



DISCLAIMER

I'm a life coach. Please give a group nod to the fact that I am not a licensed psychologist or health care professional, and my services don't replace the care of psychologists or other healthcare professionals.

ABC Thought Log

The ABC Thought Log is an aid in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and is what Albert Ellis (1957) called the ABC Technique of Irrational Beliefs.

A = Activating Event

B = Belief (Thought)

C = Consequences (Emotional and or Behavioral)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is not about ignoring negative thoughts or necessarily jumping to the opposite conclusion. It is concerned with evaluating thoughts in a reasonable and practical way.

If there is some truth in your beliefs, you can acknowledge it. Recognize where you are exaggerating or being inflexible, and moderate your view accordingly.

Example of the ABC Model:

Activating Event: I text a friend to suggest we meet in tomorrow night. Tomorrow evening comes and she has not responded.

Belief: She is usually reliable. I must have offended her, so she has ignored my text.

Emotional Consequences: I feel anxious.

The ABC Thought Log helps you act as an attorney to put the belief on trial. Attorneys dispute beliefs by asking questions. In the next page, you will receive nine questions to examine your beliefs and gain control of your emotions.

Question

1. *What evidence is there to support my belief?*
2. *What evidence is there to cast doubt on it?*
3. *What alternative possibilities are there and what evidence is there to suggest they might be true?*
4. *Is my belief balanced or is it too extreme or inflexible?*
5. *Is the belief helpful? What problems are caused by me believing it?*
6. *What could I do to check out if my belief is true?*
7. *What would I say to a friend who described a similar situation, expressed a similar belief about what it meant?*
8. *If my belief is true what is the most constructive way I could react?*
9. *Would a more moderate or tentative interpretation be more accurate? What might be a more accurate or balancing thought?*

Example Response

I haven't received a response from my friend to my text invitation which is unusual because she is normally reliable.

I can't think of anything I've done that might have caused offense and my friend doesn't normally react by ignoring me if we have a disagreement.

The text may not have got through or she may not have opened it yet. Perhaps she checked it late at night before she fell asleep and forgot to respond when she woke up.

She might have meant to respond but got distracted by something else and forgotten.

I can see that although my explanation is possible, it is a bit extreme and dogmatic. There are other possible explanations which are at least as likely.

The belief isn't very helpful because it causes me anxiety and I have reacted by putting off contacting my friend again because of my worry.

I could call my friend or ask her when I next speak to her.

I would tell them: "It's unlikely she's ignoring you because she's not like that and you can't think of anything that you've done that might have upset her, but if she is upset then the best thing is to try to find out why and see if you can resolve the problem."

Try and find out what upset her and apologize if appropriate.

Yes – it's too extreme to say my belief must be true. I could reframe the belief with a balancing thought. It's possible my friend thinks I've offended her but there's other possibilities and it's unlike her to react that way. Even if it's true there's no point in worrying about it, I'll call her tomorrow and apologize.

Completing this exercise can help you come up with balancing thoughts that will bring you greater peace of mind.



Labeling Your Cognitive Distortions

When you put your beliefs on trial with the ABC Thought Model, you begin to see how your mind convinces you of things that are not completely true. In psychotherapy, these beliefs are called “cognitive distortions.”

Cognitive distortions are inaccurate thoughts that reinforce negative thinking or emotions. They tell us things that sound rational yet keep us feeling bad about ourselves. One technique to master them is to give them a name. When you can identify what

By putting a label on your thoughts and feelings, you gain a greater sense of power over them. Here are 30 labels of cognitive distortions. Which ones do you recognize?

1. Black-and-White Thinking

A person with this dichotomous thinking pattern typically sees things in terms of either/or. Something is either good or bad, right or wrong, all or nothing. Black-and-white thinking fails to acknowledge that there are almost always several shades of gray that exist between black and white. By seeing only two possible sides or outcomes to something, a person ignores the middle—and possibly more reasonable—ground.

2. Personalization

When engaging in this type of thinking, an individual tends to take things personally. He or she may attribute things that other people do as the result of his or her own actions or behaviors. This type of thinking also causes a person to blame himself or herself for external circumstances outside the person’s control.

3. Should Statements

Thoughts that include “should,” “ought,” or “must” are almost always related to a cognitive distortion. For example, “I should have arrived to the meeting earlier,” or, “I must lose weight to be more attractive.” This type of thinking may induce feelings of guilt or shame. “Should” statements also are common when referring to others in our lives. These thoughts may go something like, “He should have called me earlier,” or, “She ought to thank me for all the help I’ve given her.” Such thoughts can lead a person to feel frustration, anger, and bitterness when others fail to meet unrealistic expectations. No matter how hard we wish to sometimes, we cannot control the behavior of another, so thinking about what others should do serves no healthy purpose.



4. Catastrophizing

This occurs when a person sees any unpleasant occurrence as the worst possible outcome. A person who is catastrophizing might fail an exam and immediately think he or she has likely failed the entire course. A person may not have even taken the exam yet and already believe he or she will fail—assuming the worst, or preemptively catastrophizing.

5. Magnifying

With this type of cognitive distortion, things are exaggerated or blown out of proportion, though not quite to the extent of catastrophizing. It is the real-life version of the old saying, “Making a mountain out of a molehill.”

6. Minimizing

The same person who experiences the magnifying distortion may minimize positive events. These distortions sometimes occur in conjunction with each other. A person who distorts reality by minimizing may think something like, “Yes, I got a raise, but it wasn’t very big and I’m still not very good at my job.”

7. Mindreading

This type of thinker may assume the role of psychic and may think he or she knows what someone else thinks or feels. The person may think he or she knows what another person thinks despite no external confirmation that his or her assumption is true.

8. Fortune Telling

A fortune-telling-type thinker tends to predict the future, and usually foresees a negative outcome. Such a thinker arbitrarily predicts that things will turn out poorly. Before a concert or movie, you might hear him or her say, “I just know that all the tickets will be sold out when we get there.”

9. Overgeneralization

When overgeneralizing, a person may conclude based on one or two single events, despite the fact reality is too complex to make such generalizations. If a friend misses a lunch date, this doesn’t mean he or she will always fail to keep commitments. Overgeneralizing statements often include the words “always,” “never,” “every,” or “all.”

10. Discounting the Positive

This extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking occurs when a person discounts positive information about a performance, event, or experience and sees only negative aspects. A person engaging in this type of distortion might disregard any compliments or positive reinforcement he or she receives.



11. Filtering

This cognitive distortion is similar to discounting the positive. It occurs when a person filters out information whether it be negative or positive. For example, a person may look at his or her feedback on an assignment in school or at work and exclude positive notes to focus on one critical comment.

12. Labeling

This distortion, a more severe type of overgeneralization, occurs when a person labels someone or something based on one experience or event. Instead of believing that he or she made a mistake, people engaging in this type of thinking might automatically label themselves as failures.

13. Blaming

This is the opposite of personalization. Instead of seeing everything as your fault, all blame is put on someone or something else.

14. Emotional Reasoning

Mistaking one's feelings for reality is emotional reasoning. If this type of thinker feels scared, there must be real danger. If this type of thinker feels stupid, then to him or her this must be true. This type of thinking can be severe and may manifest as obsessive compulsion. For example, a person may feel dirty even though he or she has showered twice within the past hour.

15. Always Being 'Right'

This thinking pattern causes a person to internalize his or her opinions as facts and fails to consider the feelings of the other person in a debate or discussion. This cognitive distortion can make it difficult to form and sustain healthy relationships.

16. Self-Serving Bias

A person experiencing self-serving bias may attribute all positive events to his or her personal character while seeing any negative events as outside of his or her control. This pattern of thinking may cause a person to refuse to admit mistakes or flaws and to live in a distorted reality where he or she can do no wrong.

17. 'Heaven's Reward' Fallacy

In this pattern of thinking, a person may expect divine rewards for his or her sacrifices. People experiencing this distortion tend to put their interests and feelings aside in hopes that they will be rewarded for their selflessness later, but they may become bitter and angry if the reward is never presented.



18. Fallacy of Change

This distortion assumes that other people must change their behavior in order for us to be happy. This way of thinking is usually considered selfish because it insists, for example, that other people change their schedule to accommodate yours or that your partner shouldn't wear his or her favorite t-shirt because you don't like it.

19. Fallacy of Fairness

This fallacy assumes that things must be measured based on fairness and equality. In reality, things often don't always work that way. An example of the trap this type of thinking sets is when it justifies infidelity if a partner has cheated.

20. Control Fallacy

Someone who sees things as internally controlled may put himself or herself at fault for events that are truly out of the person's control, such as another person's happiness or behavior. A person who sees things as externally controlled might blame his or her boss for poor work performance.

21. Assuming your current feelings will stay the same in the future

For example, "I feel unable to cope today, and therefore I will feel unable to cope tomorrow."

22. You don't know what you don't know

Getting external feedback can help you become aware of things you didn't even know that you didn't know.

23. The tendency to underestimate how long tasks will take

Enough said!

24. The tendency to prefer familiar things

Familiarity breeds liking, which is part of why people are brand loyal and may pay inflated prices for familiar brands vs. switching.

25. I can't change my behavior or thinking style

Instead of telling yourself "I can't," try asking yourself how you could shift your behavior or thinking style by 5%.

26. The Halo Effect

For example, perceiving high calories foods as lower in calories if they're accompanied by a salad.



27. Delusions

Holding a fixed, false belief despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. For example, believing global warming doesn't exist. Or, believing you're overweight when you're 85lbs.

28. Unrelenting Standards

The belief that achieving unrelentingly high standards is necessary to avoid a catastrophe. For example, the belief that making any mistakes will lead to your colleagues thinking you're useless.

29. Thinking an absence of effusiveness means something is wrong

Believing an absence of a smiley-face in an email means someone is mad at you. Or, interpreting "You did a good job," as negative if you were expecting, "You did a great job!!!"

30. Seeing a situation only from your own perspective.

For example, failing to look at a topic of relationship tension from your partner's perspective.

References

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-therapy.html>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201301/50-common-cognitive-distortions>