

# Using ABC Worksheets in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

## KNOWING THE ABCS OF CBT

***"Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge."***

These are the words of Plato; an ancient Greek philosopher believed to be the founder of the first institute of higher learning in the Western World. Your patients' behavioral habits may lead them to have negative thoughts and feelings, which, when left alone, could result in more serious issues like stress, anxiety, or substance abuse. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be used to correct these negative thoughts and reshape them into positive habits. The ABC technique can be used to strengthen the way you use CBT in your practice.

## COVERED IN THIS PAPER:

***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Explained***  
***ABC Technique Overview: What is It?***  
***How the ABC Technique Comes in Handy***  
***Introducing ABC Worksheets in CBT***



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PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

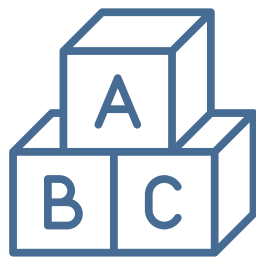


## COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY EXPLAINED

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According to the American Psychological Association, APA, "CBT is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, marital problems, eating disorders and severe mental illness. In essence, CBT aims to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing by identifying and changing destructive thought patterns.

And just like regular treatments need medicines and injections, therapies need different interventions like counseling, concrete communication, healthy living questionnaires, ABC technique, etc. This whitepaper focuses solely on the ABC technique and how it's a significant intervention to cognitive behavior therapy.



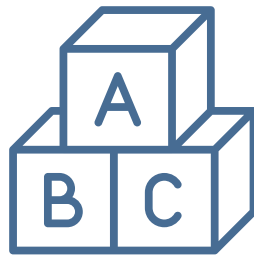
## ABC TECHNIQUE OVERVIEW: WHAT IS IT?

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The ABC technique or model of behavior was Dr. Albert Ellis's brainchild, a celebrated American psychologist, psychotherapist, and writer. It was later adopted and developed by Dr. Martin Seligman, a Pennsylvania University professor and former president of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Seligman published his adapted version in his book - *Learned Optimism* - in 1990.

The ABC technique, which stands for Adversity, Beliefs, and Consequences, has proven to be an effective practical tool for cognitive behavioral therapy, as you'll discover below. Here's a simple thought-starter;

- Let's assume you come back from the grocery store, expecting visitors only to find out that your children haven't cleaned up the house as you'd instructed them, so you direct your frustrations towards them - Adversity/Activating Event.
- Afterward, you think to yourself, "I'm really an atrocious parent" - Belief.
- You then feel and act uneasy during your interaction with your visitors because your self-confidence has been compromised - Consequences.



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Put simply; the ABC model illustrates that your patients' belief about a specific activating event determines or affects how they react to that event. When someone encounters adversity, the explanation they give themselves about the experience has a direct impact on their mindset and behavior. CBT therapists usually use the ABC technique to help patients challenge and change their cognitive distortions and irrational thoughts. And the results? Patients are able to effectively restructure their beliefs and adopt a more positive and healthier response.



## HOW THE ABC TECHNIQUE COMES IN HANDY

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Here's what you as the therapist can plan to do when using the ABC method to help your patients challenge and change their thoughts and feelings:

- Ask your patient to describe the adverse circumstance. This could be a situation they've already faced or one that's stressing them out from their imagination.
- Ask how your patient usually reacts or feels about such events.
- Based on the patient's response, you can ask for them to justify their feeling or reaction towards adversities. What's their belief?
- The next stage is to challenge whether your patient's belief is cognitively accurate. The idea is to draw a clear picture, portraying how they usually interpret circumstances.
- The last bit involves you, as the therapist, teaching your patient how to recognize or think up alternative solutions or explanations. Personalizes your response to match your patient's specific circumstances, beliefs, and emotions. On top of that, you may choose to revise certain steps or leverage other types of therapy.



## INTRODUCING ABC WORKSHEETS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN CBT

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So far, we've talked about identifying unhealthy thoughts/beliefs (B) based on an activating event (A), causing negative consequences (C). Often therapeutic approaches will include a dispute of the patient's irrational beliefs with concrete evidence, facts, and alternative rational thinking, hence the introduction of a fourth acronym (D).

In essence, an ABC worksheet lists all the four steps of the ABC model in a bottom-up descending order, i.e., Activating Event>Belief>Consequence>Dispute. Some prefer their ABC worksheets CBT in a tabular format, while others like the arrow format.



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Either way, the general concept is as follows:

### Step 1: Activating Event (A)

The first worksheet space is designated for your patient to write anything and everything that happens to them or their surrounding environment. For example, they may have a definitive exam approaching.

### Step 2: Belief (B)

The second worksheet contains a space for your patient to note their belief of interpretation regarding the activating event. In this case, they may believe that they'll fail the exam, they haven't prepared adequately, they can't stand the pressure, etc.



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### Step 3: Consequence (C)

Every belief has consequences reflecting on your patient's behaviors and feelings. The third worksheet space is where they can note down what happens to them due to having a particular view about an activating event. For example, they may feel anxious, lack sleep, low self-esteem, etc.

### Step 4: Dispute (D)

If the consequences are negative, you'll then want your patient to challenge or dispute their beliefs in order to experience new (positive) results. This is where they can think critically to determine whether the beliefs they noted above are accurate and beneficial. If the answer is NO, you get the chance to craft, adapt, and implement new beliefs.





## CONCLUSION

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And that's it for erasing negative thoughts using ABC worksheets in cognitive behavioral therapy.

Hopefully, you enjoyed the read, and you'll use this information to help your patients approach different circumstances positively henceforth, no matter how adverse they seem. Having positive beliefs about themselves and the situations they encounter will, in turn, help your patients cultivate positive and rewarding consequences, ultimately helping them to adopt alternative ways of thinking in their daily life.

For more resources on CBT techniques and worksheets, visit KASA's Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Resource Library.

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