



ACTIVITY: Reframing Irrational Thoughts

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to:

- Discuss irrational thinking and how it can contribute to emotional distress and diminish our problem solving skills
- Learn how we can “review” our thinking and reframe difficult situations

ESTIMATED TIME

10 minutes

MATERIALS

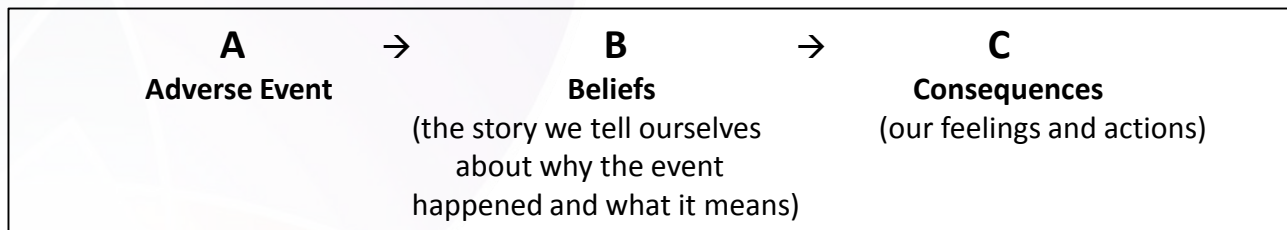
Required:

- A. Handout
- B. Pen

Background

We often believe that external events cause us to feel or act a certain way (for example, I am miserable because **this** happened...). But we also know that people respond to situations differently. The same situation can make one person sad, another person angry, and have no effect on a third person.

Psychologist Albert Ellis said it’s not an external event that causes our feelings and actions, but our beliefs about the event and why it happened. He called this the ABC model.



This can be a problem because our beliefs about difficult situations are not always accurate. Everyone falls into irrational and emotion-driven thinking from time to time. Becoming aware of how we think about a difficult situation, identifying irrational beliefs, and challenging those beliefs can help us face problems more realistically and optimistically and become more resilient.

Activity

- 1) Give participants a brief explanation of the ABCs (see page 1) and how our beliefs and thoughts can affect our feelings and actions.
- 2) Provide participants a handout and give them a few minutes to look over the list of common irrational beliefs and thinking traps on the front page.
- 3) Instruct them to complete the activity on page two of the handout.
- 4) Use the discussion questions below to debrief the activity.

Discussion Questions/ Key Points

Discussion questions should be adapted to the comfort level of the group.

- Which of these irrational beliefs or thinking traps do you struggle with?
- Select a couple of the irrational beliefs. Discuss why are these irrational.
- What are some ways we could reframe some of these irrational thoughts?
- If we know certain thoughts are irrational, why do we still hold on to them?
- How can we “dispute” our irrational thinking patterns?

What is Irrational?

More information on Dr. Albert Ellis' and his work. Contains an extensive list of irrational ideas and why they are irrational.

<http://www.rebtnetwork.org/library/ideas.html>

The ABC Method of Stress Reduction

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~eap/abcstress2.pdf>

Irrational Beliefs & Thinking Traps

Irrational Beliefs (The Three "Musts")*

- 1) I must do well and win the approval of others or else I am no good.
 - I must be perfect.
 - I must be equal to everyone else in all areas.
 - Everyone must like me.
 - I must always be competent and successful.

- 2) Other people must do "the right thing" or else they are no good and deserve to be punished.
 - Other people must act fairly and considerately.
 - Other people must make the right decision.
 - Other people must not criticize me.

- 3) Life must be easy, without discomfort or inconvenience.
 - Things must go the way I want them to, or it will be awful.
 - I must control, avoid, or change life's predicaments.
 - All problems have a perfect solution.

Common Thinking Traps

- **Catastrophizing (or magnifying)** – Exaggerating the importance of something
- **Minimizing** – Minimizing the importance of something
- **Filtering** – Focusing on the negatives and ignoring the positives
- **Jumping to Conclusions** – Making a negative interpretation of an event or situation without looking at the facts
- **Personalization** – Always blaming yourself or making the situation about you
- **All-or-Nothing Thinking** – Looking at things in black and white categories
- **Overgeneralization** – Seeing a single event as a never-ending defeat or failure
- **Emotional Reasoning** – Assuming your emotions reflect the truth of a situation

Sources:

The work of Dr. Albert Ellis. <http://www.rebtnetwork.org/library/ideas.html>
Burns, David. The Feeling Good Handbook (1989).

RESILIENCY

Self-Awareness

How I... think

Reframing Handout

Step 1: Briefly describe one difficult situation in your life.

Step 2: Review the list of irrational beliefs and thinking traps on the previous page. Do you have any irrational thoughts or beliefs about your situation?

Step 3: How can you reframe any irrational thoughts or beliefs to better reflect reality?