

The ABC Model

Working the ABC method on the beliefs underneath your reaction

Before you use this: who this tool is for

This sheet applies to your interpretations of her trauma responses. It is never used on her.

Analyzing your partner's fear, her anger, or her triggers as false beliefs she needs to dispute is pathologizing her, and that is an integrity abuse behavior all by itself. Her responses are injury reacting to real harm. They need a witness, not a worksheet. Keep this tool on your side of the room.

This is renewing-of-the-mind work in the Romans 12:2 sense. Her action is rarely what produced your conduct. The belief riding on her action is where the change happens, and this sheet exists to catch those beliefs while the wording is still fresh.

The six steps, plus one

A. Action. What happened, in one sentence, with no story on it yet. She said this. She did that. She asked that question again.

B. Belief. What you told yourself about why she said or did it. Word for word, in the words that actually arrived. If any version of she is against me showed up, write it exactly as it came. This is the step men water down, and a watered-down B makes the rest of the sheet nearly useless.

C. Conduct. The feeling, and then what you did or said. Both parts, every time. Defensiveness is a C. Going quiet is a C. Sighing is a C. Leaving the room to load the dishwasher is a C.

How late you caught it. Before it got going, in the moment, or in hindsight. Most men start entirely in hindsight. Catching it earlier is the growth, and tracking it shows you the growth.

D. Dispute. Test the belief about her motive. What is the evidence it is true, and what is the evidence against it? Then the second question: does her injury explain what she did? Most false beliefs assign intent to something that was actually a symptom.

E. Exchange. Try for three replacements. Each one has to pass four tests. It has to be true. It has to be healthy. You have to be able to point to real evidence for it. And it has to be good for the relationship rather than corrosive to it. A flattering guess about her mind fails the evidence test the same way a hostile guess does.

F. Freedom. What happened when you ran with E. If you only saw it afterward, write what freedom would have looked like, and then write the smallest version you could have actually said out loud in that moment. The line you could deliver beats the line that reads well.

Watch the shoulds

Any belief containing should, shouldn't, ought to, or has to deserves a second look, because those are usually entitled beliefs. She shouldn't speak to me that way. She should trust me by now. She should be further along than this. Write them down exactly as they arrive. They are often the most useful entries on the whole sheet.

The beliefs to look at

What follows is a working list of beliefs men in this population commonly hold about their partners. Read it as a set. Tick every one you recognize as something you have thought, even once, even briefly, even if you dismissed it two seconds later.

Then go back and circle the three that show up most often for you. Some of these will sting. A belief you can see is a belief you can test. One you cannot see just keeps running.

Her anger

- ☐ She will never forgive me.
 - ☐ She should not speak to me that way.
 - ☐ Her anger is disproportionate. It has been this many months.
 - ☐ She hates me now.
 - ☐ The person I married is gone.
 - ☐ If she is still this angry, none of this work is doing anything.
 - ☐ Nobody in recovery should be spoken to like this.
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Her questions, including the ones she has asked before

- ☐ She is punishing me with this.
 - ☐ We already covered this. Why is it coming up again?
 - ☐ She is interrogating me.
 - ☐ She is stuck, and we are never going to get past it.
 - ☐ If I tell her all of it, it will hurt her more, so I will give her most of it.
 - ☐ I am protecting her by holding some of this back.
 - ☐ This is never going to end.
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Her grief

- ☐ We were having such a good day. Why did she choose now to bring this up?
 - ☐ She is pain shopping.
 - ☐ Her sadness is a verdict on me.
 - ☐ If my recovery were working, she would be feeling better by now.
 - ☐ She is performing this to keep me in the doghouse.
 - ☐ We are not going to make it.
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Her boundaries

- ☐ She is trying to control me.
 - ☐ She is treating me like a child.
 - ☐ This is punishment with a therapeutic vocabulary on it.
 - ☐ If she really forgave me, she would not need all these rules.
 - ☐ She is trying to supervise me.
 - ☐ Her boundaries are the real problem in our marriage right now.
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Her vigilance, her suspicion, her triggers

- ☐ She is paranoid.
 - ☐ She is crazy.
 - ☐ She is too broken. This is preexisting and not about me.
 - ☐ She should trust me by now. I have been honest for months.
 - ☐ If she does not trust me anyway, what is the point of being trustworthy?
 - ☐ What is the point of recovery if nothing improves?
 - ☐ Love keeps no record of wrongs, so her checking is the unbiblical thing here.
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Her support system

- ☐ She is betraying my privacy.
 - ☐ She is making me look bad.
 - ☐ She is turning people against me.
 - ☐ What happens in our marriage should stay in our marriage.
 - ☐ I will never outlive the version of me she is giving them.
 - ☐ Her therapist is only hearing one side.
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Her physical and sexual distance

- ☐ She is withholding to punish me.
 - ☐ A wife should not leave this unmet for this long.
 - ☐ If she were really committed to healing us, she would work on this part too.
 - ☐ I have been patient long enough.
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Being watched and being controlled

- ☐ She has not taken off the police uniform.
 - ☐ Here she goes again.
 - ☐ This is a test to see how I respond.
 - ☐ She is watching me and critiquing everything I do.
 - ☐ She says she is letting go, but she really is not.
 - ☐ I cannot even do my recovery work without being monitored.
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Capability and manhood

- ☐ She thinks I am incompetent.
 - ☐ I am not as capable as she is.
 - ☐ She is covertly saying I am lazy.
 - ☐ Letting her rescue me makes me less of a man.
 - ☐ I am worthless as a husband.
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Fairness and being wronged

- ☐ How dare she attack my integrity.
- ☐ That was disrespectful of her.
- ☐ She used a small thing to hijack the whole day.
- ☐ This is not as big a deal as she is making it out to be.
- ☐ She is assigning feelings to me that are not mine.
- ☐ I have done nothing wrong here.
- ☐ She can blow up and apologize later. I have to weigh every word before it leaves my mouth.
- ☐ This work has taken my voice.
- ☐ I am the one being mistreated now.

Reading her mind

Flattering guesses about her mind belong here too. A guess is a guess.

- ☐ She is just in a mood today.
 - ☐ She is planning her exit.
 - ☐ Here we go again.
 - ☐ I must have done something wrong, and I am not getting the whole story.
 - ☐ She needs me to help her process her feelings.
 - ☐ Her negative feelings will ruin the day, and it is my job to head that off.
 - ☐ She seems settled now, so it is finished.
 - ☐ She already knows this. I told her before.
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Rescuing and fixing

- ☐ She needs me to stop her when she talks about herself that way.
 - ☐ I can help her by giving her advice.
 - ☐ This will add clarity to what she heard.
 - ☐ I was just trying to be helpful.
 - ☐ If I handle this moment well, the day is saved.
 - ☐ When I share my inside, she owes me curiosity back.
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What I fear she thinks about my past

- ☐ If I tell her everything, she will leave.
 - ☐ She thinks all betrayers are evil around the clock.
 - ☐ She is probably wishing she had left two years ago.
 - ☐ She will never feel safe while I am on calls with men like me.
 - ☐ She thinks every part of my history was about acting out.
 - ☐ When we are finally back together, she will be thinking about what I did.
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Nothing will work

Bring anything you tick in this group to a safe person rather than working it alone. These get heavier when they are handled in private.

- ☐ Maybe I am not cut out for this.
 - ☐ I cannot seem to stop hurting her.
 - ☐ All I seem to do is cause more resentment.
 - ☐ Based on what I did, I do not deserve her respect.
 - ☐ I am just too sensitive.
 - ☐ I am somehow defective.
 - ☐ If you were not such a sinner, you would not have all this work to do.
 - ☐ I am never going to let her see me do this work again.
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Anything of your own

Beliefs you recognize in yourself that are not on this list. Write them the way they actually arrive, not the way they read well.

What to do with them

- Work the three you circled. One diary entry each, minimum.
- Beyond those three, fill in a diary any time you feel the pull to get defensive, angry, overwhelmed, full of shame, or to look for an exit. The pull counts even if nothing came out of your mouth.
- Start with C, not with B. Your conduct is loud and obvious. Your beliefs are quiet and often unconscious. Catch the conduct, then trace it back and ask what story you just told yourself.
- Same day if you can manage it, same evening at the latest. The B degrades fast.
- Write your E's in advance and rehearse them. You cannot compose a true belief in the heat of a hard conversation. Writing them down is the practice. The conversation is the game.
- Confess the false beliefs to a safe person: a brother in your group, a coach, or a therapist. They were hidden and they stay durable in the dark. Bringing them into the light is part of the dismantling.
- If a week goes by with nothing to write, that is worth telling someone too.

Thought Diary 1 Date: _____

A. What happened <i>One sentence. The event only, with no story on it yet.</i>	
B. What I told myself <i>Word for word, in the words that actually arrived. Include any version of she is against me.</i>	
C. What came out <i>The feeling, and then what I did or said. Going quiet counts. Sighing counts.</i>	
How late I caught it <i>Before it got going, in the moment, or in hindsight.</i>	
D. Testing B <i>Evidence for and against her motive. If B is accurate, is holding it helping me right now?</i>	
E. The truer beliefs <i>Try for three. True, healthy, evidence-based, and pro-relational.</i>	
F. What changed <i>What happened when I believed E, or what would have. Write the smallest version I could have said out loud.</i>	

Thought Diary 2

Date: _____

A. What happened <i>One sentence. The event only, with no story on it yet.</i>	
B. What I told myself <i>Word for word, in the words that actually arrived. Include any version of she is against me.</i>	
C. What came out <i>The feeling, and then what I did or said. Going quiet counts. Sighing counts.</i>	
How late I caught it <i>Before it got going, in the moment, or in hindsight.</i>	
D. Testing B <i>Evidence for and against her motive. If B is accurate, is holding it helping me right now?</i>	
E. The truer beliefs <i>Try for three. True, healthy, evidence-based, and pro-relational.</i>	
F. What changed <i>What happened when I believed E, or what would have. Write the smallest version I could have said out loud.</i>	

Thought Diary 3

Date: _____

A. What happened <i>One sentence. The event only, with no story on it yet.</i>	
B. What I told myself <i>Word for word, in the words that actually arrived. Include any version of she is against me.</i>	
C. What came out <i>The feeling, and then what I did or said. Going quiet counts. Sighing counts.</i>	
How late I caught it <i>Before it got going, in the moment, or in hindsight.</i>	
D. Testing B <i>Evidence for and against her motive. If B is accurate, is holding it helping me right now?</i>	
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