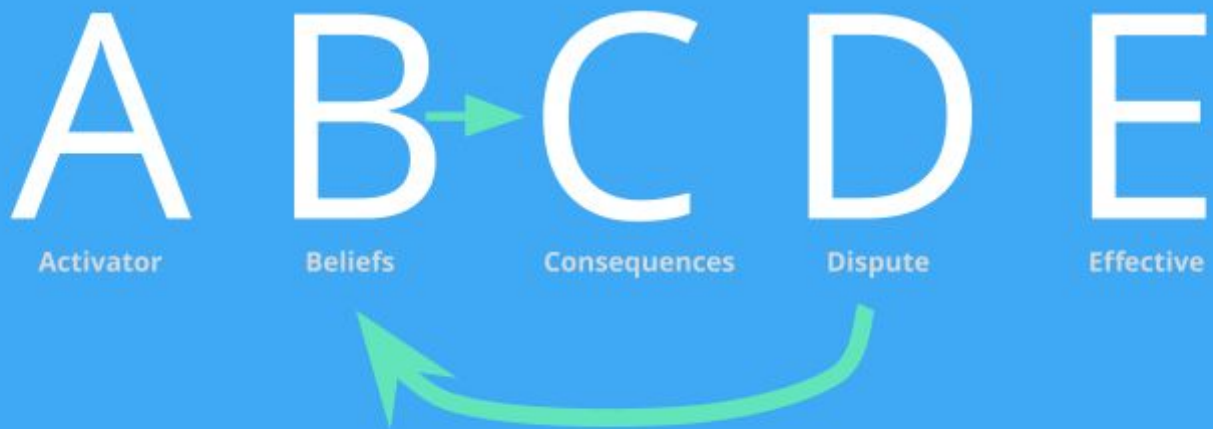




ABCDE Technique

Take control of your thoughts



CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS

Using the structured approach of the ABCDE technique, you can stay away from negative emotions caused by irrational beliefs, and have more effective behaviours and beliefs.

DISPUTE IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

The technique helps to dispute the irrational beliefs about activating events that lead to adverse consequences. Use the four disputing techniques to overcome the four irrational beliefs.

WAYS OF DISPUTING

- Evidence
- Logical
- Practical
- Positive

IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

- Demandingness
- Catastrophising
- Self-downing
- Low frustration tolerance

Emotional Addiction:

Neuroscience and psychology research have argued that we become addicted to certain emotions when we allow frequent thought patterns to persist (Dispenza, 2008). Like any addiction, it may not be an addiction to what is healthy. In fact, often it isn't. The research suggests that we become addicted to what feels 'good'. But all this means is that we become addicted to what our bodies determine as feeling good, or familiar.

We can, over time, make our bodies accustomed to feeling anxiety, shame, or anger. It may not be a healthy emotion, just one that our body has grown accustomed to experiencing.

When we then withdraw the emotions that our body is used to receiving, it signals to our brain that it is in lack, thereby making our sensory systems scan the environment for signals that will bring up the emotional information, or triggers, that will lead to experiencing that emotion again.

It is a sign of Emotional Intelligence when we are able to recognize what emotions we have become addicted to within ourselves. In order to combat this process and re-train ourselves away from these emotions, we need to interrupt the process and re-train our responses. A brilliant technique that equips us with a way to do this is Albert Ellis's ABCDE technique.

Background:

As a young psychology student, Ellis became convinced that people, at least partly, constructed their own feelings of anxiety, depression, or rage. He had a particularly difficult struggle in approaching girls, and experienced intense anxiety when interacting with them. He realised that it had less to do with anything in the interaction with these girls, and more to do with the irrational beliefs he had when these interactions occurred. He was particularly influenced by one philosopher who said:

**"People are disturbed not by events that happen to them,
but by their view of these events."**

(Epictetus)

Through the practice of disputing his irrational beliefs, Ellis developed a technique to assist him, which he called the ABCDE technique (Ellis, 1982, 1994, 2004). According to this technique, we naturally process information in a certain way. Rather than the event causing the consequences (A causes C), it is our beliefs about the event that causes the consequences (B causes C).

The Steps:

The technique helps one to take control of the irrational beliefs that one has in response to any event that leads to negative emotion. It structures the process of event, belief and consequences into a flow that is easily remembered, and possible to write down and manage. Using this structured approach allows one to take control of their thoughts about events that lead to negative consequences.

A - The **ACTIVATING** event. It is anything that happens that leads to negative emotion. Activating events happen all the time in our lives and may be as big as being fired unexpectedly, or as small as running out of battery on your cell phone.

B - The **BELIEFS** that we have about the activating event. Beliefs that may be quite irrational.

C - The **CONSEQUENCES** (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) that occur out of our irrational beliefs. (Rational beliefs lead to functional consequences, while irrational beliefs lead to dysfunctional consequences). These consequences (C) can then also become their own activating events (A), creating a type of downward spiral (eg developing anxiety about being anxious). Thereby putting ourselves into a loop.

The power of this technique lies in disputing irrational beliefs, which breaks these cycles.

D - Actively **DISPUTING** the irrational beliefs. Any one of a number of approaches to disputing can be used to counter the irrationality of beliefs that you have about the activating event. This will lead to:

E - **EFFECTIVE** rational beliefs. It is these rational beliefs that have a positive impact on our emotional responses, impacting beneficially on our behaviours.

In the first part of the technique, it's important to know which beliefs are irrational so that we can dispute them. Irrational beliefs are extreme and inflexible, and lead to psychological disturbance and dysfunctional emotions (Dryden and David, 2008).

Irrational Beliefs: There are four main types of irrational beliefs that you can dispute.

1. Demandingness:

The belief about absolute requirements expressed in the form of “must,” “should,” “have to” (e.g. “I have to win at all costs,” “I should have done better,” or “I must win all the time”).

2. Catastrophizing:

Thinking that the worst outcome is bound to happen to you, and evaluating a situation in the extreme negative. Catastrophizing often has three characteristics: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalised (e.g. “this is the worst thing ever,” or “I’m going to be fired if I don’t get this right”).

3. Self-downing (or globalization):

When individuals tend to be excessively critical of themselves or others, and of life conditions, making generalisations (e.g. “I am the worst person in the world,” or “I am a complete failure”).

4. Low frustration tolerance:

This is when people believe they can’t possibly endure something - they think they can’t be happy at all if this frustration is not fixed right now. Like believing that, “I just can’t take this anymore”.

Disputing: There are at least four different types of disputing that you can use.

1. Evidence disputing:

Disputing beliefs by challenging yourself to provide evidence that your expectations are unrealistic. This is done by looking for evidence that shows these beliefs to be a bit extreme and inflexible.

2. Logical disputing:

Disputing beliefs by challenging overgeneralized and illogical beliefs to show that the feelings that are being experienced are not facts.

3. Practical disputing:

Disputing beliefs by focusing on the practical consequences of holding the irrational belief. It’s also helpful to think about the practical reality of the worst possible thing that could happen and what life would practically look like if this was the case.

4. Positive disputing:

Disputing beliefs by reframing our thinking to focus on more positive aspects. For example, saying, “Isn’t it wonderful that...” and then completing that sentence in relation to the activating event.

The point of disputing is to bring irrational beliefs back into a space of being rational beliefs. We need to remember that we are fighting against emotional addictions and subconscious identities that may make this very difficult. So it is important to recognise that disputing, or challenging, an irrational belief can be quite uncomfortable to begin with, and it is going to take energy and practice, over time, for this technique to become natural.

Do it now:

So start by writing it down. Write down A-B-C-D-E in five different columns on a piece of paper. Do this the first few times you do it so it takes it out of your mind. As the technique becomes more familiar to you, it will start happening more quickly, and with less effort and discomfort. If you do it regularly enough, it will ultimately become the natural way that you process your thoughts when faced with activating events, so you can stay away from unnecessary negative emotions and have more positive emotions.

A	B	C	D	E
My boss says he wants to see me next week about "something".	There must be something wrong. Maybe I'll be fired. I always fail eventually.	I feel anxious. I can't stop worrying about it. My productivity has gone down and I'm struggling to sleep. I have a surge of adrenaline and stress each time it comes to mind.	My performance has been great recently. He may want to get my opinion on something. Even if it's a rebuke, everyone makes mistakes sometimes. Even if I get fired that could be the start of a new opportunity.	I feel more calm and relaxed about the conversation. I'm able to focus on other things that need doing right now. I know I'll deal with it when it happens next week, and will be okay with whatever the discussion is about.