



Grounded Wellness Psychotherapy, LLC

Life Coaching and Wellness

Keep Growing

A = Activating Event

We will look deeper at the process for each step of the ABC process, starting with A, which stands for the Activating Event.

Step 1: Identify the Activating Event:

You need to identify the activating event to start reflecting on a situation causing you distress. This refers to something that is happening that you don't like or that is bothering you. You can describe or summarize the situation in a journal or any other place where you can work through this process. It's worth noting that this process can be used to reflect on an event that happened in the past. However, the sooner you do this after the event, the more helpful it will be since the details of the experience and thought processes will be more accurate.

Step 2: Get More Specific:

- Is it real, such as an event or situation, or imagined, such as a thought or memory? Is it past, present, or future?
- Is it external, such as something happening to someone else, or internal, something happening to or inside of you?

Step 3: What Are You Experiencing?

- What are you experiencing emotionally? How do you feel?
- What physical sensations did you notice (or were you experiencing then)?
- How intense are these emotions and sensations on a scale of 1 to 10?

Step 4: What Are You Thinking?

- What are you inferring about the situation? This means, what is your interpretation of what is happening?
- "What assumptions do you have about it? To identify them, ask yourself, "What are my automatic thoughts about this? What is the voice in my head saying?" How strongly do you believe in these thoughts and assumptions when you have them?" (On a scale of 1 to 10.)

Let's look at an Example:

Step 1: Activating Event: Your friend passes you in the street and doesn't say hello.

Step 2: Specifically, it's a real situation that just happened, and you're experiencing it internally.

Step 3: You're experiencing feeling rejected and sad. There's a tightness in your chest. It's about a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10.

Step 4: You're thinking, "He is ignoring me. He doesn't like me. I fear I could end up without friends." You believed those first 2 statements at a level 10 and the final one at a level 7.

As you can see, multiple things are going on in this first step.

- The actual situation
- Your interpretation of it and thoughts about it
- An emotional and physical experience
- Your initial assumptions about the whole experience.

All of this occurs rapidly and unconsciously, giving us the impression that our responses are automatic. However, in the next step, we will delve deeper into the underlying beliefs that influence our interpretations of situations. We'll then examine the repercussions arising from our assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations. It's worth noting that the event that triggers the chain of events (Step A) isn't the root cause of the outcomes (Step C). Instead, the activating

event triggers the beliefs (Step B) that lead to the consequences (Step C). Additionally, it's crucial to understand that this ABC process can create a loop, as the consequences of the initial activating event and belief can become the next activating event that we respond to based on our beliefs, leading to additional outcomes.

B = Beliefs

In the ABC process, the second step is represented by the letter B, which stands for Beliefs. As we discussed earlier, there are two types of beliefs. Firstly, we tend to pass judgment about what a situation means, such as demands, awfulizing, discomfort intolerance, and people-rating. Secondly, there are core irrational beliefs that we refer to as demands, musts, or rules.

Step 1: Identify Your Evaluative Beliefs:

- What does this mean?
- Why is this happening?
- Does it meet my expectations or rules?
- What is wrong about this situation? Why is this wrong?
- How do you feel about the fact that this is happening?
- What does it say about you or the people involved?

Step 2: Identify the Type of Evaluative Beliefs:

Identify the type of dysfunctional belief to change it.

- Demands, including musts and absolutes
- Awfulizing, including the worst-case scenario, catastrophic thinking, or that it's horrible
- Discomfort intolerance, including feeling like you can't stand being frustrated, uncertain, inconvenienced, or uncomfortable
- People-rating, including judging yourself or others as bad or unworthy

Step 3: Identify Core Irrational Belief (Demands/Musts):

Identifying the core beliefs can take a little digging and contemplation.

Start by asking yourself, which of my rules for how life is supposed to be are being broken:

- Rules about myself and being approved of by others?
- Rules about how other people must behave to be worthy?
- Rules about how life is supposed to be—meaning if it's meeting my demands for living without discomfort, frustration, or inconvenience.

For help identifying the core belief or demand, the more specific belief you're struggling with, and the truth that will help you shift your belief, see the Core Belief Identification Chart.

RECAP: Let me rephrase the text below to clarify and fix any errors.

Let's consider the scenario mentioned earlier. Imagine you were walking down the street and saw your friend, but they didn't say hello. As a result, you may feel rejected, assume that they don't like you, and fear you'll end up without friends.

Step 1: Now, your evaluative belief or what you believe this means is that “I'm not wanted as a friend, so I must be worthless. It would be terrible to end up without friends.”

Step 2: You're awfulizing and self-rating.

Step 3: Your core belief that is being triggered is about APPROVAL. You believe that to feel worthy, I must always be approved of by every significant other.

In the upcoming step, we will analyze the outcomes that arise from your beliefs regarding the present situation. At times, it may be unclear what your beliefs are until you have identified their consequences. By reflecting on your emotions and actions in response to the situation, you can more easily recognize the underlying belief driving them. You may have to revisit this step later.

C = Consequences

The ABC process consists of three steps. The third step is C, which represents Consequences. No matter what happens in our lives, we always react in some way, whether healthy or unhealthy, positive or negative, by taking action or not. In every situation, there are consequences.

There are four levels of consequences:

1. Emotional consequences
2. Behavioral consequences (reactions)
3. Outcomes or results
4. Secondary emotional consequences

It is important to understand that the consequences we face in life are not caused by the situations themselves but rather by our thoughts and beliefs about those situations. We will keep revisiting this crucial point until you truly believe your power lies in your choices about what you think, feel, and do.

So far, all the consequences we have discussed result from how we respond to life situations. The good news is that we can choose how we respond to every situation in life. That's where the word "responsibility" comes from - it means "ability to respond". As you work through this process, you will take responsibility for your thoughts, emotions, and actions, taking back control of your life. Congratulations!

Now, sometimes, it's helpful to assess the consequences before identifying and changing our core beliefs. There are two reasons for this:

Firstly, it might be hard to gain clarity about the core belief, and looking at how we feel about the situation and how we are responding to it can provide clues about what we would have to believe to be feeling and acting this way.

Secondly, looking at the dysfunction and damage our emotions and behaviors are causing to ourselves, others and our lives can be a wake-up call that motivates us to commit to changing our thinking. Motive is, in fact, the root word in "motivation" for a reason. To be motivated to change, we must have a strong enough reason.

\So, let's look at the consequences in more detail.

Step 1: Unhealthy Negative Emotions:

- What are the major unhealthy negative emotions you are experiencing about this event?

(Remember, the unhealthy negative emotions are anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, rage, hurt, jealousy, envy)

- How did you feel DURING the event?
- What thoughts were you thinking that led to this feeling?
- How do you feel now ABOUT this event?
- What thoughts are you thinking now that lead you to feel this way?
- How do you feel about the future consequences of this event?
- What thoughts do you have about how this will impact your future?

Step 2: Self-defeating Behaviors:

1. How did you react to the situation? What did you say? Do? Think?
2. How have you responded to the situation since it happened up until now? How have you behaved? What did you say or do?
3. Have you used any self-protective or over-compensatory behaviors, such as:
 - Going out of your way to please people
 - Overcompensating to make up for something
 - Pushing yourself too hard
 - Avoiding potentially challenging, uncertain, or unpleasant situations
 - Working too hard or trying to prove your worthiness
 - Trying too hard to control other people or situations
 - Being rebellious in an attempt to prove your autonomy

Step 3: Outcomes or Results:

During our discussion today, we emphasized the significance of how our thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors affect the outcomes or results we experience. It is crucial to examine the consequences of our actions honestly. This will help us realize the pain and discomfort caused by our negative actions and motivate us to make changes accordingly.

So, ask yourself:

- How has how you felt about the situation impacted you? Others (who, specifically)?
- What has happened because of how you felt?
- Can you see how your emotions influenced your behaviors and actions? Which emotions are connected to which behaviors?
- What results or outcomes have occurred because of your actions or behaviors? Which behaviors have resulted in which outcomes?
- What future consequences do you anticipate will happen if you continue with these emotions, actions, and behaviors?
- What will happen because of these outcomes?

Step 4: Secondary Emotional Disturbances

After identifying how your emotions have influenced your actions and how your actions have led to consequences in your life, it's important to reflect on how you feel about these consequences. In our earlier discussion on secondary emotional disturbances, we talked about examples such as feeling guilty about our actions or feeling anxious about our anticipated anxiety. At this stage, we will also analyze the consequences of these secondary emotions.

Ask yourself:

- Looking back at how you felt and acted during the situation, how do you feel ABOUT it?

- Looking at how you have behaved or felt SINCE the experience or now, how do you feel ABOUT it?
- How do you feel about the results or outcomes arising from how you felt and acted?
- Imagining the future consequences that you anticipate will result from continuing these thoughts, emotions, and actions, how do you feel ABOUT the future?

Once you have recognized any unhealthy and problematic secondary emotions, you can restart the process by going back to step B to uncover the beliefs that lead to these emotions. Additionally, you should examine the negative consequences you identified in this step and return to step A, using these consequences as the Activating Event.

RECAP: Before you move on, let's look at that example we've been using.

Your friend passed you in the street and didn't say hello. You feel rejected. You assume he doesn't like you, and you fear you'll end up with no friends. You think this means you're worthless. It feels awful. Your need for approval has been triggered because you believe you must be approved by everybody at all times.

Now, it's time to assess the consequences of this belief.

- Emotional consequence: you feel depressed and worthless
- Behavioral consequence: you avoid people because you believe you're unworthy as a friend
- Result: you become socially isolated
- Secondary emotion: the isolation reinforces the beliefs and increases depression.

“One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.” – Abraham Maslow.

