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## The ABCs of Thinking

### Summary

The **three-column ABC form** helps to capture "thoughts" and we use it to match thoughts to feelings and events. By first talking about the "emotions and behaviors" that are bothering us or causing us problems, and then identifying the event(s) and the exact thoughts that accompany it(s).

These simple forms help build awareness of "how" we think - help us see patterns and connections over time - and most importantly, help us see that our thoughts are often irrational, illogical and unhelpful, so we can challenge and replace them with positive talking.

### Instruction:



- Complete the ABC worksheet
- Identify your thoughts (can be hypothetical or real)
- After you have identified your thoughts, challenge them
- Use evidence, facts and an alternative (healthy) way of thinking

| A = Activation event<br>(Activation) | B = Conviction( <b>B</b> elief) | C = Consequences in<br>behavior and emotions<br>( <b>C</b> onsequence) | D = dispute with<br>evidence<br>( <b>D</b> ispute) |
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**Remark**

- We identify bad feelings,
- then match the event/situation,
- then identify the thoughts
- then work with them.

**Tips for managing a dispute:**

- What is the evidence? What alternative views are possible?
- What is the consequence of me thinking the way I think?
- Is my thinking realistic?
- What would I say to my best friend?

**Examples of dispute**

| <b>A =<br/>activation<br/>event</b> | <b>B =<br/>belief/thought</b>   | <b>C =<br/>consequence<br/>of<br/>feelings/beha<br/>viour</b>   | <b>D = dispute with evidence</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| I have interview!                   | I have no hope for getting this job. There will be hundreds of applicants and I cannot compete with them. I'll be nervous, "ordinary" and tongue-tied. It's unbearable. I can't stop worrying about it. | Anxiety, nervousness, I can't face the preparation, I try to "ignore" it until I am he has to deal with it. | <p>Saying "I have no hope" or "I can't compete" is irrational because I can't know what will happen in the future. It would be more accurate to say that I'm nervous and worried that I won't get it and I'll contrast poorly with the other applicants. That's how most people would feel.</p> <p>Yes, I expect I'll probably be nervous, but that's totally normal and most people are nervous during interviews. I shouldn't call myself "ordinary", everyone is unique, this term is useless.</p> <p>I may or may not be "tongue-tied", but what exactly is it? It's not rational to imagine that the language actually 'commits' to me and is unusable, I'll change that statement, it's not helpful. Using the term "unbearable" is not correct, actually I can bear it.</p> <p>it would be more correct to say that I'm nervous and I'd rather not get into a situation where I have to "endure". It's not useful or rational to take yourself out of it for fortune telling, it's more correct to say I have no idea what will happen.</p> |



## **Helpful strategies for challenging automatic negative thoughts.**

### **Questions to help you challenge irrational thoughts:**

#### **1. What is the evidence?**

- What evidence do I have to support my ideas?
- What evidence do I have against it?

#### **2. What are the alternative views?**

- How might an outsider look at this situation?
- How would I have looked at it before I got anxiety/depression?
- How much more likely are new alternatives?

#### **3. How much is this thinking costing me?**

- Does it help or hinder me from getting what I want? How?
- What can be the result of a healthier way of looking at things?

#### **4. Is my thinking realistic? (read common thinking mistakes)**

- Am I thinking in terms of "all or nothing"?
- Am I judging myself as a person based on a single event?
- Am I focusing on my weaknesses and forgetting my strengths?
- Am I blaming myself for something that isn't my fault?
- Am I taking something personally that has little or nothing to do with me? - Do I expect myself to be perfect?
- I'm using a double standard - how would I view my best friend in this situation? - Do I only notice the bad side of things?
- Am I overestimating the likelihood of disaster?
- Am I exaggerating the significance of events?
- Am I doing what I should and should instead of accepting and dealing with situations as they are? - Do I believe that there is nothing I can do to change my situation?
- Am I anticipating the future negatively instead of experimenting with it or even looking forward to it?

#### **5. What steps can I take?**

- What can I do to change my situation?
- Am I overlooking troubleshooting because I assume they won't work?
- What can I do to verify the alternative views I have arrived at?

