

Master the
A B C D E
technique



How does this technique actually work?

A - Activating event

This is the thing that made you feel bad, either a little or a whole lot.

- It can be any occurrence which causes a negative feeling in you.
- It may make you feel irritated, angry, sad, depressed, frustrated, uneasy or anxious.
- Some examples: your battery dying, arriving late to work, an argument with your partner, a misunderstanding with a colleague, forgetting to feed a pet.

B - Belief

This is what that “bad” thing made you believe.

- Ask yourself what you believe about yourself or others that’s making you feel bad.
- Usually, this belief is irrational, generalized and not completely true.
- Be honest with yourself so you can start to change it.

C - Consequence

The feelings, actions or thoughts that result from the “bad” thing happening.

- What were your thoughts, actions or feelings after the “bad” thing happened?
- Did you start to feel angry or demotivated? Did you decide to stop talking to someone or did you have an argument?

D - Dispute

Which put simply means; tell yourself how much truth there is to what you believe about the “bad” thing.

- Is it true?
- Address your belief. Look at it full on and assess it logically.
- Now present evidence to yourself that contradicts your belief.
- The aim is to push that belief back to being rational.

E - Effective rational belief

Here’s where you want to end up. With a belief that is rational, true and doesn’t make you feel negative about yourself or others.

- It is compassionate towards you and others.
- It allows room for growth and may see a need for change.
- It recognizes you and others as having strengths and weaknesses.
- It is manageable and can be maintained.

How to dispute successfully!

B comes before C

Why does B come before C to dispute successfully?

Because you must **dispute the Belief not the Consequence** when using the ABCDE technique!

Why? Because when you challenge and change your Belief, the Consequence will change too!

Instead of this...

Activating event (A)

My colleague spoke over me again today when I offered my opinion on a discussion.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

I am not valuable and my opinion does not matter.

Consequence (C)

I felt ignored and I left the conversation and went to sit on YouTube for a while.

Disputing Evidence (D) - It may be a bit extreme...

to think they were ignoring me, perhaps they just didn't hear me.

Disputing Evidence (D) - Isn't it wonderful that...

I felt better after watching a music video.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

I feel a little more relaxed after distracting myself and realise I maybe jumped to a conclusion.

Try this...

Activating event (A)

My colleague spoke over me again today when I offered my opinion on a discussion.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

I am not valuable and my opinion does not matter.

Consequence (C)

I felt ignored and I left the conversation and went to sit on YouTube for a while.

Disputing Evidence (D) - It may be a bit extreme...

to think that I'm not valuable just because one person hasn't acknowledged my comments twice this week.

Disputing Evidence (D) - Isn't it wonderful that...

I have a relationship with a loving partner and close friends which is an indication that people do value me.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

I am valuable which is evidenced by my partner and friends who care for me.

Why is disputing the belief so important?

- Your irrational belief is what needs to change.
- When your irrational belief changes, so will the consequence.
- Disputing the consequence doesn't change what you believe.
- It gives **temporary relief** but doesn't address the problem.
- This means your feelings, actions & reactions will likely remain the same.

So, be honest, dispute, see the truth. And when the same belief pops up again, repeat! Be honest, dispute, see the truth - and chip away at that irrational belief!

The proof is in the disputing.

Evidence based disputing is the 1st of 4 main disputing techniques.

How does it work? Dispute your irrational belief by asking yourself, "Can I prove that this is unrealistic?" Review the evidence you come up with and adjust your belief accordingly.

When can I use it? Anytime. Use the dispute that works best for you and your situation.

What does it look like?

Activating event (A)

I have a business trip to Joburg booked for next week but I'm really scared of flying. I get anxious on the plane and struggle to sit still or relax for the whole flight.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

Deep down, I believe that the plane might crash while I'm on the flight.

Consequence (C)

I consider whether I should skip the business meeting and let my colleague go instead, it would mean missing this opportunity. I've been unable to focus because of my anxiety.

Disputing Evidence (D)

There is a 1 in 3 million chance of dying from food poisoning, and a 1 in 11 million chance of dying in a plane crash, so I'm far more likely to die from the plane food than the actual plane crashing. Rationally, I should be more scared of the food I eat every day than of this upcoming flight.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

I realise that my fear is not rational and resolve to remind myself that there are other things I am not afraid of at all that would make more rational sense to fear and I feel more at ease.

Let's think logically for a moment.

Logical disputing is the 2nd of 4 main disputing techniques.

How does it work? Dispute your irrational belief by the following:

1. Ask yourself, "Are the (negative) conclusions I've come to logical?"
2. Are they real? Factual?
3. Where can I see myself exaggerating?
4. Provide logical reasons from your life to combat these conclusions.

It's common to generalize in this area. Make sure you're not turning your feelings into facts.

When can I use it? Anytime. Use the dispute that works best for you and your situation.

What does it look like?

Activating event (A)

I saw an old friend from University today and he told me about his life at the moment. He's so successful and happy. He's a professional golfing instructor and he and his wife and kids are going to the Seychelles next week. I feel like such a failure, I'm not even married yet.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

I'm a failure.

Consequence (C)

I feel depressed and dissatisfied and feel less motivated about heading into work tomorrow.

Disputing Evidence (D)

It's not logical to think that I am a failure just because I'm not married or my life doesn't look like someone else's. I have a solid job that I worked hard for and I enjoy my colleagues and what I do. I also have a great group of friends. Perhaps I should instead take a look at my goals and rather evaluate if there are one or two areas I would like to prioritise differently.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

I feel calmer remembering that there are areas I succeed in. And even if there are other areas I would like to look different, that doesn't mean I'm a failure. Thinking that I have friends has also reminded me that I've been successful in caring for these relationships.

Where does this lead?

Practical disputing is the 3rd of 4 main disputing techniques.

How does it work? Dispute your irrational belief by focussing on the consequences of holding onto your irrational belief. Consider what would happen if you kept believing what you do.

When can I use it? Anytime. Use the dispute that works best for you and your situation.

What does it look like?

Activating event (A)

I had an argument with my wife this morning, we both shouted, we haven't had time together in weeks as she's been focusing heavily on work and doing additional overtime.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

My wife doesn't want to spend time with me.

Consequence (C)

I feel unloved and unwanted, I resign myself to not making an effort until she starts trying.

Disputing Evidence (D)

If I keep believing that the reason my wife hasn't spent time with me is because she doesn't want to I will begin to question whether she loves me and keep disengaging from our marriage. We'll grow further apart and have more issues to work through. There are times where we both need to focus more on other things. I should discuss a timeline for how much longer she needs to work overtime and explain my feelings calmly and ask what we can do together to address both our needs.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

My wife does love me but she can't show it as much at the moment because of how hard she's working. This is hard for me. It causes irrational concerns in me. I can address these by sharing honestly with her and acknowledging our different needs at the moment.

This example shows

Maintaining an irrational belief:

- Has increasingly negative consequences.
- Doesn't address realities.
- Furthers negative feelings, actions and thoughts.
- Is a choice.
- Prevents growth and healthy change.

Combating an irrational belief:

- Provides options for positive development & change.
- Addresses realities.
- Enables positive thinking and problem solving.
- Is a choice.
- Is possible through disputing.

Are you stuck in the negative?

Here's your way out!

Positive disputing is the 4th of 4 main disputing techniques.

How does it work? Your mind is wired to think negatively. Find the positive realities by completing the phrase. "Isn't it wonderful that ...".

When can I use it? Anytime. Use the dispute that works best for you and your situation.

Yes! Here comes the sun...



What does it look like?

Activating event (A)

My boss told my colleague he appreciates her worth ethic and how hard she focuses. He didn't say anything to me about my work.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

My boss doesn't appreciate my worth ethic, he thinks I'm lazy and doesn't think as highly of me as he does of my colleague. I'm not good at my job.

Consequence (C)

I withdraw at work and start getting frustrated with my colleague. I start questioning whether I'm good enough at what I do.

Disputing Evidence (D)

Isn't it wonderful that my boss told me two weeks ago that he values me as a team member. Isn't it wonderful that my boss hasn't needed to speak to me about being lazy at all and has given me no reason to be concerned about my work ethic. Isn't it wonderful that I have a job I care about and I'm privileged to earn a salary.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

My boss does appreciate me and appreciates the hard work of my colleagues too. There is no evidence to say my boss thinks negatively of my work ethic. I'm privileged to have a satisfying and well paid job.

Positive disputing doesn't:

- Ignore the facts or your feelings.
- Invalidate your experience.

Positive disputing does:

- Remind you of the positive realities you're not considering.
- Focus on switching lanes from negative to positive.
- Restore rational thinking.
- Help you see situations differently.

It's time to be less demanding.

You'll thank yourself for it, and so will everyone else.

There are 4 types of irrational beliefs. Or, 4 ways of seeing things that are unhelpful and illogical.

Here's how to spot the first irrational belief known as:

Demandingness

Demandingness is about "absolute requirements" - these are demands/requirements/expectations that feel non-negotiable.

The trick to recognising an absolute requirement or non-negotiable demand is with these phrases or feelings:

"Must" I must win

"Should" I should have done better

"Have to" I have to be more engaging/capable than my colleague/friend

When you see things this way it's as if there is:

No alternative in your situation

No way out of your situation

No other option

But the truth is,

**YOU can choose not to live by the rules of
"absolute requirements"**



Take a look at this example:

Activating event (A)

A close friend just told me they're renovating their home and my brother and his family just purchased a second investment property.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

I have to increase my hours and put my social life on hold so I can get that promotion. I'm behind. I haven't been working hard enough or focusing on my goals enough.

Consequence (C)

I feel frustrated and panicked and start thinking through how I should cancel the plans I have for this evening so I can work later instead.

Disputing Evidence (D)

It's a little bit extreme to think that I'm behind just because my life doesn't look like a few others I know. I have been very focused on my work and I'm diligent at my job. I don't HAVE TO increase my hours and lose my social life. It's a choice I can make if I decide to but I should think through how to make sure it's sustainable. Isn't it wonderful that I have a home I can afford to rent, great friends and a job that I enjoy.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

I'm not behind in life. I'm doing my best and working diligently. But if I feel dissatisfied with my own progress I can reassess my goals and take a look at my time management and see if I would like to shift a few things around. Life isn't a race or competition.

Absolute requirements:

- Don't allow compassion or understanding.
- Demand immediate action.
- Create a sense of urgency linked to panic.
- Don't allow time for logical thinking or planning.
- Create intensely negative feelings when not adhered to.

The best way to deal with absolute requirements is to recognize them, acknowledge your feelings and dispute with the ABCDE technique.

It's the end of the world!

...but just for me.

The second irrational belief is called **Catastrophising**
- and you may do it without realising.

So what is it?

It's thinking that the worst is bound to happen.

Or that it is happening... to you.

It's an extreme negative view that leads to anxiety!

To spot when you are catastrophising look for these three things:

Permanence - Does it feel like you/the situation could never change?

Eg. "He's never going to choose me for the presentation." "I'll never learn how to do that."

Pervasiveness - Does it feel like it affects and touches everything/is all consuming?

Eg. "I didn't do that first draft well, I'm not good at anything."

Personalized - Does it zone in on your life and ignore appropriate levels of awareness or concern for others?

Eg. "My boss looks frustrated, he's probably upset with me."

Look for these kind of catchphrases:

Pervasiveness

"This is the **worst thing ever**."

Personalized

"I'm going to be fired **if I don't get this right**."

Permanence

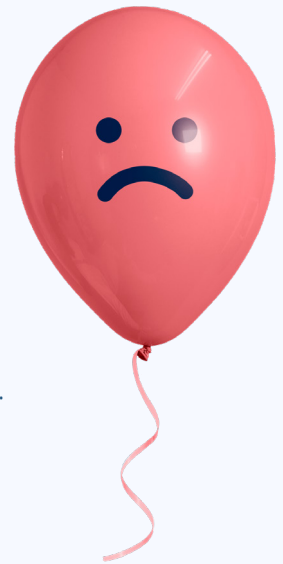
"It's **never** going to change."

The best way to deal with Catastrophising is to recognize it, acknowledge your feelings and dispute with the ABCDE technique.



Are you the worst person in the world?

Um, probably not.



The third irrational belief, known as **Generalizing or Self-downing**.

So what is it? Being overly critical of yourself or others or life conditions. And it can lead to depression.

Here are catchphrases to look out for:

"I am a complete failure."

As opposed to:

"I didn't handle that meeting too well - I'll work on improving for next time."

"He's a loser."

As opposed to:

"We have different hobbies and we don't relate in this area."

"My colleague is totally incapable."

As opposed to:

"My colleague seems to be struggling a lot in this area, which is challenging at times."

To pull back on being overly critical and avoid a negative spiral - dispute your irrational belief with the ABCDE technique!

How is your frustration tolerance?



Let's take a look at the 4th Irrational Belief.

It's believing you can't possibly endure something.

It's thinking you can't be happy at all if a specific frustration isn't resolved right away.

It commonly leads to anger.

Catchphrase to look out for: "I just can't take this anymore!"

Take a look at this example:

Activating event (A)

My toddler son is sick again for the fourth time in the past two months.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

I just can't handle this anymore.

Consequence (C)

I burst into tears and shut myself in the bathroom, slamming the door, so I can have a few minutes to myself before taking him to the doctor and then calling in to take the day off to look after him. I can't think straight and don't know what to do. This isn't fair, I'm exhausted and everyone's going to think I'm a bad mother.

Disputing Evidence (D)

Having a young child that happens to get sick often is really difficult and it's understandable that I'm struggling. But if I look at the evidence, it's a bit extreme to think I can't handle this, I have handled it before. I just don't want to have to because it's tough. Isn't it wonderful that my mother lives close by and I can ask her to look after him today instead of missing work.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

I don't want to have to handle this because it's hard but I can handle it because I care for my child and I have additional support through my mother. Lots of mothers go through this, it doesn't make me terrible at it, just normal.

To improve your frustration tolerance and avoid a negative spiral - dispute your irrational belief with the ABCDE technique!

Can't think of any activating events?

"I'm a really positive person, what should I do?"

It's great if you feel you're pretty positive from one day to the next!

But chances are there are still small moments that might...

- Irritate you.
- Frustrate you.
- Make you a little sad.
- Make you a touch moody.
- Leave you a tiny bit unsettled.

These can be used for activating events too - they don't all have to be intensely negative responses.

- Someone hooted at you in traffic.
- You forgot to buy more toilet paper.

So if you're struggling to think of an activating event you can: **Think of something small.**

Apply the ABCDE technique to an event from your past - either a few months ago or as far back as your childhood.

You can dispute the same event you've disputed before - just dispute it differently.

For example, If you used an argument with your spouse as your activating event the day before, you may use the same argument today, provided you change your dispute.

You can use the ABCDE technique on a situation in the life of someone you're close to.

For example, you may be aware that one of your parents is struggling with concerns around debt, your technique may look something like this:

Activating event (A)

My mother is very concerned after she got a phone call about her overdraft.

Irrational Beliefs (B)

I think she believes that she has failed in her ability to manage finances and that she's not a good example as a mother.

Consequence (C)

She has had a short temper since the call and asked to cancel our lunch to focus on an outcome.

Disputing Evidence (D)

It's a bit extreme for her to believe that she's failed, she still has a job and is consulting with wise friends who handle their money well which shows that she's trying and taking responsibility. Isn't it wonderful that my mother still has a positive relationship with me where I want to spend time with her and don't feel she is a bad example, just working on a growth area.

Effective Rational Belief (E)

She's hasn't failed, she is making active choices to develop and change an area of her life that requires growth. Despite the difficulty and her canceling on me she is choosing to take responsibility and I respect that.

Some people find it tricky to recognize emotions, here's **The Emotion Flower** by Robert Plutchik to help you out.

