**ABC Sheet**

This is a commonly used cognitive behavioural tool and I encourage you to use it whenever you feel anxiety, or feel your thoughts spiral or experience intrusive negative thoughts. You must physically go through the exercise *in written form*. Once you see your thoughts written down, you will realise that they are just ideas, or theories rather than actual facts. It only takes a couple of minutes and will help address the negative thoughts.

What you think determines how you feel and this in turn directly informs your behaviours and actions. This tool will help you challenge and change the unhelpful thoughts at a conscious level which will instantly help you feel more at ease in yourself. If you think about it, the more negative you feel, the more likely you are to perpetuate negative thoughts and this can easily develop into a negative thought cycle. Use an ABC sheet whenever you feel upset, anxious, or when you have acted in a way that you are unhappy with and would like to change.

1 Start with the Consequences box, take a minute to asses how you are feeling right now. This is the most logical place to start as emotions and behaviours are consequences of the interplay between the activating or trigger event and the beliefs around them. See the box below for suggestions.

2 Next turn to the activating/trigger event box. This can really be anything at all, use your feelings as a guide to uncover the activating event which triggered the negative thought spiral. Aim to focus on the specific aspect of the event which upset you. Rather than going into detail, try to be as succinct as possible and distil your thoughts.

3 Now look the the Beliefs box. What thoughts and attitudes do you have about the activating event that lead to the emotions you wrote in the consequences box?

4 Finally turn to the Dispute box which will help you reduce the intensity of the unhelpful thoughts, by coming up with more supportive and positive ways of thinking and acting. This step is critical as it is these alternative thoughts which will empower you to change your actions and feel more at ease in yourself. So take the time write out more flexible and positive responses to every ‘negative belief’ you have written down. This process is extremely empowering and clients absolutely love it!

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| **Activating/ Trigger event**  Write out what you think triggered your emotions; an event/ situation/ sensation/memory  **(e.g. Something that just happened, a past event, an event that will occur in the future, or that you fear will happen in the future, a person, place or thing that causes you distress, something within your mind, a thought or memory, your own emotions or behaviour or a physiological reaction; heart racing, shortness of breadth, headache, tiredness, blushing, sweating, sudden pang of hunger).** | **Beliefs**  Thoughts and attitudes about A  Write out what your thoughts, attitudes and beliefs about  A, or what it meant to you.  **Beliefs can be about you, others, the world,**  **your past or future.**  The beliefs may seem extreme or distorted and are typically very negative thoughts about yourself, the situation or others. | **Consequences** of A & B on your behaviours and emotions.  Write out the emotions you are feeling  (e.g. **Anger, anxiety, hurt, shame, guilt, disgust, depression, envy, hurt, jealousy, shame, sadness)**  How you reacted to  these emotions?  (e.g. **Over-indulging in food or other substances, binge-eating or restricting food, avoiding or escaping the situation, withdrawing, isolating yourself, procrastinating, being aggressive or seeking reassurance or support)** | **Dispute-** Question and examine the beliefs and create alternative ways of thinking.  Dispute each negative belief with logic and evidence. Questions you can ask to prompt yourself are:  **-Is this thought logical or illogical?**  **Would others think this thought is extreme?**  **-What evidence disproves this thought?**  **Is this thought caught up in my negative beliefs or is it actually based on reality and facts?**  **-Can I prove that this thought is 100% truthful?**  **(do not simply answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to these questions. Consider them and generate alternative ways of thinking in response to the negative thoughts and beliefs).**  In order to come up with positive responses to the negative thoughts ask yourself:  **-How can I look at this situation in a more kind and helpful way?**  **-What would I say to a loved one who was thinking this way?**  **-When I am feeling good in myself, do I think this way?**  **-What life experiences have shown me that there is an alternative way of thinking about this?**  **What can I think in order to act and feel differently about A?** |
|  |  |  |  |
| Your turn |  |  |  |

Remember to keep your answers brief and as accurate as you possibly can.

Some thoughts and behaviours are more entrenched than others. It may take some time and effort and many ABC sheets, to tackle the thoughts and behaviours that are weighing you down. By going through the exercise you are, over time, changing and reprogramming your mind to think more flexibly. Essentially you’re learning how to challenge ridged negative thinking by opening up mental space to consciously acknowledge an issue and think about it differently. I encourage you to regularly use the ABC sheet. Start off using it once a day, as the better you get at them, the more effective they become at interrupting the negative train of thought. The more you practice this exercise, the better you will become at addressing negative thinking. Practice will help change the negative behaviours and the unhelpful thought patterns behind them. Creating new ways of thinking and new helpful behaviours takes time and repetition.

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