

The A,B,C's of Cognitive Therapy

Events do not create the way we feel. Our interpretation of the events creates the way we feel. Our interpretation is our CORE BELIEF.

So....our belief, our CORE BELIEF, about ourselves, our identity, our role in life, our worth as an individual is what creates how we feel in any given situation. This is what we believe about ourselves.

Example:

Janet's CORE BELIEF is that she must be perfect or she is a failure. Janet is a "perfectionist", dissatisfied with anything she does that doesn't come out just right. Since most of what happens in our lives is not completely and fully within our control, you can see how Janet is setting herself up for a let-down. Most of the events in our lives are dependent upon not only our choices, but often they depend in part upon the choices of other human beings over whom we have absolutely no control.

So.....

Janet is a secretary and does very good work. She's received many impressive evaluations for her capabilities. One day her supervisor tells her that some information is inaccurate in a report she just completed. Most of us would feel some level of embarrassment if we fudged a report, and that would be a normal response. We may be eager to correct it, and berate ourselves for not being more accurate. But we wouldn't feel like a failure. We may feel we failed to complete the report as well as we should have, but we would not feel like we were a complete failure. Our dialog with ourselves would go like this:

The Event: "My supervisor just told me my work needs changing"

CORE BELIEF: I didn't do this as accurately as I wanted. My reasons may be fatigue, lack of focus, etc.

Emotion/Feeling: I'm embarrassed that I didn't do as good of a job as I usually do, but I'll change it and pay more attention next time.

Resulting Behavior: I'll fix the problem.

Janet, however, would feel like a failure and have a less functional response:

The Event: "My supervisor just told me my work isn't perfect, it needs changing".

Her CORE BELIEF: Either I'm doing it perfectly or **I am** the failure.

Her Emotion/Feeling: Humiliation, Depression, Undue Anxiety, or Extreme Anger (Rage)

Her Resulting Behavior: *Avoidance* of the work or the supervisor.

Extreme anger and un-acceptance of herself for not being perfect.

Unnecessarily high levels of anxiety over her mistakes - which represent more than just mistakes; they represent personal failure.

Depression over not living up to her own unreasonable standards for perfection.