

**Cognitive Therapy for Feelings:
Change How You Think to
Change How You Feel
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

One of the most powerful tools in working through feelings in addiction recovery is the use of Cognitive Therapy. I have been using this with my clients since the 1980s when the technique was called Rational Emotional Theory (by Albert Ellis). Aaron Beck is credited with Cognitive Therapy, which seems to have evolved from RET by application and further development. Some time ago, I came across a worksheet entitled, "The ABCs of RET", that had a very simple format. It explained how to use this technique to identify the Activating Event (A), the Belief about that event (B), and the Feelings associated with the Belief (C). I believe that D) the behavior came along later. This worksheet used the example of seeing a mouse. This is how it works:

1. What is the Activating Event? Example: My spouse says "I'm leaving" in the middle of an argument.
2. What is your Belief about that event? What meaning do you give it? Example: I believe that he is leaving for good.
3. What feelings do you have when you think that? Example: I feel fear that he won't come back and that I will be abandoned. I feel sad that we will get a divorce.
4. What is your behavior when you think and feel these things? Example: I block the door and try to get him to stay and keep talking to me.

At this point, you go back to #1, the activating event, which remains the same, then challenge the automatic thought that you had about the event.

1. Activating Event remains the same. Example: My spouse says "I'm leaving" in the middle of an argument.
2. What else could that event mean? Identify other possible beliefs or explanations. Try to at least a neutral explanation. Example: He could be leaving to try to de-escalate the argument. Or, he could be leaving so that he won't say something that he will regret.
3. What feelings do you have when you think that the alternatives are possible? Example: I feel reassured that he loves me and wants to work it out. I feel safe.
4. How does your behavior change as your feelings change? Example: I let him go out the door, and I try to calm myself down, so that we can finish the discussion rationally when he gets back.

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