

Three Minute REBT: When to Use the ABCs and Disputing Irrational Beliefs

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When people learn the ABCs, often they have a tendency to overuse this technique. As said earlier in this issue, if you have a hammer in your hand, everything begins to look like a nail.

Let's say you're thinking about altering your addictive behavior. You've learned about the importance of self-determination, and you've done some exercises to enhance your motivation. At this point, is it good to try quitting, or is it best to discover your irrational thinking by doing an ABC? I'd recommend that if you aren't aware of any emotional disturbances about quitting, then just try quitting.

When do you use the ABCs of REBT? Try doing them when you become upset, or you fail, or become stuck and don't know where to go next. The assumption is that an emotional disturbance contributes to these problems, and by doing the ABCs you can discover the contributing irrational Beliefs.

Let's say you try to quit and you fail. Your failure (drinking or using) is the C (Consequent emotions and behaviors) in the ABCs. The A (Adversity or Activating event) can be that a friend offered you a drink, or you attended a party where people were drinking, or you had an urge to drink. (Note: A's in the ABCs are often the same as the events that many people refer to as "triggers.")

By doing the ABC, you may discover that you told yourself, I can't resist a drink, or I must have the fun and excitement I get when I drink. Then, Dispute your irrational thinking.

Dispute: Is there any evidence I can't resist a drink?

Answer: No, there is not. I haven't resisted a drink in the last ten years, but that does not prove that I can't.

Dispute: Where's the evidence that I must have the fun and excitement I get when I drink?

Answer: There is no evidence. I will miss the fun and excitement, but there is no evidence I must have it.

When you Dispute these beliefs several times, most likely you will find it easier to resist urges and temptations augmented by these irrational Beliefs.

[Back To 3 Minute REBT](#)

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