

Dealing with setbacks

When things go wrong, when you are disappointed, let down, or fail to get what you'd hoped for, you may hear an inner voice accusing you, or telling you off, or mocking you. *'There was no way you were going to get that job. How could you ever have thought you'd be good enough?' 'Of course he was going to dump you. You're selfish, stupid, and fat!' 'So you messed up again. What's new?'*

If someone else said these things to us, we might well argue back. But when we say them to ourselves, we usually fail to dispute them, even though they are often false. The key to dealing with these negative, self-defeating thoughts, is first to **recognise** them, and secondly to treat them as if they were spoken by someone else (an enemy!) and **dispute** them.

This is the ABCDE model for dealing with setbacks.

A stands for **adversity** – the rotten or disappointing experience itself.

You have a major row with a child, who is insulting, aggressive, and hateful towards you.

B stands for the **beliefs** that are automatically brought into play by the event.

Children should be respectful and obedient towards their parents. I would never have dreamed of talking to my parents like that. If she insults me like that, there's no way she can love me. I'm a failure as a parent.

C are the usual **consequences** of the belief.

I feel deeply sad, drained, and depressed. I can't summon up any energy to do anything to improve the relationship with my child. I don't have any resources to move forward. We end up not talking except in monosyllables.

D is the way out – it is your **disputation** of the routine belief.

E is the **energy** that is released if you dispute successfully.

HOW TO DISPUTE YOUR DISEMPOWERING BELIEFS

1. **Ask for the evidence** – *Is it really so unusual for parents and children to have rows? Aren't we all horrible sometimes to people we love? Look at all the great things I've done for my children – how could I be considered a poor parent?*
2. **Look for alternative explanations** – particularly ones that are changeable – *She was tired and anxious with her exams coming up. She's fallen out with her teacher, and was taking it out on me.*
3. **Look at the implications** of the belief – even if it was true. *Suppose I did make a mistake in the way I challenged her? Does that really imply I'm a bad parent? So what if we both said unpleasant things, is it the end of the world?*
4. **Ask how useful the belief is** – *How useful is it for me to have such high standards for parent – child relationships? What good will it do me to go on dwelling about everything we shouted at each other? Wouldn't it be more useful to believe that family rows are normal?*

You can learn to deal with setbacks better by practising the ABCDE in your daily life. Don't go looking for adversity, but when it happens, notice what you say to yourself. When you hear the disempowering beliefs, dispute them. And feel the energy you get from successfully challenging them.