

Worksheet

Professional Version | US English

Exploring Problems Using An A-B-C Model



Description

Some problems look complicated from the outside but start to make sense when we see the inner workings.

A case formulation is a good way of understanding complicated problems by creating testable hypotheses about the factors which might be maintaining an individual's difficulties.

"[The purpose of a case formulation] is both to provide an accurate overview and explanation of the patient's problems that is open to verification through hypothesis testing, and to arrive collaboratively with the patient at a useful understanding of their problem that is meaningful to them ... The case formulation is then used to inform treatment or intervention by identifying key targets for change."

(Tarrier and Calam, 2002).

An antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) diagram is a form of functional analysis, and is a helpful way of conceptualizing a behavior of interest. It explores what happened before and after a target event, and makes explicit the contribution of consequences to further instances of target behavior.

Instructions

Suggested Question



When we're trying to understand why we feel 'stuck' or why the same things seem to happen over and over again, it can be helpful to think about what happened before and after. Can you think of a recent time when you felt a sudden change in emotion? What was going on for you then?

Therapists should encourage clients to reflect on:

- What happened before the target behavior (What made it more likely? What was the client experiencing internally (thoughts / feelings)? What was happening externally?).
- The behavior itself (observable and non-observable).
- The consequences of the behavior (Intended and unintended; immediate and longer-term).
- The relationship between the consequences of their behavior and the likelihood of future instances of the behavior.

References

Tarrier, N. and Calam, R. (2002). New developments in cognitive-behavioural case formulation. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 30, 311–328.

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Situation

Think of a recent time when you felt a sudden change in emotion.
Who were you with? What were you doing? Where were you? When did this happen?

Antecedents

What was happening just before you noticed a change in how you were feeling or acting?

Behaviors

What did you do? Behaviors can be observable to other people, or can be the things we do or say to ourselves in our minds.

Consequences

What were the intended and unintended results of responding in that way?

Intended

Unintended

Reflections

What do you notice now about your **behaviors**?

Did any of your actions result in good feelings like pleasure or relief, at least in the short-term?

If you carry on acting in those ways, what do you think the **long term** result will be?

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Situation

Think of a recent time when you felt a sudden change in emotion.
Who were you with? What were you doing? Where were you? When did this happen?

I had a row with my partner and he stormed off.

Antecedents

What was happening just before you noticed a change in how you were feeling or acting?

I was sat thinking about what a failure I am, and that I always upset people, and that I don't deserve to be in a relationship.

Behaviors

What did you do? Behaviors can be observable to other people, or can be the things we do or say to ourselves in our minds.

I had a glass of wine.

Consequences

What were the intended and unintended results of responding in that way?

Intended

I felt a bit better.
It took the edge off what I was feeling.

Unintended

It felt good so I carried on and drank the whole bottle, then I ended up messaging him and we got into another row.
I felt awful the next day, and had even more things to hate myself for.

Reflections

What do you notice now about your **behaviors**?

That my intention was to feel better, but it had more unintended consequences than I anticipated.

Did any of your actions result in good feelings like pleasure or relief, at least in the short-term?

Yes - I felt good after the first glass, and it took the edge off my distress.

If you carry on acting in those ways, what do you think the **long term** result will be?

I'll become dependent on alcohol.

It doesn't actually help me to manage my relationship and probably gets in the way of me doing more useful things.

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