

THE ABCDE EXERCISE

Use the five columns below.

1. Think of an upsetting situation you experienced over the past week. In the C (consequence) column, write down what your unpleasant feelings were and what behaviours accompanied them.
2. Write down the incident – the activating event – that seemed to trigger this upsetting situation in column A (activating event)
3. The key aspect of the ABCDE approach is to now capture your Bs: that almost imperceptible, easily overlooked self-talk triggered by the activating event. Write these in the B (belief) column.
4. Your next task is to actively debate, dispute and discard the maladaptive, self-defeating beliefs that give rise to your Cs. Submit every element of your internal monologue to rigorous examination. Write your answers in the D (debate, dispute and discard) column.
5. Finally, in column E, write down the effects of completing column D – how debating, disputing and discarding have shifted your understanding and beliefs about the activating event and, consequently, your feelings and behaviours.

The power of the ABCDE approach is that by diffusing illogical maladaptive beliefs allows more rational and adaptive beliefs to emerge, and shifts your Cs to more effective and adaptive feelings and behaviours.

This tool has been used extensively in the professional world with excellent results.

Activating event	Beliefs	Consequences	Debate	Effects/energisation
Situation, event, a look or a comment	What I believed about that situation/situation	How I interpreted it and made sense of it (thoughts – internal, actions – external)	Debate, dispute and discard the beliefs	Shifting understanding about the event – resulting in more positive behaviours
<p>Emma Sue example:</p> <p><i>I received an email from a client telling me about a change of plan.</i></p>	<p><i>That there are political undercurrents and difficulties in the organisation. That the person writing it has always disliked me – it's obvious from the way the email was written and how many people were cc'd into it.</i></p>	<p><i>I was upset, spent ages discussing the ins and outs of it with my husband and friends. Could not sleep, woke up in night thinking about it. Wrote back over explaining "my side of the story". Resulted in a chain of emails either side. Repeat first two from above.</i></p>	<p><i>What actual evidence do I have that this person "dislikes" me? He is new in post and maybe needs to get clarification on something or make a decision which has nothing to do with me. The change in plan might have all sorts of reasons behind it which actually I know nothing about. They probably have perfectly valid reasons (for them) for the changes.</i></p>	<p><i>I don't get upset and spend energy discussing stuff that is not even real. I write a short and polite email back saying thank you and that I understand and that I am happy to adapt to the new plan, I offer support and I am friendly. I create good relationships resulting in more work. I understand better. Later I find out anyway that there were in fact all sorts of other reasons behind the decision.</i></p>

YOUR TURN! Think of a RECENT event in your life or at work. Help each other to complete the exercise.

Just think – if you did this every day like Seligman suggests, within a very short space of time your behaviour will be more positive, effective and rational.

Activating Event	Beliefs	Consequences	Debate	Effects/Energisation
<i>Describe as in Who, What, Where, When</i>	<i>What were you saying to yourself? What was running through your mind?</i>	<i>Your emotions and reactions at the the time.</i>	<i>What's the evidence for your beliefs?</i>	