



Adapting Response Patterns

Recognising and transforming sabotaging patterns into supportive, authentic responses

BEING | Integrity and Authenticity

→ What you will need:

- 👤 4 - 20
- 👥 Group
- ⌚ 1 hr preparation
- ⌚ 1.5 - 2 hrs execution

→ Related Tools:

- 👉 Challenge your Beliefs
- 👉 Acting in Alignment

→ Menu:

- I. Overview
- II. Learning Activity
- III. Assessment
- IV. Key Advice
- V. References



“

“Discover how your authentic self responds under pressure. Practice awareness of automatic reactions and explore more supportive, authentic responses through guided simulation.”

—Femma Roschar





I. Overview

Everyone faces moments where their reaction doesn't reflect who they truly are. This tool helps students recognise those automatic, self-sabotaging responses and consciously replace them with supportive behaviour that aligns with their authentic self. Using the ABC model of Albert Ellis, students analyse a personal situation, identify unhelpful beliefs and explore alternative, supportive responses.

In small groups, students share their sabotaging and supporting patterns and try out new responses in a guided simulation. Whether observing or actively participating (as supporter, saboteur or owner of the situation), students experience the impact of acting from their inner core.

By sharing, supporting and experimenting with authentic response patterns, students strengthen their ability to take a stance for who they are, what they value and the life they want to shape.

Learning outcome

- ✓ The student is able to identify and apply supportive response patterns by reflecting on their thoughts, emotions, desires, self-image and actions





II. Learning Activity

Through a simulation exercise, students learn to transform self-sabotaging response patterns into supportive behaviours in line with their authentic self.



1. Exploring the Automaticity of Being ⌚ 20 mins

Ask students to sit in a circle and close their eyes. Say: "I will tap one person on the shoulder. That student will have to sing a song."
You won't actually tap anyone.

After a moment of silence, invite students to open their eyes and reflect on the experience using the following questions:

- What did you notice?
- What thoughts went through your mind?
- What beliefs or judgments came up?
- What emotions did you feel?
- What did you sense in your body? What physical effects did you notice?

Allow about 5 minutes for students to share their reflections, either in pairs or in the full group, depending on the group size.

Afterwards, reflect together on the exercise using the ABC model. Choose one or combine the following options to introduce the model:

- Let students read the handout on the transformative ABC model;
- Show the YouTube video by Lewis Psychology (6:34);
- Explain the model yourself, using a slide or drawing on the board that includes:

A = Activating event

B = Belief or belief system

C = Consequences (emotions, behaviour, thoughts)

D = Dispute the belief to find which are dysfunctional



Except where otherwise noted, content on the Transition Makers Toolbox is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. Icons by The Noun Project.

E = Effective, new belief and emotional consequence



2. Exploring Sabotaging Response Patterns

⌚ 15 mins

Using the ABC model worksheet, ask students to describe a situation in which they often show a response that feels ineffective, unsupportive or unpleasant, either for themselves or others. This is referred to as *the sabotaging response pattern*.

Instruct the students to describe this pattern using the ABCDE model.

Then, invite students to personify this sabotaging pattern:

- If this sabotaging response pattern can be viewed as a character, what does this saboteur look like?
- What name would you give it?
- What typical sentences or thoughts does it express?

Tip: this can serve as a formative assessment, especially when the tool is used over multiple sessions. It works well as a first reflective hand-in after the initial introduction.



3. Exploring Supportive Response Patterns

⌚ 20 mins

Using the worksheet, ask students to revisit the same situation from Step 2, but now imagine how it would unfold if their response came from a more authentic, supportive place. This new response is referred to as *the supportive response pattern*.

First, ask students to describe this pattern using the ABCDE model.

Then, invite students to personify this supportive pattern:

- If this supporting response pattern can be viewed as a character, what does this supporter look like?
- What name would you give it?
- What sentences or thoughts does it express?



Except where otherwise noted, content on the Transition Makers Toolbox is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. Icons by The Noun Project.

Tip: this can be used as a formative assessment, especially when the tool is used over several weeks. For instance, as a follow-up assignment after the introduction.



4. Simulating a New Response

⌚ 30 mins

First, invite a student to share a personal situation—one where they responded in a way they'd like to change—for a plenary demonstration. If no one volunteers, prepare a fallback example.

Assign roles:

- The student plays themselves;
- Peers take roles as saboteurs, supporters or other relevant people involved.

Explain the setup:

- The student shares both their sabotaging and supportive ABC patterns;
- Saboteurs stand diagonally behind the student's left side; supporters on the right;
- Each uses short, clear statements during the simulation;
- If others are part of the real situation, peers can play them too.

During the simulation (max. 2 minutes):

- The student responds to the recreated situation;
- Supporters and saboteurs whisper their statements;
- The student focuses on the supportive input and notices their inner response (thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations).

Afterwards, the student shares what they experienced and the group reflects together on what they observed.

After the plenary demonstration, give students 30 minutes to work in groups of 4 to 6 in small group simulations. Each group selects one student-generated case to simulate, based on the personal ABC patterns shared within the group.

Assign roles:



Except where otherwise noted, content on the Transition Makers Toolbox is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. Icons by The Noun Project.

- One protagonist (case owner);
- At least two saboteurs;
- At least one supporter;
- Optional: additional roles for specific people involved.

The small groups follow the same process as the plenary demonstration.

Tip: the given time frame typically allows each small group to do one full simulation. More time enables more rounds. The aim of the simulation is to create an experience for the case giver that closely reflects the real situation. This requires clear instructions on peer roles and, at times, several rounds of refinement. Make sure students understand the purpose and feel invited to adjust the setup if it helps the process.



5. Harvest, Reflect and Contemplate ⌚ 1 hr, including assessment

First, give students 20 to 30 minutes to answer the reflective questions and integrate their insights individually.

Then, allow 10 to 15 minutes for students to share their experiences in pairs or small groups. This helps them process emotions, normalise vulnerability and gain new perspectives.

Optionally, take 10 minutes for a closing group reflection. You might ask:

- What was your key insight?
- What worked well for you in this exercise, and why?
- What didn't work so well for you, and why?
- If you face a similar situation again, how will you stay close to your authentic self?
- What did you learn from your peers?

Please note, you may choose to collect students' responses in a reflection report for a formative or summative assessment. The group reflection can also serve as informal assessment.



Except where otherwise noted, content on the Transition Makers Toolbox is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. Icons by The Noun Project.



III. Assessment

Students describe sabotaging and supportive ABC patterns and reflect on their simulation experience through self-assessment and, optionally, a short report to deepen self-awareness and strengthen authentic responses.



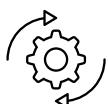
Purpose

Assessment as learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning, Authentic



Materials

Reflective assignment





Assessment

Reflection assignment

Answer the questions below in full sentences. Be honest, specific, and concise.

1. What was the situation you described?
2. What was your **sabotaging ABC** in this situation? (Which character did it reflect?)
3. What was your **supporting ABC**? (Which character did it reflect?)
4. How does this supporting ABC align more closely with your core or authentic self?
5. What did you experience during the simulation? Consider your thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations.
6. What behavioural choices did you make?
7. What were the effects of these choices, both on yourself and on your peers?
8. What worked well for you in this exercise?
9. What didn't work so well?
10. What insight or learning do you take with you for the future?





IV. Key Advice

The **Transformative ABC model handout** (Step 1) and **ABC model worksheet** (Step 3) can be downloaded below.



Except where otherwise noted, content on the Transition Makers Toolbox is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. Icons by The Noun Project.

Understanding our response to stress and adversity



Caught in a traffic jam, one person will honk the horn in anger, another will turn on some quiet music and just sit and wait, while still another will be flooded with anxiety about being late. Why do people have different reactions to adversity and stress?

Many of us believe that negative events cause us to act in certain ways. However, in Guide 1, we introduced a different reason for our reactions to adversity and stress. Research tells us that our reactions are based on our thoughts about the adversity.

When adversity happens, the first thing we try to do is explain to ourselves why it happened. Our beliefs about the cause of the adversity set off our reaction—how we feel and what we do.

The ABC model

Psychologist and researcher Dr. Albert Ellis created the ABC model to help us understand the meaning of our reactions to adversity:

A is the adversity—the situation or event.

B is our belief—our explanation about why the situation happened.

C is the consequence—the feelings and behaviours that our belief causes.

Adversity	Beliefs	Consequences
-----------	---------	--------------

Here's an example:

Mary-Jo has been consciously living a healthy lifestyle for more than two months. She finds out that she wasn't invited to a party at school, but her friend Janice was invited. Mary-Jo thinks to herself, Janice always gets invited to things; I never do. I am such a loser—nobody likes me. She gets very sad, doesn't go out jogging, and eats a whole box of candy instead.



So what are the ABCs in this scenario?

Adversity= didn't get invited to the party to which her friend was invited

Beliefs= ***"I am such a loser—nobody likes me."***

Consequences= feels sad, even depressed. Has no motivation to go jogging and eats a whole box of chocolates despite her focus on healthier living.

Here is another reaction:

Here's an ABC showing how another person, Anna, reacts to the same situation:

That's disappointing, but I actually don't know Nancy very well. Janice knows her far better. That's probably why I wasn't invited. Maybe next time I'll be invited. She goes for a run, stops at a video store to rent a new comedy, and calls a girlfriend to come and watch it.



The adversity (A) remains the same, but Anna's belief (B) is different. Thinking that she wasn't invited because ***"I actually don't know Nancy very well"*** helps Anna let go of initial feelings of disappointment, do things that help her feel more positive about herself, and enjoy the rest of the day (C). Using the ABC





model can help us develop key resilience abilities discussed in Guide 2, such as emotional regulation, impulse control, causal analysis, and empathy.

HOW TO USE THE ABC MODEL

Vividly recall a recent adverse event. After recording the A, fill in the C, then the B. Or, you might follow an ABC order. Choose the method that works best for you.

A: Describe the event objectively. Answer these questions: Who? What? Where? When?

B: Record your thoughts about the event. Why do you think it happened?

C: Record your feelings and actions.

B-C connections

Drs. Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté, authors of *The Resilience Factor*, have created a useful tool to help people identify their beliefs when they are doing the ABC model. The tool, shown in the following chart, outlines the links between specific beliefs and emotions that people predictably and universally experience. The authors of the “B-C Connections” have charted only the “negative” emotions, as they are commonly the ones we experience in times of adversity.

COMMON B-C CONNECTIONS

Beliefs	Consequences (emotions)
violation of our rights	→ anger
actual loss or loss of self-worth	→ sadness, depression
future threat	→ anxiety, fear
violation of another's rights	→ guilt
loss of standing with others	→ embarrassment

© Reivich & Shatté. 2002. *The Resilience Factor*. New York: Broadway Books.

The chart shows that if we believe that our rights have been violated—for example, if we think that we've been treated unjustly or disrespectfully—this will lead to feelings of anger. A belief involving loss causes sadness, perhaps even depression. A belief that something negative is going to happen (future threat) leaves us feeling anxious and fearful.

How can we use the B-C connections to identify our beliefs?

Sometimes it's hard to identify our beliefs; we often have more experience labelling our feelings. The B-C connections can be used in reverse to help us identify our beliefs. For example, feelings of guilt are often aroused when we believe that we have violated another person's rights. We feel embarrassed if we believe that we have lost standing in another's eyes. B-C connections help us increase our self-awareness—an important first step to a resilient response to adversity.

Refer to Section 2, “Helping Children Become More Resilient,” for information about using B-C connections with children.

Please visit www.reachinginreachingout.com, the RIRO website, for a brief video on the ABC model (Skills Video 2).

What do teachers say about using the ABC model and B-C connections?

Using the ABC model helped me recognize my automatic thoughts when I'm upset, mad, etc. It helped me look at things more positively. It led to looking for alternatives to solve the problem and helped me be calmer in a situation that is hard to handle. –YZ (kindergarten)

The ABC model allows me to be reflective about my responses. –TH (supervisor)

Using the process of thinking through what the problem is, step by step, helps me know more exactly what my beliefs are. It simplifies things. –KH (kindergarten-preschool)



Summary

Understanding our response to stress and adversity



Why do people have different reactions to adversity and stress?

Our beliefs or thoughts about adversity cause our reactions—how we feel and what we do in stressful situations.

Psychologist Dr. Albert Ellis developed the ABC model to help us understand the connection between adversity (A), our beliefs (B), and our emotional and behavioural responses (C).

Adversity Beliefs Consequences (feelings and actions)

Sometimes our beliefs about a situation are not accurate, and our reactions undermine resilient responses.

We can use the ABC model to identify our beliefs and, if necessary, challenge whether they are true.

Using B-C connections can help us identify our beliefs. If we know what our emotional reactions are, we can identify what types of beliefs we may have, e.g., sadness = loss; anxiety = future threat; anger = violation of our rights.

COMMON B-C CONNECTIONS

Beliefs	Consequences (emotions)
violation of our rights actual	anger
loss or loss of self-worth future	sadness, depression
threat violation of another's	anxiety, fear
rights loss of standing with	guilt
others	embarrassment

© Reivich & Shatté. 2002. *The Resilience Factor* .New York: Broadway Books.



Except where otherwise noted, content on the Transition Makers Toolbox is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. Icons by The Noun Project.



ABC Problem Solving Worksheet



Activating event

What is the Activating event? What happened? What did I do? What did others do? What idea occurred to me? What emotions was I feeling?



Consequence

Am I feeling anger, depression, anxiety, frustrated, self-pity, etc.? Am I behaving in a way that doesn't work for me? (drinking, attacking, moping, etc.)



Beliefs

What do I believe about the Activating event? Which of my beliefs are helpful or self-enhancing beliefs, and which are my dysfunctional or self-defeating beliefs?



Dispute

Dispute the Beliefs to find which are dysfunctional. What is the evidence that my belief is true? In what ways is my belief helpful or unhelpful? What helpful or self-enhancing belief can I use to replace each self-defeating or dysfunctional belief?



Effective New Belief and Emotional Consequence

What helpful or self-enhancing **new** belief can I use to replace each self-defeating or dysfunctional belief? What are my new feelings?





V. References

Zeeman, A. (2019) ABC Model (Ellis). Retrieved on 16 July 2025 from Toolshero:
<https://www.toolshero.com/psychology/abc-model/>
<https://www.toolshero.com/psychology/abc-model/>

Lewis Psychology. (2021, September 28) ABCDE model. Change negative thoughts and beliefs. CBT and REBT [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/YJnZBm6Y51Y?si=uuSpAHRJMpbYkyMP>

