

THE A-B-C'S OF EMOTIONAL EMERGENCIES

Most of us are well-versed in the A-B-C (Airway - Breathing - Circulation) mnemonic from first-aid. It stands for Airway-Breathing-Circulation. This is a basic, yet critical life-saving checklist for those we serve. When any of the A-B-C's are missing, we intervene. We can use the A-B-C checklist for self-care as well.

A – Awareness. We need to bring awareness to how we are reacting to a situation. Most of us might respond that this is “obvious”. If I am mad, for instance, than it is obvious that I feel angry. But as many of us have experienced, we realize that we are angry much too late. By that time we have often already made a regretful decision; maybe a hasty email, maybe harsh words, or maybe a physical response. Afterwards, we often look back at our reactions with shame

By bringing awareness to the forefront, by developing a routine for checking in with ourselves, we can ensure that we are as balanced as we can be. Be aware of how your body is responding in certain situations. And, as your skill builds, you will be able to identify a growing emotional concern simply by your body's response. Tense shoulders, sore mouth, shallow breathing, and many other bodily reactions, are working to try and get your attention. So, let it!

B – Breathing. Once you are aware of a growing emotional reaction, focus on your breathing. Rapid intervention at this point is imperative. Your body is smart, but it can be easily tricked. Shallow, quick breathing focused in the upper chest is your body's fight-or-flight response. But, by changing those breathes to deep, stomach filling, measured breathes, you trick your body into believing that you are calm. Physiologically, you've convinced your body that “There is nothing to fear here. Move along.” In turn, your brain releases chemicals that calm the body. But only by being aware, can you turn that awareness into intervention.

C- Cycle. Practice often! The more often, the better. The next time you have an emotional emergency, you will be able to employ this Rapid Intervention. Focus on developing these skills while experiencing positive emotional responses as well. If we are able to use these skills when we are feeling well, we will be in a better position to employ them when we are feeling low. Practice certainly doesn't always make perfect, but remember that it does help to develop routine.

