

The ABC of a Difficult Moment

Separate what happened from what you told yourself about it

It is natural to assume that events cause our reactions: the email made me furious, the meeting made me anxious. The ABC model, developed by the psychologist Albert Ellis, suggests something more useful. Between the event and the reaction sits what we believe about it, and that is the part we can change.

A is the activating event or adversity. B is your beliefs about it. C is the consequences: how you felt, what your body did and how you behaved.

IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

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Step 1: work through the moment

	WHAT I NOTICE
A: What happened? Be specific: when, where, who.	
Which part bothered me most?	
B: What was I telling myself about it?	
C: How did I feel? What did my body do? What did I do?	

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Step 2: spot the rigid beliefs

Four kinds of belief tend to drive the strongest reactions. Tick any that were in your B.

RIGID BELIEF	SOUNDS LIKE	A MORE FLEXIBLE VERSION
Demands	"I must...", "They have to...", "It should not be like this."	"I would much prefer it if... but it does not have to be that way."
Awfulising	"This is awful, a disaster, the worst thing."	"This is bad, but it is not the end of the world."
Can't-stand-it	"I can't bear this. I can't cope with it."	"This is hard, and I can tolerate it. I have handled hard things before."
Self-condemnation	"Because of this, I am a failure."	"This went wrong. It does not make me a failure. I am human and I get things wrong sometimes."

Test the original belief:

- Is it true? Where is the evidence?
- Is it logical? Does it follow from what happened?
- Is it helpful? Is telling myself this getting me what I want?
- Given what I was telling myself, is it surprising I felt the way I did?

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Step 3: build a new response

EXERCISE

A more flexible view

1. What would I prefer, rather than demand?

2. If I believed this, how might I feel and act differently?

3. One thing I will do tomorrow to put this into practice:
