

Emotion Dysregulation: States of Mind and Behavior Chain Analysis Supplemental Handout

Practice Exercise 1: Components of the BCA

Your patient logs into her telehealth session in tears, saying her boyfriend is “the worst person ever” and you’ll never believe what he said today. She reports having engaged in self-harm by cutting as soon as she got home from school, and then she cried and took a nap before logging onto your session. She hasn’t yet connected with her parents or friends.

- What do we think the prompting event was? The target behavior?
- What areas do you need further information on? What questions will you ask to gather that data?

BCA cheat sheet:

- **Vulnerability factors:** recent factors that make the individual more vulnerable to unsafe or unwise behavior (poor sleep, substance intoxication, limited medication adherence, intense hunger)
- **Prompting event:** event that “tipped the scales,” the “last straw” that set off a sequence of events leading to the target behavior
- **Intermediate links:** thoughts, feelings, urges, events, and actions that led, moment-by-moment, to the target behavior
- **Target behavior:** specific behavior of interest in as much detail as possible (context, location, duration, frequency, intensity)
- **Consequences:** thoughts, emotions, events, that occur after the target behavior. May serve as possible implicit reinforcers for the behavior

Practice Exercise 2: Using the BCA

You complete a behavior chain analysis with the following results:

Vulnerability factors: stayed up all night studying for a test, ended up feeling like the test went poorly in 2nd period

Prompting event: sought support from boyfriend during lunch, and he responded "I mean, it probably would have gone better if you had started studying for it a few days ago."

Intermediate links:

Feeling: invalidated, hurt, angry
Thought: "I can't believe he would say that! He's supposed to care about me"
Action: went to next class, holding back tears and feeling distracted
Event: teacher called on me and I hadn't been paying attention
Feeling: embarrassed, "stupid"
Action: take bus home, sit alone
Event: friend texts to ask if I'm okay
Action: read but don't respond
Feelings: embarrassed and ashamed, intensifying
Event: arrive home, mom is still at work
Action: try to call mom; she texts back that she can't talk right now because she's in a meeting
Thought: "not even my mom has time for me," urge to self-harm
Feeling: worsening self-hatred, loneliness, distress
Target Behavior: self-harm by cutting leg 4 times; broke skin and bleeding but not requiring further medical attention

Consequences:

Feeling: relief, decreased intensity of frustration and loneliness
Thought: "I'm so pathetic, I can't believe I did this again."
Feeling: embarrassed, ashamed, sad
Action: cried for a few minutes, felt sleepy and drained, took a nap
Action: logged onto therapy session after getting calendar reminder
Anticipated consequences: may lose privileges, mother may be frustrated or disappointed

- Does your patient need to learn more skills to manage intense emotions? If so, which skills might be helpful in a similar crisis?
- What other factors may be interfering with skillful behavior?
- Practice introducing a skill by highlighting a link on the chain that could have gone differently.