

People respond to being stuck in traffic differently. Where one person will honk their horn in rage, another will turn on some peaceful music and just sit and wait and another will become overwhelmed with anxiety because they're going to be late.

### Why do people have different reactions to stress and adversity?

- ✗ A common false belief:** A negative event causes us to act in certain ways.
- ✓ Evidence-based research:** Our reactions are based on our beliefs about the situation rather than the situation itself.

When adversity happens, the first thing we attempt to do is explain to ourselves why it happened rather than examine what beliefs we have which caused us to feel the way we did.

## A Activating Event/Adversity

Activating events are triggers that cause potential stress.

Different types of stressors:

- ◆ **Major life event stressors**, such as the death of a loved one or a job loss.
- ◆ **Daily hassles**, which are more common stressors. Our individual beliefs, thoughts and perceptions regarding the daily hassles determine if the event is stressful for us or not.

### Purpose:

To understand the meaning of our personal reactions to activating events.

#### A. Activating Event/Adversity

- ◆ The event or situation.

#### B. Belief/Thought

- ◆ Our explanation about why the event/situation happened.

#### C. Consequent Emotion and Behavior

- ◆ The feelings and behaviors our belief causes.

$$A + B = C$$

an activating event  
+  
our subconscious beliefs or thoughts  
=  
a consequent behavior or emotion

\*The ABC Model, created by Psychologist Dr Albert Ellis

## B Belief/Thought

When we're born, we come into this world as a clean slate: we have no beliefs, opinions, perceptions or views. As soon as we can talk and listen, we begin to learn the opinions of our parents, our peers, classmates, etc. We automatically begin using these beliefs as a template for interpreting ourselves, others and the world in general.

**The problem:** Others will not necessarily have the same template, beliefs and views as we do.

We use our beliefs to interpret what is happening to us.

✓ **Accurate, optimistic, possible and flexible beliefs:** Help reduce the amount of stress a person experiences in life.

✗ **Automatic negative thoughts which are often rigid, inflexible and pessimistic:** Exacerbate our stress levels.

## C Consequent Emotion/Behavior

The final part, or Consequent Emotion/Behavior refers to the feelings/behaviors that occur as a result of an individual's beliefs and self-talk in response to the trigger.

**These feelings/behaviors might include:** stress, fear, worry, anxiety, frustration, anger, aggression, depression, irritability, avoidance, social withdrawal, etc.

This ABC Framework helps individuals begin **identifying their limiting beliefs** and build awareness of how they think. By identifying thoughts that are often irrational, illogical and unhelpful, they can start to dispute them and begin to practice replacing them with healthier alternatives.

### The Goal:

**To shift the focus away from external events and onto our internal processing of the event (i.e. our beliefs).**

It is possible to change our beliefs and, as a result, reduce our stress levels.

Our interpretation of an event is a **subconscious reaction** which occurs automatically. This idea developed from the *Freudian Iceberg Theory*, which explores the concept that there are three levels of consciousness:

1. **The conscious**
2. **The subconscious**
3. **The unconscious**

### Example 1:

A = Activating Event = 'My boyfriend has left me.'

B = Belief = 'I can't live without him. Everyone always breaks up with me. There must be something wrong with me. Life isn't worth living without someone to love and care for me.'

C = Consequent Emotion/Behavior = Feels depressed. Has no motivation to go out or do the things that she normally enjoys.

**Example 2:** (Same problem, different belief and reaction)

A = Activating Event = 'My boyfriend has left me.'

B = Belief = 'I'm sad that it's over, but it's his choice to walk away. It'll take me time to get over this but I know this is not a reflection on me and I will be OK.'

C = Consequent Emotion/Behavior = Feels sad that the relationship has ended but continues with the things she enjoys in life.