

The ABC of CBT

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a widely used form of psychotherapy that helps individuals understand the connection between their thoughts and feelings, and how thoughts and feelings influence their behaviour. The goal of cognitive behaviour therapy is to teach individuals that while they cannot control every aspect of the world around them, they can take control of how they interpret and deal with things in their own environment. The basic premise is that people often have thoughts or feelings that perpetuate problematic or destructive beliefs and these faulty beliefs can affect functioning and relationships at home, work, school and in the community at large.

This basic premise is, if you can change your thoughts, then you can change your life. CBT is one of the most popular therapies around because it is highly researched and proven to be effective, with a wide array of mental health disorders including addiction, depression, anxiety and phobias. It is also goal specific and its results can be easily measured. It has roots from Albert Ellis in 1980 in Rational Emotional Theory, but Aaron Beck was the developer of CBT.

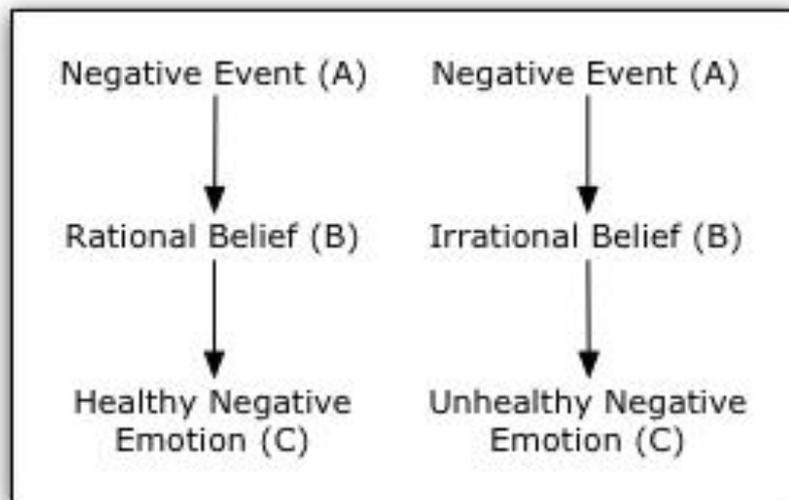
For years, I have been using the concepts of CBT with the individuals I work with through a very simple format, "The ABC's of CBT." This model can best be explained as, "I think, so I feel and I do." This is what ABC stands for:

(A) Activating event – The actual event and the client's immediate interpretations of the event

(B) Beliefs about the event – This evaluation can be rational or irrational

(C) Consequences – How you feel and what you do or other thoughts

In the chart below you can see how that when a negative event happens, one can interpret it positively or negatively. How one interprets it affects how one feels, thinks and behaves. The outcome can be healthy or unhealthy.



Here is an example of a negative perspective:

1. **What is the Activating Event?** Example: My co-worker comes to work one morning, passes my desk and does not speak to or acknowledge me.
2. **What is your Belief about that event?** What meaning do you give it? Example: I believe that he/she is just being rude or is upset with me about something that happened a couple of days ago.
3. **What feelings do you have when you think that?** Example: I feel resentful that she did not speak and I fear that she will say something negative about me to a mutual friend of ours.

Here is an example of a positive perspective:

At this point, you go back to number one, the activating event, which remains the same, then challenge the automatic thought that you had about the event.

1. **Activating Event remains the same.** Example: My co-worker comes to work one morning, passes my desk and does not speak to or acknowledge me.
2. **What else could that event mean? Identify other possible beliefs or explanations. Try to at least give a neutral explanation.** Example: She (my co-worker) might just be having a rough morning because traffic was heavy or she didn't have enough time to stop for coffee. Whatever it was, she was probably just too distracted to say good morning and will come and chat later on in the day.
3. **What feelings do you have when you think that the alternatives are possible?** Example: I feel reassured that she is not holding onto the event from the other day and I feel safe that she will not talk behind my back.
4. **How does your behaviour change as your feelings change?** Example: I won't waste a second of my time thinking about something that has nothing to do with me.