

The ABC Model of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) teaches that our beliefs influence our emotions and behavior. CBT allows a person to become aware of inaccurate or negative thinking and respond to challenging situations in a more effective way.

Identify and address problematic thoughts and you can help change your behavior and experiences for the better.

The *ABC Model* asks you to record a sequence of events in terms of:

- A - Activating Event (also called a "Trigger")
- B - Beliefs (for example, the thoughts that occur to you when the Activating Event happens)
- C - Consequences - how you feel and behave when you have those Beliefs (consequences may be divided into two parts: your actions and your emotions)

A - Activating Event	B - Beliefs	C - Consequences
Write down the event or situation that triggered your thoughts and feelings.	Write down the thoughts that went through your head when the activating event occurred (or after it)	<p>Actions How did you act then?</p> <p>Emotions What did you feel then?</p>

ABC Model - Example

A - Activating Event	B - Beliefs	C - Consequences
My boss asks me if I have completed a piece of work.	<p><i>I think:</i></p> <p>"She thinks I am not working hard enough"</p> <p>"She is trying to get me."</p>	<p>Actions I say defensively that I have nearly finished the work, although in fact I still have some ways to go.</p> <p>Emotions I feel annoyed, angry, and resentful.</p>

An Activating Event triggers beliefs, but are those beliefs justified or based on erroneous assumptions or thinking errors?

In this example, the beliefs "She thinks I'm not working hard enough" and "She is trying to get me" might be examples of what is sometimes called "Mind Reading"—making assumptions about what other people are thinking. Your beliefs *may* be justified and accurate, but they also may not. It is important to clarify whether the situation and the evidence justifies your beliefs and then decide how you want to act once you have done that.

If on reflection you consider that the Beliefs are not justified, then you might think of some **Balancing Statements** to use when the activating event occurs in order to help keep what is happening in perspective. In the example given above, possible Balancing Statements might be:

- "It is possible that she thinks I am not working hard enough, but it is also possible that she is simply enquiring about the work because there is a deadline coming and she does not mean it personally"
- "I may be jumping to conclusions here because I am anxious about falling behind and feel I need more support. It would be better for me to voice my concerns and seek some more help or more time rather than to try to pretend I am coping better than I am."

The important thing about Balancing Statements is that, as the name implies, they seek to be balanced and accurate. If you do (in the above example) feel that there is genuine evidence to indicate that your boss thinks you are not working hard enough or is trying to get you, then it is not the role of Balancing Statements to ignore that evidence but to reflect on it in a balanced way and then decide how that will influence your choice of actions.

To help you reach a balanced view, ask yourself what a neutral person or a trusted reliable friend might say or think in the same circumstances.

CBT encourages you to think about what your options are for dealing with negative thoughts both by using balancing thoughts to address your thought processes *and* by thinking about practical actions you might take to improve or cope with a problematic situation.

Once you have sensible balancing thoughts in your thinking processes, the idea is that you then make practical decisions about how you will act or respond in the situation.

Per our example, using the ABC Model could help you to react in a more constructive way. For example, rather than responding defensively to your boss, you might:

- Try to explain to your boss the difficulties that you are having with the work and seek support, or
- If for some reason that is not possible or practical, then you might decide to try to speak to someone else appropriate within the organization to help deal with the issue, or
- If you feel that neither of those is a realistic option then you might explore avenues outside the organization where you can gain personal support, or
- You might even consider whether to try to change jobs or roles if your genuine conclusion is that for whatever reason this particular role is not something you want.

CBT is about making a sensible assessment of your situation and making the most constructive choices you can to improve it or cope with it.

"You see, everything is about belief; whatever we believe rules our existence, rules our life." (Don Miguel Ruiz)

What are your inner beliefs about yourself?