

WHAT IT IS

Assisting individuals to see their irrational thoughts is the first step to helping them find alternative ways to process the world around them. Rational emotive behavior therapy, developed by Albert Ellis, can be described in terms of ABCs: activating events, beliefs about these events, and the consequences of these beliefs. Help them see the upsetting things that they find themselves thinking about as “activating events.” These activating events can happen in a variety of settings. These could occur through daily hassles that the individual encounters in the environment (daily work stress, financial worries, self-esteem), life changes (family divorce or conflict, new job), environmental stresses (construction noises outside, heating or cooling problems), chronic pain (from past surgery, illness, or injury), or acculturation stress (moving from another country or geographic region, living in a religiously different area).

These events cannot be prevented; they occur throughout our lives. When the stressful activating events are identified, focus on applying techniques like cycle breathing to improve the individual’s ability to cope and reduce further escalation.

WHO TO USE IT WITH

Those who become annoyed or derailed by everyday events that upset them and distract them from their overall plan and goals. This is also useful to improve their empathy skills and develop other ways to think about ideas beyond their first negative read on a situation.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. What are some common activating events that occur in your life? These are unplanned and out of your control things that cause you to become upset, angry, or frustrated.
2. Can you think of a time when you had a singular way of looking at things and an outside way of looking at things shifted how you saw it in an unexpected way?

TEACHING INSIGHTS

The best way to engage individuals in this process is through the sharing of examples related to the A-B-C method.

Activating Event	Negative Belief	Negative Consequence
You spill coffee on your shirt.	You think people will make fun of you and think you are a slob.	You skip an important meeting or class because of your worry about how other people will see you.
A person cuts you off in traffic.	You feel disrespected and think they did it on purpose.	You honk your horn angrily and give them the finger from your car.

Activating Event	Negative Belief	Negative Consequence
You spill coffee on your shirt.	You tell yourself everyone makes mistakes and don’t get too worried.	No one notices the coffee spill and you go on to have a good day.
A person cuts you off in traffic.	You imagine they are rushing to work because if they are late one more time, they will be fired.	You let the entire situation slip out of your head and proceed with your drive to work.

LEARN TO USE THE ABCS

One of the most powerful ways we can regain control of our lives is by making use of the A-B-C method outlined by psychologist Albert Ellis. He suggests we experience activating events all around us that we have little control over. Activating events can happen in a variety of settings. These could occur through daily hassles you encounter in the environment (daily work stress, financial worries, self-esteem), life changes (work or school worries, family divorce or conflict, losing an important relationship), environmental stresses (construction noises outside the apartment, heating or cooling problems in your apartment, frustration from living in close quarters with other people), chronic pain (from past surgery, illness, or injury), or acculturation stress (moving from another country or geographic region, living in a religiously different area).

While we cannot control the activating events, we are able to control the beliefs we tell ourselves about these events. This helps our reaction lead to a more positive consequence rather than a negative one. Consider the following scenario:

Activating Event	Negative Belief	Negative Consequence
The power goes out and your alarm doesn't go off. You are late for an important appointment.	You think no one will understand and they will judge you for missing the appointment.	You skip the appointment and don't reschedule because you think they are going to judge you for not being on time.

You can't control losing power, but you can control how you approach the problem. Look at how a new, positive belief leads to a more positive consequence:

Activating Event	Positive Belief	Positive Consequence
The power goes out and your alarm doesn't go off. You are late for an important appointment.	You recognize that you can't change the past and that you just need to move forward.	You apologize for being late, explain what happened, and reschedule if necessary

Think about something that annoyed you recently that was outside of your control. It could be something an issue with someone you work with, a friend not showing up, or unforeseen circumstances that messed up a plan that you had for a long time. Consider your initial reaction (belief) and what kind of outcome (consequence) this led to in your life.

Activating Event	Positive Belief	Positive Consequence

What different belief could have led to a more positive outcome? Think about some of the obstacles to holding this belief.