



## The A-B-C Model

Psychologists have come up with the **A-B-C Model of Emotions and Behavior**. Here's how it works:

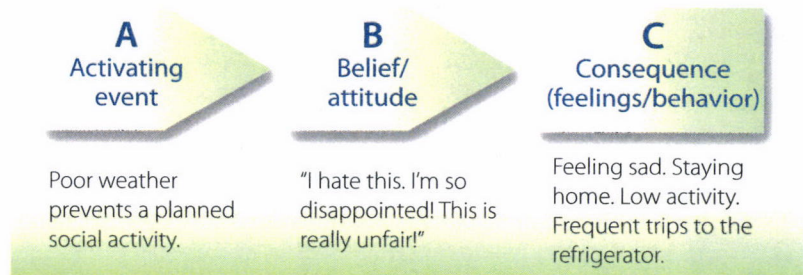
We all know that what we feel and how we behave are related to the day-to-day events in our lives. Naturally, we tend to think that a given event (A) causes us to feel and act a certain way (C).



An example: poor weather prevents a planned picnic (A) which causes us to (C) feel sad, stay home, become less active that day, and start making trips to the refrigerator. But, in fact, there is middle step, (B), in this process: (B) Attitude!

(B) is how we choose to think about the event (A), which can strongly affect the way we act and feel (C).

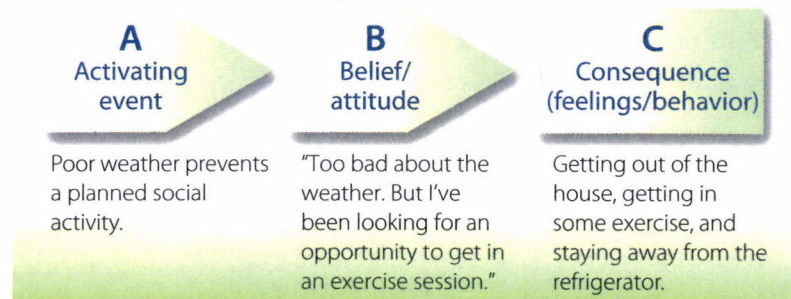
In this example, a poor attitude toward uncontrollable events has led to destructive (unhelpful) actions and feelings.



### But What if (B) Was Different?

Another person might react to the event of poor weather (A) very differently by thinking, "Too bad about the weather. It would have been fun to get together with everyone at the picnic. But I've been looking for a good opportunity to get in an exercise session."

What might the result be then? This person has reacted to the uncontrollable event of poor weather by (B) choosing to make different plans, in this case healthy and agreeable activity, and, therefore, (C) getting out of the house, getting in some exercise, and staying away from the refrigerator.

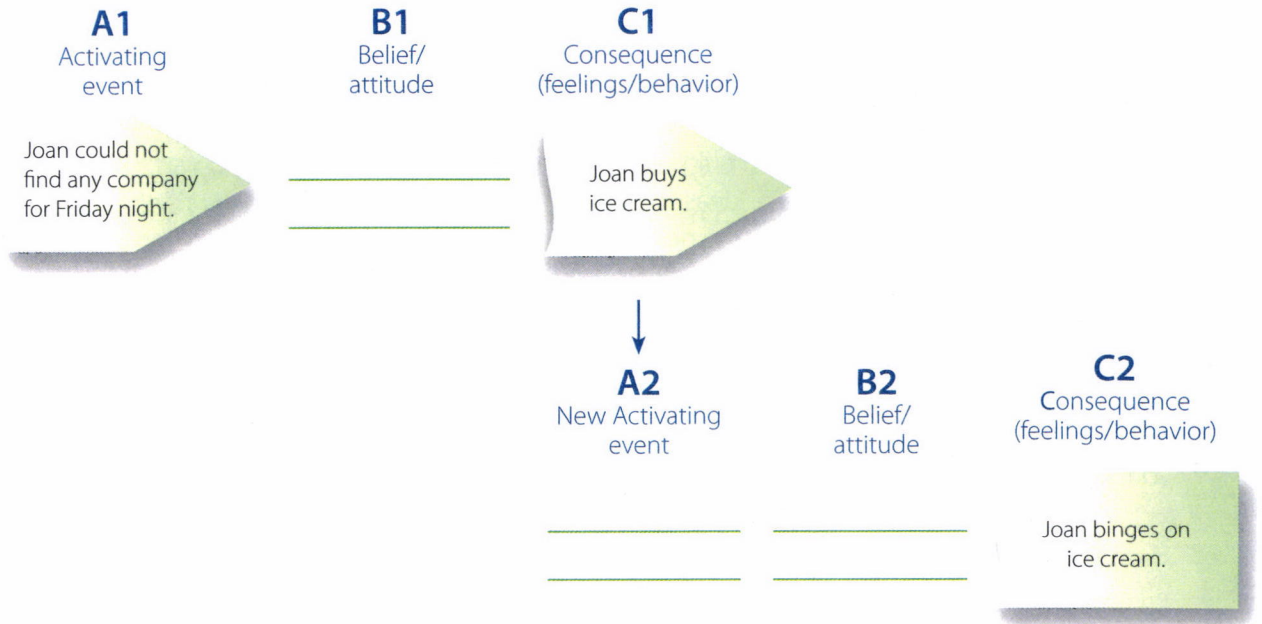


The A-B-C Model proposes that how we think about day-to-day events and ourselves—our attitudes—can strongly influence how we feel and act. The key to changing our emotions and behaviors is to recognize destructive (unhelpful) thoughts as they're occurring and creatively "re-think" them so they become constructive (helpful) thoughts that help us reach our goals.

## Identifying Destructive (Irrational) Thought Sequences

Recently separated from her husband and not used to living alone, Joan tried all day to make plans with someone for Friday night entertainment after work. Although she had many friends, on this particular evening all of them seemed to have other plans. Feeling lonely, rejected, "empty" and depressed, Joan bought a quart of ice cream, which she ate that evening before going to bed early.

This scenario could be illustrated as follows:



Complete the chart above as follows:

- Under B1, write what Joan told herself about A1 that created such a strong negative emotional response at C1. Was it true? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_ Was it helpful? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
- Under B2, write what Joan told herself about her feelings at C1 (new A2), that led to her bingeing on ice cream. Was it true? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_ Was it helpful? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
- How do you think Joan felt while eating the ice cream?

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- How do you think she felt later about what she did?

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## Making The A-B-C Model Work for You

Whenever you find yourself in a mood or acting in a way that undermines your efforts at weight control, you can apply the A-B-C Model:

- Identify the event (**A**) and then the attitude or “trigger” response (**B**) that has prompted your mood or behavior leading to result (**C**). These events are usually situations you encounter, but they may also be mental images or old self-image issues. Becoming familiar with these “trigger events” will keep you from being taken by surprise in the future.
- If your triggered attitudes are getting in the way of your goals for healthy eating, physical activity, and weight loss, quickly zero in on those unhelpful thinking patterns and work to change them by coming up with more constructive (helpful) alternatives. Is there another way to look at the event or situation?
- Think about what you would tell someone else you cared about who was thinking these thoughts, then write down those ideas so that you can substitute them for any unhelpful thoughts that might come up for you the next time you’re in a similar situation. Try to find positive, realistic thoughts to counter the negatives thoughts that often come to mind before you are consciously aware of them.

You’ll find that successful weight control involves watching not only what you eat, but also what you think. Changing our thinking habit takes a great deal of attention and persistence, so be patient with yourself.

## Beyond the A-B-Cs of Behavior

There is a model for gaining control of unproductive, self-defeating emotions and behaviors by monitoring and changing the destructive (irrational) thoughts that motivate them. It starts with the **A-B-C** Model that you know, and adds two new steps. Point **D** is a rational thought that actively disputes and challenges the destructive (irrational) belief at Point **B**, resulting in Point **E**, an effective new philosophy. For example:

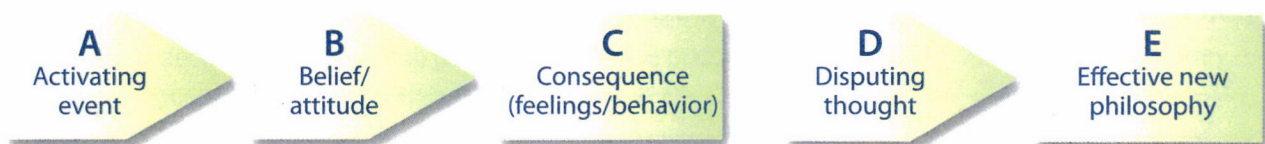
**Activating event** – Person travels extensively, and is rarely active during numerous business trips.

**Belief/attitude** (destructive thought) – I’ll never stick with physical activity; it’s just too hard with my travel schedule.

**Consequence** (feelings and behaviors) – Discouragement/gives up trying to manage weight.

**Disputing thought** (constructive thought) – That’s not true! I am physically active at home, and occasionally when traveling. With better planning and prioritizing, I can be active anywhere!

**Effective new philosophy** – It won’t always be easy to stick to my goals but who said life must be easy? I’d better focus less on obstacles and more on solutions.



## Mastering the A-B-C-D-E Model

The following three strategies will help you adopt the new model.

- Recognize when you are thinking destructively (irrationally). One way to do this is by staying in touch with your feelings. Since irrational thoughts are automatic and “telegraphic,” strong negative feelings are often your first clue that you are thinking irrationally. By accepting and tolerating your negative feelings, you’ll give yourself time to analyze the situation:
- Determine if activating events (Point A) can be changed through constructive action on your part.
- Identify any destructive belief (Point B) that might be contributing to your feelings.

Review the list of **Common Thinking Errors** to determine which irrational belief or thinking pattern may be at work in the present situation. Write it down.

Ask yourself if this belief is both true and helpful to you. If it’s not, dispute it by writing why it is not true or how it is not helpful (Point D). Express Point D in a strong and emphatic way, since most irrational thoughts (Point B) are “hot.”

Point E naturally follows from “D” and is a positive coping statement reflecting a rational philosophy of life.

## Common Thinking Errors

The following are examples of common thought patterns that often interfere with developing habits of healthy eating and exercise.

### All-Or-Nothing

Our thinking is “all or nothing” when we judge ourselves or our experiences in terms of extremes—all one way or the other. For example, we may think of people or situations as totally good or totally bad, but we all know that there are actually both good and bad qualities in most people and situations. Or we may think of people or things as either totally perfect or totally defective. In terms of changing our lifestyle habits, we may think of ourselves as being 100% on track, or totally lost and without a prayer for getting back to where we should be. You can see that either way of thinking can completely sabotage our efforts to change our habits.

Here’s an example of how this form of “all-or-nothing” thinking can wreak havoc on a person’s attempts to change lifestyle habits. Tanya had gotten into the habit of walking 35 minutes a day, 5 days a week, until she and her spouse were called away unexpectedly to her mother-in-law’s funeral in another state. As a result, Tanya not only failed to complete her walk for several days in a row, but she also ate a variety of foods outside of her meal plan. She began to think that she had entirely blown her attempt to change her health-related lifestyle habits. She criticized herself for being a weak person, became down and hopeless about her weight, and abandoned all efforts to maintain her healthy lifestyle changes for several weeks.

### Overgeneralization

We overgeneralize when we use one aspect of people or situations to “sum up” or “pigeon hole” everything about them, rather than dealing with all their traits and abilities. For example, Al is a competent and fairly successful salesperson, as well as a good father to his two girls. Not only do he and his spouse provide a good standard of living for their family, Al finds time to be supportive of his widowed mother. Yet, Al thinks of himself only as a “fat person,”

with all the negative attributes that go along with this label. When his wife reminds him of all the things he does for others, he quickly dismisses her comments by saying he just does what's expected of him.

### **Magnification**

We all know how a magnifying lens works. And in magnification, the significance of an event is blown up and well out of proportion to what we might ordinarily consider its true size and importance. For example, Maria did a really good job of sticking to her planned meals and snacks throughout her workday, except for that last glazed doughnut that was left in the break room after the committee meeting. As she winds down at home that evening, the doughnut sticks in her mind and she feels irritated with herself that she "blew" her diet. In reality, though, that one doughnut was really only a minor misstep.

### **Minimization**

As you've already guessed, minimization is really the flipside of magnification. In minimization, the person reduces the significance of an event, which is really much more important than the person realizes. For example, while he has been on the road, Jose has strayed from his meal plan for more than four days in a row. And who can blame him? He's on the road. He has very little time to relax. He doesn't buy groceries because he doesn't have access to a kitchen or refrigerator, and some of his fast-food choices have not been all that healthy. His first day back home, he has the opportunity to resume his normal meal plan. Yet, instead of taking this opportunity to re-establish his routine, he thinks: "I really don't feel like shopping and cooking today, either. I'm bushed. It really doesn't matter if I eat out one more day. I'll get back to my meal plan on Monday."

Why is Jose's decision such a big deal? While unavoidable interruptions in our healthy routine should be expected and taken in stride, we also need to take advantage of a clear opportunity to get back on track. If we choose to miss this first opportunity, it becomes all that much easier to forgo the next one, and pretty soon Jose may completely abandon all the healthy eating habits he has learned.

## Rational Thinking Log

Make extra copies of this page. Write down one thought sequence each day.

Example:

**Activating event** – Thanksgiving holiday is coming up at my sister’s house.

**Belief/attitude** (destructive thought) – Thanksgiving won’t even be special if I can’t eat all that good food! I can’t stand having to deprive myself during such special occasions.

**Consequence** (feelings and behaviors) – I dread the holiday; I may even decide not to go.

**Disputing thought** (constructive thought) –That’s low frustration tolerance! Just because I want something doesn’t mean I have to have it. I can still enjoy reasonable portions of the food. Besides, holidays are about the people, not the food. This year I’ll focus on the blessing of being with my family. That is the true meaning of Thanksgiving.

**Effective new philosophy** –Food is only one part of why holidays are special. I’m going to put it in its proper perspective from now on, and focus on the whole picture.

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## How Lapses Become Relapses

Dorothy had been carefully following a low-calorie, low-fat food plan for six weeks. When she went to dinner with her friends, however, she was a little embarrassed to appear "different." When everyone ordered the famous house specialty of chicken-fried steak, Dorothy agreed with determination to eat only half of her order. However, she ended up cleaning her plate instead, then reasoned that since she'd "blown" her food plan anyway, she might as well "go all out" and ordered pecan pie for dessert. After this happened several more times during the following week, Dorothy concluded that she had no will-power and might as well just go back to her old unhealthy eating routine.

Write down 3 thinking errors in this scenario, along with rational alternative thoughts.

Thinking Error:	Constructive (rational) Alternative:
1.	
2.	
3.	

As part of his weight management program, Bill decided to walk 45 minutes a day for 6-7 days a week. However, he went on a week-long business trip where he sat in meetings all day long and even at night. This trip disrupted his walking program, since he couldn't find 45-minute blocks of "free time" in which to walk. After encountering similar obstacles for several more weeks, he concluded he might as well give up since he felt that he didn't have the self-discipline to stick to a regular physical activity program.

Write down 2 thinking errors Bill made and suggest rational alternatives.

Thinking Error:	Constructive (rational) Alternative:
1.	
2.	

## key goals

Using the tips in this module, develop 2 – 3 goals to work towards.

1	
2	
3	

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