ACTIVITY: The ABCs of Resiliency

We have a tendency to think that certain situations cause us to act and feel a certain way. Yet in reality, people react differently to the same event. One person who is driving to work and gets a flat tire may become angry and yell and curse about their bad luck, while another person in the same situation may become filled with anxiety. A third person may calmly call for roadside assistance and use the wait time to read on their phone.

Psychologist Albert Ellis developed the ABC model to explain why people react differently to negative events. Whenever an adverse event happens we tell ourselves WHY it happened and WHAT it means. The ABC model says it is not the event itself that causes us to feel and act a certain way, it is our beliefs about the event that lead to our feeling and actions.

Our beliefs – the things we tell ourselves about why events happen and what they mean- are not always accurate. Often they are based on our personal history, past experiences, and strong emotions. When our thoughts are inaccurate, or irrational, it is difficult to deal with situations effectively. Irrational thoughts often create strong emotional responses that undermine our ability to remain calm, think clearly and figure out how to handle things.

Using the ABC model can help us identify irrational thoughts and beliefs. When we become aware of our irrational thoughts and beliefs (and our personal patterns), we can begin to re-frame them to more adequately reflect reality. This helps us avoid getting “stuck” in intense emotions and gives us the clarity to find solutions, and acceptance, in difficult situations.

A
Adversity
This is the negative event or situation

B
Beliefs
This is what we tell ourselves about why it happened and what it means.

C
Consequences
The feelings and behaviors that result from our beliefs

Sources/More Information
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) Network
www.rebtnetwork.org

The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life’s Hurdles  Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte
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Try This

1) Using the table on the next page, write down a negative event or experience you are going through or have gone through recently in the first column.

2) Next, write down any beliefs or thoughts you have about the event or experience. Be honest and try to capture what you have been telling yourself about the event.

3) In the third column, identify what feelings and behaviors have resulted from your beliefs.

4) The next step is to add a “D” to the ABC model. The “D” stands for dispute. This is where you will re-frame any irrational or inaccurate thoughts or beliefs. Use the following questions to guide you:

   • What evidence do I have to support my thoughts/beliefs? What evidence do I have to dispute them?

   • How would I view this situation if it was happening to someone else?

   • Am I falling into any of the following 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
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