

STARTING A BIBLICAL COUNSELING SESSION

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Where do you start a biblical counseling session? The easy answer would be, anywhere you have a counselor and a counselee committed to engage in sharing God's word as solutions to problems. Another answer is related to a time, place, a prepared agenda, and an intake form. An intake is where, preferably on a written form, where the counselee writes a response to specific questions and spaces on the form designed to share information relative to why the counselee is seeking biblical counseling. Adequate time is given to complete the form.

INTAKE FORM:

A section on the intake form may have questions such as these:

1. Why are you seeking biblical counseling?
2. When did you first notice this issue?
3. Who are some of the persons involved in this issue?
4. What have you done to resolve this issue?
5. Why do you think biblical counseling may help you resolve this issue?
6. How much effort (work) are you willing to put into solving this issue?
7. If someone asked you to help them solve a similar issue, what would you tell them?
8. How would describe the status of your physical health?
9. What medications are you presently taking, and why?
10. What questions do you have about biblical counseling?
11. How would you describe your spiritual life and involvement in church?

BASIC APPROACH TO COGNITIVE BIBLICAL BEHAVIOR COUNSELING (CBBC)

In the initial session the counselor, shares the basic approach to biblical counseling. This is the first phase in helping the counselee understand the why and how of his or her behavior. It is the ABCDE sequence involved in most behavior issues. Here is a brief explanation of CBBC:

- ✓ **A Activating event.** This refers to something that has actually happened in life. It may be a positive or negative event. It may even be a negative thought pattern, etc. The counselee needs to share the details.

- ✓ **B Beliefs.** This is a realization and an examination of how the activating event was responded to by the counsels belief system. Beliefs usually have three responses to an event: (1) it creates an inference (which may or may not be true), (2) it relates to a core belief held for a long time, and (3) beliefs evaluate the event.
- ✓ **C Consequences.** Every activating event that is passed though our belief system creates a consequence. The consequence may be a negative behavior or pessimistic attitude. It may be a positive behavior and a positive attitude. There is always a consequence of some time created by an activated even that is run through our belief system.
- ✓ **D Debating the truth of the ABC's.** This may be a quick disputing or an extended debate. This is where the truth of God's word is vital in discovering the truth and applying it.
- ✓ **E Establing a new and effective belief.** This occurs after the truth has been discovered in God's word, or from an accurate evaluation of the activating event, beliefs, and consequences.

EXAMPLE OF HOW ABCDE WORKS:

Jim is walking down the hall at work, a walk, he usually take with a smile and hello greeting to everyone he sees. Today he is buried in thought about a call he just received about his mother's health. He is preoccupied. Tom sees Jim coming his way, smiles and says hi, Jim walks on by without looking up or replying. For Tom this is an activating event. He thinks, what's wrong with Jim? What have I done for him to give me the cold shoulder? The rest of the morning Tom dwells on the activating event. His belief system is creating all kinds of answers relative to how he was treated by Jim. He has a belief system about how he ought to be treated; especially by Jim. He is becoming angry. Seeing Jim in the breakroom, Tom approaches Jim and immediately launches into trying to find out why he was given the cold shoulder. It dawns on Jim in the midst of Tom's tirade, that it is about the event in the hall that morning. Jim apologized and explained to Tom what was happening when they passed in the hall. Tom felt a whole range of emotions. He had been the victim of not properly using the ABCDE model.

Heres how Tom may have used the ABCDE model in a negative way:

A Activating event: Tom perceived that Jim was upset with him and gave him the cold shoulder.

B Belief system: Tom believes that Jim must always greet him with a smile and a hello.

C Consequence: Tom created frustration, anger and a desire to confront Jim.

D Debate: Tom did not pause to analyze or debate his thoughts and beliefs.

E Establiing: This only happened after Tom had displayed an unpleasant behavior toward Jim.

THE TRILOGY OF THOUGHTS, FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOR

It must be noted that working simultaneously with the ABCDE model the trilogy of: (1) Thoughts, (2) Feelings, and (3) Behavior. Here is a brief look at these three functions:

1. **THOUGHTS:** When an activating event occurs in our cognitive awareness, we automatically have a thought about it. The thought will usually trigger a feeling, a feeling that involves our belief system. We need to remember that thoughts are tangible facts that exist in a set form. For example, if you think, "I would like to jump out of an airplane"; this is not a fact. It is only a thought. If we aren't careful we will stay in a specific thought pattern and start to engage in negative self-talk. We can change the self-talk from negative to positive. As we have already noted, as Christians, we must bring every thought captive to Christ and get His approval before we obey it. Noticing where your mind goes is a key to successfully deal with issues.
2. **FEELINGS:** As the thought lingers, even though it may be for only moments, it will trigger a feeling. As this occurs we must not deny the feeling, but question whether it is valid, and if so why. Never bury the feeling; buried feelings never die. Keep in mind that feelings are forms of cognitive information generated in your mind; they are not facts. Also, remember feelings are something we have, not who we are. You have the power to replace the thoughts that generated the feeling; thus, change your feelings.
3. **BEHAVIOR:** Many of our behaviors are automatic. We walk a certain way; express ourselves in certain ways; react to certain stimulants in a certain way. These responses aren't produced by a cognitive thought patter. They are what we call habits. Biblical counseling has as a major goal, helping a counselee identify negative behaviors and how to change them. Behaviors can create emotions, just as emotions can create behavior. God has given us the freedom to choose our behavior; Jesus invested His blood in the

belief that a person can change; even to become an “Imitator of God” (Ephesians 5:1). This means that we should choose behavior consistent with who and what God wants us to be and do. This requires that we (1) observe our behavior, (2) examine the thoughts and beliefs behind it, and (3) accept responsibility for changing it. The core issue is not the behavior, but the thoughts, beliefs, and emotions that drive it. It must also be noted that behavior meets a psychological need created in the mind by previous thinking.

It has been proven that negative thoughts produce negative effects on neurotransmitters in the brain, which, in turn, promote more negative thinking, feelings and behavior, and more negative thinking, and the cycle goes on and on. The cycle is broken by “repentance”: “A change of mind; having another mind.”

ADDICTION:

Few words trigger more emotional responses than *addiction*. When it is used to describe a person’s state, or the direction his behavior is going, it brings up fear, anger, denial, weakness, and hopelessness. These expressions are usually expressed by a person to another person who has a behavior pattern that is destructive. They don’t understand WHY the person won’t change. They don’t understand why the person won’t change.

The person with the destructive habit goes through the same cycle toward self. The person feels powerless, hopeless, filled with feelings of guilt. The smoker stops for a few days and then starts again. The alcoholic stops for a month and then goes back to drinking. Addiction creates confusion. Addiction is a worldwide problem, and is getting worse. Addiction isn’t limited, as some seem to think, to alcohol and drugs. There are numerous other types of addictions.

What is addiction? **An addiction is a behavior that is repeated regardless of the consequences of the behavior.** Behavior becomes addictive when it changes moods, beliefs, and emotions. The behavior is continued even though it is destructive to the person practicing it, destructive to the family, the community, friends, vocation, spiritual health, and other relationships and pursuits in life. Some addictions are overlooked because they don’t make the news such as drunk driving accidents killing people, or drug overdoses taking lives. These are the *silent* addictions. Here are a few *silent addictions*:

- ✓ Compulsive eating

- ✓ Excessive media watching
- ✓ Perfection demands of self
- ✓ Smoking
- ✓ Compulsive sexual activities
- ✓ Gambling
- ✓ Work
- ✓ Exercise, physical fitness
- ✓ Religion
- ✓ Moods such as worry, anxiety, depression, etc.
- ✓ Hypochondria

Almost any behavior can become an addiction; even drinking water to chewing gum; working crossword puzzles to dress. These are things we do to alter our moods from a perceived undesirable one to a positive one because of the emotional reward of the addiction. Keep in mind that I am not saying that all repeated behavior is bad. When an addiction is positive we call it a habit. We need positive habits.

Biblical counseling is able to help persons who desire to break an addiction to do so. The ABCDE model will be helpful in reaching this goal. It also recognizes that in some cases there may be a genetic factor involved that is disease based; thus, in need of medical help. The counselee is referred to a competent medical professional.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Using The ABCDE model write an essay on this scenario: Joe comes home and without exception, he has an argument in which he blows up at his wife for not having dinner ready. How will you use the ABCDE model to help Joe break this addictive behavior? Be specific.