

ABC - to stop being victimized by your thinking

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The ABCs is a form of cognitive therapy that is simple enough and effective enough to be used by anybody and – it works. You can learn to do this off the computer screen.

A common example is the issue of someone else's behavior "making you angry". This is a very common way of expressing something and we hear it often, but in fact it distorts the situation it attempts to describe. A more accurate description of "someone making me angry" is to say that you feel angry about their behavior. They are not making you anything- they are simply behaving in a way that you are getting angry about. You notice their behavior and then become angry. The responsibility for the anger is yours, not theirs. This can sound strange at first, but when dealing with problematic anger and frustration this is the way it works.

To use this ABC exercise for yourself, just pick any situation where someone's behavior is "making you angry" and take a look and see what it is you are thinking about it that is DEMANDING and irrational, and change it into something more rational- a PREFERENCE. It is irrational to demand that people behave in the exact way you want them to! Here is an example using drunken people making a lot of noise late at night as they pass by outside where I live.

A. (Activating situation)

Drunk people outside, making some noise.

B. (Irrational Belief I have about A)

They MUSTN'T make any noise.

C. (Consequences of having those beliefs about A)

When noisy drunken people pass in the street outside late at night and wake me up I feel angry. It feels bad. I lie awake feeling angry and upset and don't get back to sleep for a long time.

D. (Dispute the irrational Beliefs in B by turning them into questions and answers)

WHY shouldn't they make any noise- where is that commandment written in stone? Well, it isn't.

E. (Effective new thinking- substitute something rational instead of B)

Drunken people often tend to be noisy, but it's no big deal. It is very common that they make some noise on their way home. I will CHOOSE to not upset myself about this, and I will stop even noticing it because it is not a problem for me. When this happens I will say "Ah, the drunk people who pass in the night" (taking care to spell it right) and go back to sleep.

You can make an ABC exercise really short;

- A. (Activating situation) Drunks walking past outside, making some noise.**
- B. (Irrational Belief I have about A) They SHOULDN'T make any noise**
- C. (Consequences of having those beliefs about A) I Feel angry, etc**
- D. (Dispute the irrational Belief/s in B) WHY shouldn't they make any noise?**
- E. (Effective new thinking) Drunk people do make noise, it's what they're good at- its like a natural talent for them. I will CHOOSE to not upset myself about this.**

And you can do this on many situations that bother you and reclaim your peace of mind, just look for the DEMAND and turn it into a PREFERENCE.

Try to keep it as simple as you can while you get used to the ideas involved. Be aware of "should-ing" and "musterbation" (these simply mean the occurrence of problem-causing "should" and "must" DEMANDS in your thinking).

Here are some things you might think or believe, in which case these could be your "iB"s;

They MUST see it my way

The sun MUST shine tomorrow

I MUST NEVER display weakness

I SHOULD be able to have a drink

Email lists SHOULD be how I expect them to be

Other people SHOULD behave in the way I want

I MUST NOT feel overwhelmed with responsibilities

People who do bad things MUST ALWAYS be punished etc.

I NEED a drink ("NEED" is often interpreted as MUST HAVE- be aware of such invisible demands)

I CAN'T STAND IT when I feel (bored, sad, lonely, whatever) People MUST not take me for granted

GYE - Guard Your Eyes

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Try to find some Activating situations, iB's and Consequences of your own and do this exercise with them.

Often is easier to start with the C- the Consequences of the A and B and work back to see what they were. Whenever you feel upset it can be a useful exercise to see if an ABC can be done on the situation and your thinking about it. You never know, you might just feel better.

Get into the habit of doing this regularly and you might feel a lot better overall. And do please note; this is a tool not just a theory. Success with this (and other) cognitive techniques is dependent on your writing out your own examples and making it part of the way you think.

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