



ABCD+ WORKSHEET

for HEALING OBSESSIVE
THOUGHTS

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ABCD+ WORKSHEET

The ABCD method is a 4 question worksheet created by Cognitive Behavioral Therapy founder Albert Ellis to deal with obsessive thoughts.

The original method is helpful in logically working out our cognitive distortions and helping us create alternative ways of looking at our thoughts and beliefs.

The problem I kept running into was that this method only used my intellect to try and resolve my thought obsessive thoughts. While intellectual solutions may offer some relief from obsession, the result is often not permanent.

That's because intellectualizing the issue is surface work. We need to bring the wisdom of our body, so that we don't just think of new ways to think, but program the associated new feelings into our nervous systems.

Below is a practice I call ABCD+. It is an adaptation of Dr. Ellis' method with a more embodied and nurturing approach so that you can get to the root of your obsessive thoughts and release them more gently.

ABCD+

4 KEY QUESTIONS TO RESOLVING OBSESSIVE THOUGHTS

1. Activating Event – What is my trigger?

Is it a thought? An event? Something you heard or read?

2. Base Belief – What is the automatic negative thought? Take this thought to it's worst possible outcome, your base belief. Then note what kind of distorted thinking this is.

Taking our automatic negative thought to its worst possible scenario is crucial to uncovering the belief that drives our obsessive thinking. We often believe we

shouldn't be frightened by our intrusive thought because it's "ridiculous." While the thought may be ridiculous and untrue, it is often not actually what we are afraid of.

Your real fear is what the thought *means about you*— *your belief*. And to get to your belief, you gotta write down your scary thought and ask the simple question: "And then?" Or "Which means?"

When you get the answer, ask it again: "And then?" Really *feel into your body* when you're asking the question. This is crucial. We are using your intuition (not our analytical reasoning) to find the answer. Keep going until you land on the root belief, which might feel something like *"If this fear is true: No one will love me / I'll be alone / I'll lose everything."*

This buried belief is what your mind and body are reacting to when you get triggered. You may have thought it was the automatic fearful thought, when it could actually be the subconscious belief. The fear response happens in a split second because the connection in your brain pathway from "fearful thought" → "subconscious belief" is well worn. You've traveled that pathway many times.

Once you find the root belief, you might see that your fear is something anyone would be afraid of if they thought this way.

After this, simply jot down what kind of distorted thinking you're experiencing. This helps label your thought so you can become more aware that the thought is the problem and not you. Don't spend too much time categorizing. Just jot down the cognitive distortion you think is happening. Use this list:

All-or-Nothing Thinking

Mind Reading

Overgeneralizing

Emotional Reasoning

Mental Filter

Fortune Telling

Discounting the Positive

Personalization

Jumping to Conclusions

Should Statements

Labeling and Mislabeled

Magnification (Catastrophizing) and Minimizing

3. Consequence – What am I feeling in my body and how would I normally try to fix this?

Drop into your body and write where you feel any muscle tension, squeezing or any discomfort. You might feel your stomach clench or your chest or throat squeeze or the muscles around your face and scalp might get tight. You might have a chronic pain that intensifies.

Remember, your body carries the emotions that we feel.

Once you get the sense of how your body is reacting, notice and write down what your automatic response is to these emotions.

Are you finding yourself reaching for your phone to distract yourself or rummaging through the refrigerator? Are you lost in circling thoughts trying to prove to yourself that you're not what your intrusive thoughts tell you?

All these are coping mechanisms to get out of the discomfort we feel in our bodies. They are what Tara Brach so wisely refers to as "false refuges." Any false refuge we take is to get out of the discomfort of being in our bodies. It is important to notice our body-leaving-habits and then learn how to stay with them in compassion.

4. Design – What would I tell my child?

In the classic ABCD model, D normally stands for 'Dispute,' but we are redefining it as 'Design.' The words we use with our selves are important. And as you've no doubt experienced by now, trying to dispute your negative thoughts is what keeps you in them. Instead, I want you to design a new and more gentle way of talking and relating to yourself.

Imagine yourself talking to an innocent child. Or you could imagine yourself as the child and talk the way you would have wanted your parents to talk to you. What nurturing statement feels true right now? What gentle words might come to mind when caring for someone or something (like a hurt animal) that is innocent and unassuming.

If you're having trouble accessing your own nurturing, then what might someone who you believe shows unconditional love say? You might imagine a religious/spiritual figure or your favorite aunt or uncle when you were a kid, or a grandparent, a favorite pet or the sense of a warm light penetrating your body. Design your words, the feelings, the imagery of safety in your body and mind.

Use the worksheet on the next page for this exercise.

ABCD+ Worksheet

1. Activating Event - What is my trigger?

2. Base Belief - What is the automatic negative thought? Take this thought to it's worst possible outcome, your base belief. Then note what kind of distorted thinking this is.

3. Consequence – What am I feeling in my body and how would I normally try to fix this?

4. Design - Design your nurturing state. What would I tell my child?
