearly the effect of distorted thinking on how we feel and how we behave:

A = ACTIVATING EVENT/SITUATION	B = BELIEFS AND THOUGHTS	C = CONSEQUENTIAL FEELINGS AND BEHAVIORS
What's happening?	Thinking that....	Makes me feel... and do....
I have an important exam approaching.	I'm going to fail! This is unbearable, I can't stand it. I can't focus. I'll never be able to prepare for it, not with the way I am right now. It's useless, why am I bothering? There's no point. I'm screwed.	Adrenaline spike. Threat response on. Anxious, afraid, angry at myself and the world. Can't sleep. Avoid study and procrastinate, self-medicate, lose myself online in social media or on YouTube or Netflix.
My partner has ended our relationship.	I can't live without her. I'll never find anybody like her again. Everybody always breaks up with me. I'll never be in a proper relationship. Nobody will ever love me. I'll always be alone. It's awful.	Adrenaline spike. Threat response on. Depressed, nervous, hopeless. Isolating myself and avoiding people and events. Neglecting personal hygiene. Can't be bothered with anything. Stalk her online and go over and over past, present, and future in my head.
My friend got a job we both applied for, not me!	That is unbelievable. He's so stupid! And he's not even good-looking. Or funny. Or anything. Oh no, I must be even worse than him then! Or the interviewers are total idiots! Yes, they are. And I hate him. It's not fair!	Adrenaline spike. Threat response on. Angry, aggressive, irritable, and flying off the handle. Going on and on about it to my partner (and myself), putting my competitor down to others and looking for constant reassurance and validation.
Map the unhelpful cognitive distortions you have found in these examples:		

Develop Rational Thinking Skills, Dispute, and Reframe

After identifying the ABC, you will add a D box/column to 'dispute and reframe' the beliefs and thoughts.

Language matters. What are you saying to yourself? Preciseness of language could change your life.

Here, you will learn how to build awareness and self-regulation by "thought stopping" and editing and disputing unhelpful/irrational language, replacing it with cool, rational, evidence-based language instead.

Apply the following to your thoughts and beliefs about any particular problem situation before you dispute and reframe:

- Is this kind of thinking healthy or unhealthy?
- Is it rational or irrational?
- Is it helpful or unhelpful?
- Am I using bad thinking habits/cognitive distortions?
- Which one(s)?
- Am I using emotional reasoning (Oh, my feelings! Remember, feelings are not facts—what are the facts?)
- What is the evidence for this thought or belief? Is there any evidence against it?
- Am I getting things out of proportion? 30%? 50% 90%?
- Is that a bit dramatic and unhelpful?
- How does accepting these thoughts and beliefs make me feel and behave?
- Has thinking this way been helpful in life so far?
- What would I advise my best friend if they were thinking this way?
- What is the rational, calm, evidence-based alternative view of this situation?
- What is it more true to say? Write this new self-talk in this Disputing box...

Key ideas – what did I learn? What are my patterns?

Try it yourself. Fill in an ABC worksheet to identify and map your own ABC. Use this template as a guide if you don't want to write in your workbook.

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<p>Dispute – reframe B ‘beliefs and thought’</p>		
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