



Master Thoughts & Emotions with the Dr Ellis A-B-C-D-E Method

Reflect upon a recent event that resulted in a strong emotional reaction. This should be an event where you would have liked to respond differently. Read through each of the five steps of the ABCDE method and write down your own experience each step of the way.

“A” – Adversity or Activating Event

Consider the event that triggered the emotional response in you. This would be whatever happened right before you noticed yourself feeling an emotion such as anxiety, sadness, or anger. When you become more mindfully aware of events that typically trigger strong emotional responses, you can learn to watch out for these events in the future and be better prepared to deal with them more effectively.

Example: A friend asks you if he/she can borrow money again.

“B” – Beliefs

We all tell ourselves stories about what events mean. For the moment, avoid judging your beliefs as “right” or “wrong” and simply notice what they are. We often have [irrational beliefs](#) that serve to fuel maladaptive emotional responses and perpetuate problems. A belief is generally “irrational” when it lacks clear evidence, is overgeneralized, or is otherwise based on faulty reasoning.

Example: “I always get taken advantage of like this – it’s not fair.”

“C” – Consequences

Consequences are more than just the clear cut “outcome” of the event. Consequences can take behavioral and emotional forms. Sometimes we observe consequences externally, such as noticing that another person is lashing out at us or withdrawing from us. Other times, consequences are internal, such as experiencing debilitating anxiety or sadness.

Example: Regret, disappointment, and withdrawal from the friend. Refusal to give in to friend’s expectations.

“D” – Disputing

This step involves actively disputing harmful belief systems through mindfully examining, questioning, and challenging them. First, locate the harmful beliefs in your stream of consciousness in such a way that you can examine them carefully.

Next, prepare to enter the “disputation phase” by asking yourself the following six questions:



1. Does this belief fit with reality?
2. Does this belief support the achievement of reasonable/constructive interests and goals?
3. Does this belief help foster positive/healthy relationships?
4. Does this belief contradict parasitic thinking?
5. Does this belief seem reasonable and logical given the context in which it occurred?
6. Is this belief generally detrimental or generally helpful?

These questions are intended to facilitate the process of separating realistic from harmful/dysfunctional thinking. Through mindfully examining your beliefs in this way, you are also increasing your own self-awareness and insight into the ways that you tend to think and behave.

Example:

1. No, there have been exceptions to my friend asking me for money. I have even asked him/her for money before.
2. No, it actually defeats my interest in overcoming the anxiety related to these demands.
3. No, my emotional reaction only served to harm the friendship.
4. No, the belief that it's unfair makes me feel weak and overwhelmed, which is parasitic thinking.
5. No, my friend actually asked for money when I knew she really needed it.
6. In this case, it's generally detrimental. It only costs time and emotional energy, with no beneficial return.

“E” – Effects

Notice the effects that result from actively examining and disputing parasitic/faulty thinking. Once you identify and clarify your emotionally charged beliefs about a situation, you can begin to create an alternative line of thinking that is based upon more plausible and reasonable beliefs.

Example: A better perspective on the situation, sense of encouragement, and less emotional attachment to the idea of “fairness.”

Keep in mind that the ABCDE method will not defer normal/healthy emotions, such as appropriate loss, regret, realistic fears, or frustration. Not all emotions need to be “changed” in this way. Quite often, emotions are incredibly valuable and useful tools that are providing you with important information about the situation.

In these cases, it is crucial to mindfully attend to your emotional experience and receive the lessons embedded within those emotions. Other times, when emotional responses are causing unnecessary suffering or are based in faulty thinking, mindfully applying the ABCDE method can shed light on a situation where you feel “stuck.”