

## WHAT IT IS

Assisting students to see their irrational thoughts is the first step to helping them find alternative ways to process the world around them. Rational emotive behavior therapy, developed by Albert Ellis, can be described in terms of ABCs: activating events, beliefs about these events, and the consequences of these beliefs. Help them see the upsetting things that they find themselves thinking about as “activating events.” These activating events can happen in a variety of settings. These could occur through daily hassles that the individual encounters in the environment (daily work stress, financial worries, self-esteem), life changes (graduation worries, family divorce or conflict, being away from home the first time), environmental stresses (construction noises outside the dorm, heating or cooling problems in the residence hall, frustration from living in close quarters with other college students), chronic pain (from past surgery, illness, or injury), or acculturation stress (moving from another country or geographic region, living in a religiously different area).

These events cannot be prevented; they occur throughout our lives. When the stressful activating events are identified, focus on applying techniques like cycle breathing to improve the student’s ability to cope and reduce further escalation.

## WHO TO USE IT WITH

Students who become annoyed or derailed by everyday events that upset them and distract them from their overall plan and goals. This is also useful to improve their empathy skills and develop other ways to think about ideas beyond their first negative read on a situation.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. What are some common activating events that occur in your life? These are unplanned and out of your control things that cause you to become upset, angry, or frustrated.
2. Can you think of a time when you had a singular way of looking at things and an outside way of looking at things shifted how you saw it in an unexpected way?

## TEACHING INSIGHTS

The best way to engage students in this process is through the sharing of examples related to the A-B-C method.

Activating Event	Negative Belief	Negative Consequence
You spill coffee on your shirt.	You think people will make fun of you and think you are a slob.	You skip an important meeting or class because of your worry about how other people will see you.
A person cuts you off in traffic.	You feel disrespected and think they did it on purpose.	You honk your horn angrily and give them the finger from your car.

Activating Event	Negative Belief	Negative Consequence
You spill coffee on your shirt.	You tell yourself everyone makes mistakes and don’t get too worried.	No one notices the coffee spill and you go on to have a good day.
A person cuts you off in traffic.	You imagine they are rushing to work because if they are late one more time, they will be fired.	You let the entire situation slip out of your head and proceed with your drive to work.