

## Lesson 7

### My ABCD for Stressful Situations

Instructions: Unhelpful thoughts can make your pain flare up, especially in stressful situations. Use this worksheet to challenge unhelpful thoughts.

- A. First, write down a recent stressor or event that was followed by a pain flare-up. Keep this concise. A few lines are enough. For example, 'I twisted in my chair while reaching for the phone and felt my back strain.' If you're having trouble thinking of a stressor, just go over the past 2 or 3 days when you felt pain. The more recent the stressor, the better able you will be to identify all thoughts and feelings.
- B. Next, list all thoughts you may have had when your pain-related stressor occurred. For example, 'My back is going out again.' 'I have to take up the slack and answer the phone for the other secretary who's always out sick.' 'I thought my doctor said this wouldn't happen if I exercised regularly.'
- C. Third, jot down all feelings you had right after the stressor. A key to identifying feelings (rather than thoughts) is that when describing feelings you don't usually use the word *that*. If you find yourself saying 'I felt that I . . .' you are likely describing a thought, not a feeling. For example, 'I thought that the other secretary was faking,' is not really a feeling. However, it may contain hints to your feelings. For example, it may contain clues to the feeling 'I felt victimized.' Notice that you don't say, 'I felt *that* I was victimized.' '*That*' typically doesn't occur in feeling statements. Other examples of how you might have felt in this situation are, 'I felt angry and disappointed. Later I felt a bit hopeless.' You do not need a long list of feelings. A few key ones will do. These feelings are the consequences of your thinking.
- D. Finally, you will dispute the thoughts you listed in the second step. You question whether 'my back is going out again' is really the case. You might think instead, 'My back hurts sometimes. Over time it will get better.' Instead of, 'My doctor said this wouldn't happen,' you might think, 'My doctor said that these events will happen less frequently if I keep to my pain management program.' And finally, you might question whether the other secretary is *always* out sick. You might think instead, 'She's out sick a lot. I wonder if she's struggling with some physical or emotional problem.' As a result of disputing your belief, your feelings may change or become less intense. You may feel, for example, just mildly irritated at the other secretary. You may also feel less hopeless or sad. And, as a result of having fewer negative feelings, you will likely be able to think of more positive things you can do for yourself. You might think, for example, 'I'll do some relaxation exercises in the empty conference room for a little while.' 'At lunch, I'll go for a short walk and have a chat with one of my coworkers.' 'I'm going to trust that I will feel better over time.' 'I'll seek some diversion and I trust that I'll be alright again in a couple of days.'

Date and time	A Activating event (pain or other distressing situation)	B Belief systems (thoughts)	C Consequences (feelings, behaviors, physical sensations)	D Disputation