

SECOND EDITION

**DBT Skills
Training
Handouts and
Worksheets**

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Orientation and General Skills

**Handouts
and Worksheets**

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CONTENTS

General Skills: Orientation and Analyzing Behavior

General Handouts

Orientation Handouts

- General Handout 1: Goals of Skills Training
- General Handout 1a: Options for Solving Any Problem
- General Handout 2: Overview—Introduction to Skills Training
- General Handout 3: Guidelines for Skills Training
- General Handout 4: Skills Training Assumptions
- General Handout 5: Biosocial Theory

Handouts for Analyzing Behavior

- General Handout 6: Overview—Analyzing Behavior
- General Handout 7: Chain Analysis
- General Handout 7a: Chain Analysis, Step by Step
- General Handout 8: Missing-Links Analysis

General Worksheets

Orientation Worksheet

- General Worksheet 1: Pros and Cons of Using Skills

Worksheets for Analyzing Behavior

- General Worksheet 2: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior
- General Worksheet 2a: Example—Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior
- General Worksheet 3: Missing-Links Analysis



General Handouts

Orientation Handouts





Goals of Skills Training

GENERAL GOAL

To learn how to change your own behaviors, emotions, and thoughts that are linked to problems in living and are causing misery and distress.

SPECIFIC GOALS

Behaviors to Decrease:

- Mindlessness; emptiness; being out of touch with self and others; judgmentalness.
- Interpersonal conflict and stress; loneliness.
- Absence of flexibility; difficulties with change.
- Up-and-down and extreme emotions; mood-dependent behavior; difficulties in regulating emotions.
- Impulsive behaviors; acting without thinking; difficulties accepting reality as it is; willfulness; addiction.

Skills to Increase:

- Mindfulness skills.
- Interpersonal effectiveness skills.
- Emotion regulation skills.
- Distress tolerance skills.

PERSONAL GOALS

Behaviors to Decrease:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Skills to Increase:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Options for Solving Any Problem

When life presents you with problems, what are your options?

1. **SOLVE THE PROBLEM**

Change the situation . . . or avoid, leave, or get out of the situation for good.

2. **FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE PROBLEM**

Change (or regulate) your emotional response to the problem.

3. **TOLERATE THE PROBLEM**

Accept and tolerate both the problem and your response to the problem.

4. **STAY MISERABLE**

Or possibly make it worse!

1. **TO PROBLEM-SOLVE:**

Use interpersonal effectiveness skills

Walking the Middle Path (from interpersonal effectiveness skills)

Use problem-solving skills (from emotion regulation skills)

2. **TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE PROBLEM:**

Use emotion regulation skills

3. **TO TOLERATE THE PROBLEM:**

Use distress tolerance and mindfulness skills

4. **TO STAY MISERABLE:**

Use *no* skills!

GENERAL HANDOUT 2

Overview: Introduction to Skills Training

GUIDELINES FOR SKILLS TRAINING

SKILLS TRAINING ASSUMPTIONS

**BIOSOCIAL THEORY
OF EMOTIONAL AND
BEHAVIORAL DYSREGULATION**



Guidelines for Skills Training

1. **Participants who drop out of skills training are *not* out of skills training.**
 - a. The only way out is to miss four scheduled sessions of skills training in a row.

2. **Participants who join the skills training group support each other and:**
 - a. Keep names of other participants and information obtained during sessions confidential.
 - b. Come to each group session on time and stay until the end.
 - c. Make every effort to practice skills between sessions.
 - d. Validate each other, avoid judging each other, and assume the best about each other.
 - e. Give helpful, noncritical feedback when asked.
 - f. Are willing to accept help from a person they ask or call for help.

3. **Participants who join the skills training group:**
 - a. Call ahead of time if they are going to be late or miss a session.

4. **Participants do not tempt others to engage in problem behaviors and:**
 - a. Do not come to sessions under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 - b. If drugs or alcohol have already been used, come to sessions acting and appearing clean and sober.
 - c. Do not discuss, inside or outside sessions, current or past problem behaviors that could be contagious to others.

5. **Participants do not form confidential relationships with each other outside of skills training sessions and:**
 - a. Do not start a sexual or a private relationship that cannot be discussed in group.
 - b. Are not partners in risky behaviors, crime, or drug use.

Other guidelines for this group/notes:



Skills Training Assumptions

**An assumption is a belief that cannot be proved,
but we agree to abide by it anyway.**

1. People are doing the best they can.

All people at any given point in time are doing the best they can.

2. People want to improve.

The common characteristic of all people is that they want to improve their lives and be happy.

3. People need to do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change.*

The fact that people are doing the best they can, and want to do even better, does not mean that these things are enough to solve the problem.

4. People may not have caused all of our own problems, but they have to solve them anyway.**

People have to change their own behavioral responses and alter their environment for their life to change.

5. New behavior has to be learned in all relevant contexts.

New behavioral skills have to be practiced in the situations where the skills are needed, not just in the situation where the skills are first learned.

6. All behaviors (actions, thoughts, emotions) are caused.

There is always a cause or set of causes for our actions, thoughts, and emotions, even if we do not know what the causes are.

7. Figuring out and changing the causes of behavior work better than judging and blaming.

Judging and blaming are easier, but if we want to create change in the world, we have to change the chains of events that cause unwanted behaviors and events.

*But trying harder and being more motivated may not be needed if progress is steady and at a realistic rate of improvement.

**Parents and caregivers must assist children in this task.

Biosocial Theory

Why do I have so much trouble controlling my emotions and my actions?

**Emotional vulnerability is BIOLOGICAL:
It's simply how some people are born.**

- They are more **sensitive** to emotional stimuli; they can detect subtle emotional information in the environment that others don't even notice.
 - They experience emotions **much more often** than others.
 - Their emotions seem to hit for no reason, from **out of the blue**.
- They have more **intense** emotions.
 - Their emotions hit like a **ton of bricks**.
 - And their emotions are **long-lasting**.

**Impulsivity also has a BIOLOGICAL basis:
Regulating action is harder for some than for others.**

- They find it **very hard to restrain** impulsive behaviors.
 - Often, without thinking, they do things that **get them in trouble**.
 - Sometimes their **behavior seems to come out of nowhere**.
- They find it very **hard to be effective**.
 - Their moods get in the way of **organizing** to achieve their goals.
 - They **cannot control** behaviors linked to their moods.

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**An invalidating SOCIAL environment
can make it very hard to regulate emotions.**

- An invalidating environment doesn't seem to understand your emotions.
 - It tells you your emotions are *invalid, weird, wrong, or bad.*
 - It often *ignores* your emotional reactions and does nothing to help you.
 - It may say things like "Don't be such a baby!" "Quit your blubbering." "Quit being such a chicken and just solve the problem." or "Normal people don't get this frustrated."
- People who invalidate are **OFTEN DOING THE BEST THEY CAN.**
 - They *may not know* how to validate or how important it is to validate, or they *may be afraid* that if they validate your emotions, you will get more emotional, not less.
 - They *may be under high stress* or time pressure, or they may have too few resources themselves.
 - There may be just a *poor fit* between you and your social environment:
You may be a tulip in a rose garden.

**An ineffective SOCIAL environment
is a big problem when you want
to learn to regulate emotions and actions.**

- Your environment may *reinforce out-of-control emotions and actions.*
 - If people give in when you get out of control, it will be hard for you to get in control.
 - If others command you to change, but don't coach you on how to do this, it will be hard to keep on trying to change.

**It's the TRANSACTIONS that count
between the person and the social environment.**

- Biology and the social environment influence the person.
- The person reciprocates and influences his or her social environment.
- The social environment reciprocates and influences the person.
- And so on and on and on.

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Handouts for Analyzing Behavior

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GENERAL HANDOUT 6

([General Worksheets 2, 3](#))

Overview: Analyzing Behavior

**To figure out its causes
and plan for problem solving.**

Chain Analysis
is for when you engage in ineffective behavior.

A chain analysis examines the chain of events that leads to ineffective behaviors, as well as the consequences of those behaviors that may be making it hard to change them. It also helps you figure out how to repair the damage.

Missing-Links Analysis
is for when you fail to engage in effective behaviors.

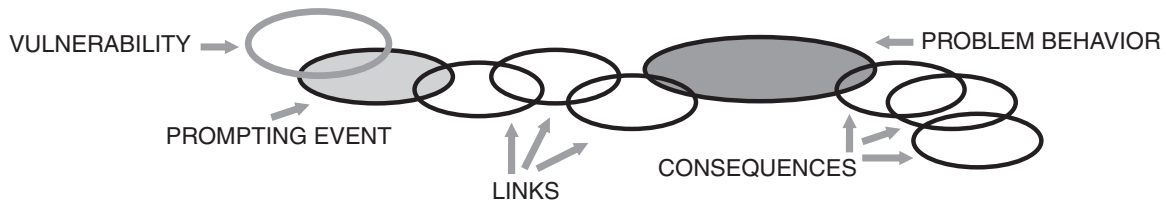
A missing-links analysis helps you identify what got in the way of doing things you needed or hoped to do, things you agreed to do, or things others expected you to do. It also helps you problem-solve for the future.

GENERAL HANDOUT 7

(General Worksheets 2, 2a)

Chain Analysis

TO UNDERSTAND BEHAVIOR, DO A CHAIN ANALYSIS.



Step 1: Describe the **PROBLEM BEHAVIOR**.

Step 2: Describe the **PROMPTING EVENT** that started the chain of events leading to the problem behavior.

Step 3: Describe the factors happening before the event that made you **VULNERABLE** to starting down the chain of events toward the problem behavior.

Step 4: Describe in excruciating detail the **CHAIN OF EVENTS** that led to the problem behavior.

Step 5: Describe the **CONSEQUENCES** of the problem behavior.

To change behavior:

Step 6: Describe **SKILLFUL** behaviors to replace problem links in the chain of events.

Step 7: Develop **PREVENTION PLANS** to reduce vulnerability to stressful events.

Step 8: **REPAIR** important or significant consequences of the problem behavior.

Chain Analysis, Step by Step

- 1. Describe the specific PROBLEM BEHAVIOR** (overeating or overdrinking, yelling at your kids, throwing a chair, having an overwhelming emotional outburst, dissociating, not coming or coming late to skills training, putting off or refusing to do skills practice, etc.).
 - A. Be very specific and detailed. No vague terms.
 - B. Identify exactly what *you did, said, thought, or felt* (if feelings are the targeted problem behavior). Identify what *you did not do*.
 - C. Describe the intensity of the behavior and other characteristics of the behavior that are important.
 - D. Describe the problem behavior in enough detail that an actor in a play or movie could recreate the behavior exactly.
 - E. If the behavior is something *you did not do*, ask yourself whether (a) you did not know you needed to do it (it did not get into short-term memory); (b) you forgot it and later it never came into your mind to do it (it did not get into long-term memory); (c) you put it off when you did think of it; (d) you refused to do it when you thought of it; or (e) you were willful and rejected doing it, or some other behavior, thoughts, or emotions interfered with doing it. If (a) or (b) is the case, skip from here to Step 6 below (working on solutions). Otherwise, keep going from here.

- 2. Describe the specific PROMPTING EVENT** that started the whole chain of behavior. Begin with the environmental event that started the chain. Always begin with some event in your environment, even if it doesn't seem to you that the environmental event "caused" the problem behavior. Otherwise, we could ask about any behavior, thought, feeling, or experience, "What prompted that?" Possible questions to help you get at this are:
 - A. What exact event precipitated the start of the chain reaction?
 - B. When did the sequence of events that led to the problem behavior begin? When did the problem start?
 - C. What was going on right before the thought of or impulse for the problem behavior occurred?
 - D. What were you doing/thinking/feeling/imagining at that time?
 - E. Why did the problem behavior happen on that day instead of the day before?

- 3. Describe specific VULNERABILITY FACTORS** happening before the prompting event. What factors or events made you more vulnerable to reacting to the prompting event with a problematic chain? Areas to examine are:
 - A. Physical illness; unbalanced eating or sleeping; injury.
 - B. Use of drugs or alcohol; misuse of prescription drugs.
 - C. Stressful events in the environment (either positive or negative).
 - D. Intense emotions, such as sadness, anger, fear, loneliness.
 - E. Previous behaviors of your own that you found stressful coming into your mind.

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4. Describe in excruciating detail the CHAIN OF EVENTS that led to the problem behavior. Imagine that your problem behavior is chained to the precipitating event in the environment. How long is the chain? Where does it go? What are the links? Write out all **links** in the chain of events, no matter how small. Be very specific, as if you are writing a script for a play. Links in the chain can be:

- A. Actions or things you do.
- B. Body sensations or feelings.
- C. Cognitions (i.e., beliefs, expectations, or thoughts).
- D. Events in the environment or things others do.
- E. Feelings and emotions that you experience.

What exact thought (or belief), feeling, or action followed the prompting event? What thought, feeling, or action followed that? What next? What next? And so forth.

- Look at each link in the chain after you write it. Was there another thought, feeling, or action that could have occurred? Could someone else have thought, felt, or acted differently at that point? If so, explain how that specific thought, feeling, or action came to be.
- For each link in the chain, ask whether there is a smaller link you could describe.

5. Describe the CONSEQUENCES of this behavior. Be specific. (How did other people react immediately and later? How did you feel immediately following the behavior? Later? What effect did the behavior have on you and your environment?)

6. Describe in detail at each point where you could have used a **skillful** behavior to head off the problem behavior. What key links were most important in leading to the problem behavior? (In other words, if you had eliminated these behaviors, the problem behavior probably would not have happened.)

- A. Go back to the chain of behaviors following the prompting event. Circle each link where, if you had done something different, you would have avoided the problem behavior.
- B. What could you have done differently at each link in the chain of events to avoid the problem behavior? What coping behaviors or skillful behaviors could you have used?

7. Describe in detail a PREVENTION STRATEGY for how you could have kept the chain from starting by reducing your vulnerability to the chain.

8. Describe what you are going to do to REPAIR important or significant consequences of the problem behavior.

- A. Analyze: What did you really harm? What was the negative consequence you can repair?
- B. Look at the harm or distress you actually caused others, and the harm or distress you caused yourself. Repair what you damaged. (Don't bring flowers to repair a window you broke: fix the window! Repair a betrayal of trust by being very trustworthy long enough to fit the betrayal, rather than trying to fix it with love letters and constant apologies. Repair failure by succeeding, not by berating yourself.)

GENERAL HANDOUT 8

(General Worksheet 3)

Missing-Links Analysis

Ask the following questions to understand how and why effective behavior that is needed or expected did not occur.

1. Did you know what effective behavior was needed or expected (what skills homework was given, what skills to use, etc.)?

IF NO to Question 1, ask what got in the way of knowing what was needed or expected. Ideas might include not paying attention, unclear instructions, never getting the instructions in the first place, becoming too overwhelmed and couldn't process the information, and so on.

PROBLEM-SOLVE what got in the way. For example, you might work on paying attention, ask for clarification when you don't understand instructions, call others, look up information, and so on.

2. IF YES to Question 1, ask were you willing to do the needed or expected effective behavior?

IF NO to Question 2, ask what got in the way of willingness to do effective behaviors. Ideas might include willfulness, feeling inadequate, or feeling demoralized.

PROBLEM-SOLVE what got in the way of willingness. For example, you might practice radical acceptance, do pros and cons, practice opposite action, and so on.

3. IF YES to Question 2, ask did the thought of doing the needed or expected effective behavior ever enter your mind?

IF NO to Question 3,

PROBLEM-SOLVE how to get the thought of doing effective behaviors into your mind. For example, you might put it on your calendar, set your alarm to go off, put your skills notebook next to your bed, practice coping ahead with difficult situations (see Emotion Regulation Handout 19), and so on.

4. IF YES to Question 3, ask what got in the way of doing the needed or expected effective behavior right away? Ideas might include putting it off, continuing to procrastinate, not being in the mood, forgetting how to do what was needed, thinking that no one would care anyway (or no one would find out), and so on.

PROBLEM-SOLVE what got in the way. For example, you might set a reward for doing what is expected, practice opposite action, do pros and cons, and so on.



General Worksheets

Orientation Worksheet



GENERAL WORKSHEET 1

([General Handout 1](#))

Pros and Cons of Using Skills

Due Date: _____ Name: _____ Week Starting: _____

Use this worksheet to figure out the advantages and disadvantages to you of using skills (i.e., acting skillfully) to reach your goals. The idea here is to figure out what is the most effective way for you to get what you want in life. Remember, this is about your goals, not someone else's goals.

Describe the situation or problem:

Describe your goal in this situation:

Make a list of the Pros and Cons of practicing your skills in this situation.

Make another list of the Pros and Cons for not practicing your skills or of not practicing them completely.

Check the facts to be sure that you are correct in your assessment of advantages and disadvantages.

Write on the back if you need more space.

PROS	Practicing Skills	Not Practicing Skills
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
CONS	Practicing Skills	Not Practicing Skills
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

What did you decide to do in this situation? _____

Is this the best decision (in Wise Mind)? _____

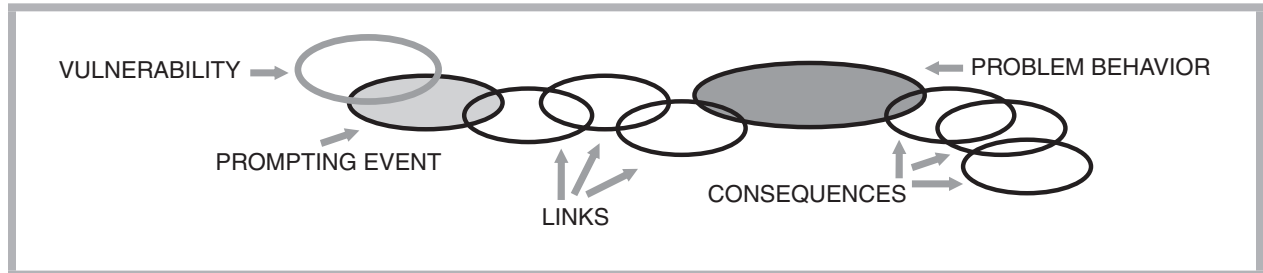
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Worksheets for Analyzing Behavior

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Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior

Due Date: _____ Name: _____ Date: _____



1. What exactly is the major **PROBLEM BEHAVIOR** that I am analyzing?

2. What **PROMPTING EVENT** in the environment started me on the chain to my problem behavior? Include what happened **RIGHT BEFORE** the urge or thought came into my mind.

Day prompting event occurred: _____

3. Describe what things in myself and in my environment made me **VULNERABLE**.

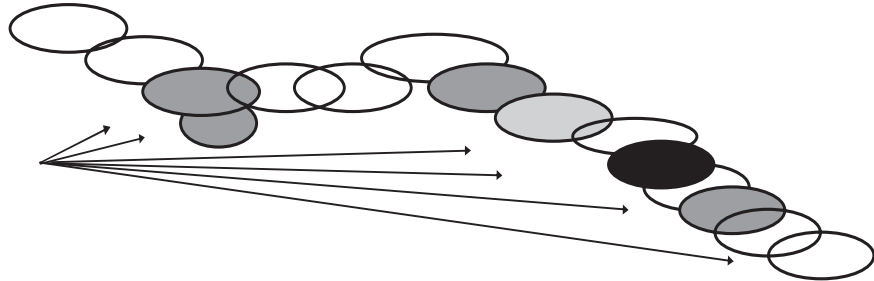
Day the events making me vulnerable started: _____

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LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVENTS: Behaviors (Actions, Body sensations, Cognitions/Thoughts, Feelings) and Events (in the environment)

Possible Types of Links

- A. Actions
- B. Body sensations
- C. Cognitions/thoughts
- E. Events
- F. Feelings



4. List the **chain of events** (specific behaviors and environmental events that actually did happen). Use the ABC-EF list above.

1st. _____

2nd. _____

3rd. _____

4th. _____

5th. _____

6th. _____

7th. _____

8th. _____

9th. _____

6. List new, more **skillful** behaviors to replace ineffective behaviors. Use the ABC-EF list.

1st. _____

2nd. _____

3rd. _____

4th. _____

5th. _____

6th. _____

7th. _____

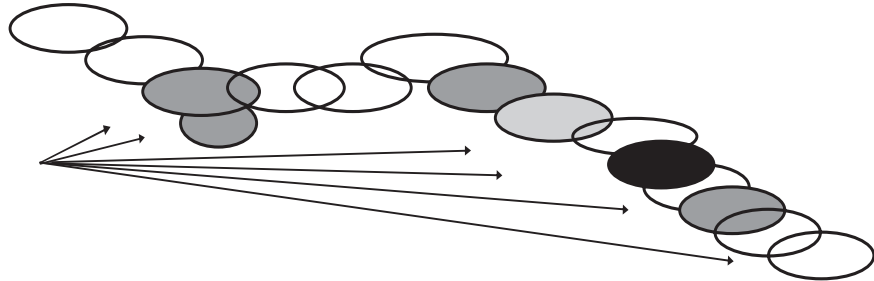
8th. _____

9th. _____

LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVENTS: Behaviors (Actions, Body sensations, Cognitions/Thoughts, Feelings) and Events (in the environment)

Possible Types of Links

- A. Actions
- B. Body sensations
- C. Cognitions/thoughts
- E. Events
- F. Feelings



4. List the **chain of events** (specific behaviors and environmental events that actually did happen). Use the ABC-EF list above.

10th. _____

11th. _____

12th. _____

13th. _____

14th. _____

15th. _____

16th. _____

17th. _____

6. List new, more **skillful** behaviors to replace ineffective behaviors. Use the ABC-EF list.

10th. _____

11th. _____

12th. _____

13th. _____

14th. _____

15th. _____

16th. _____

17th. _____

5. What exactly were the *consequences* in the environment?

And in myself?

What *harm* did my problem behavior cause?

7. *Prevention plans:*

Ways to reduce my *vulnerability* in the future:

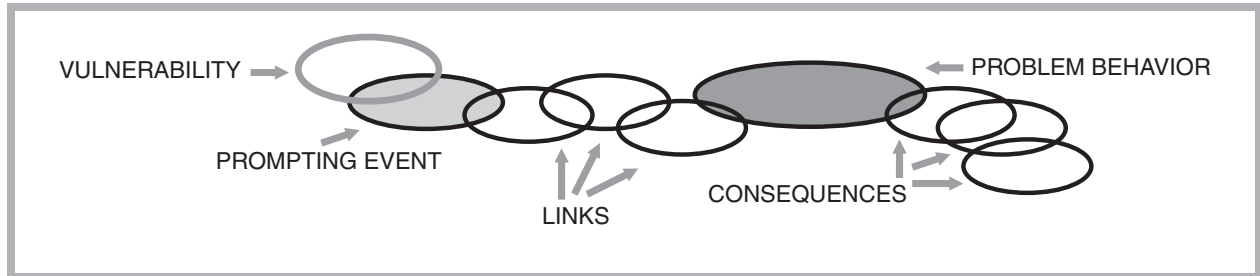
Ways to prevent *precipitating event* from happening again:

8. Plans to *repair, correct, and overcorrect* the harm:

Example: Chain Analysis of Problem Behavior

Due Date: _____ Name: _____ Date: _____

Problem Behavior: _____



1. What exactly is the major **PROBLEM BEHAVIOR** that I am analyzing?

Drinking too much and driving drunk

2. What **PROMPTING EVENT** in the environment started me on the chain to my problem behavior? Include what happened **RIGHT BEFORE** the urge or thought came into my mind.

Day prompting event occurred: Monday

My sister from out of town called me and said she was not going to come visit me the next week like she had said she would, because her husband had an important business party he wanted her to attend with him.

3. Describe what things in myself and in my environment made me **VULNERABLE**.

Day the events making me vulnerable started: Sunday

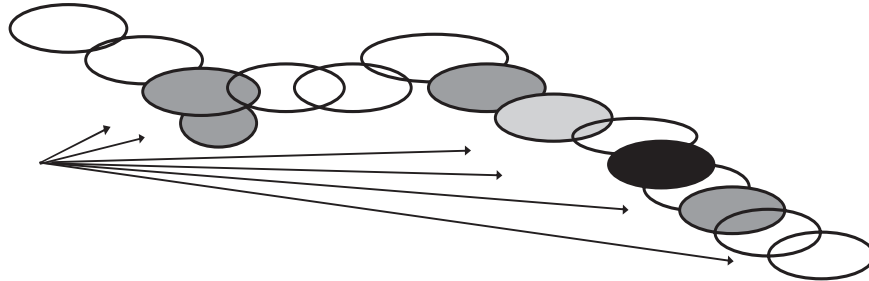
My boyfriend said he had to take a business trip sometime in the next month.

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LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVENTS: Behaviors (Actions, Body sensations, Cognitions/Thoughts, Feelings) and Events (in the environment)

Possible Types of Links

- A. Actions
- B. Body sensations
- C. Cognitions/thoughts
- E. Events
- F. Feelings



4. List the **chain of events** (specific behaviors and environmental events that actually did happen). Use the ABC-EF list above.

1st. *I felt hurt and started sobbing on the phone with my sister and was angry with her.*

2nd. *I thought, "I can't stand it. No one loves me."*

3rd. *I felt very ashamed once I hung up from talking to my sister.*

4th. *I thought "My life is useless; no one will ever be here for me."*

5th. *Tried watching TV, but nothing was on I liked.*

6th. *I started feeling agitated and thought, "I can't stand this."*

7th. *I decided to drink a glass of wine to feel better, but ended up drinking two whole bottles.*

8th. *Got in my car to drive to a late-night concert.*

9th. *While I was bending down to pick up a piece of paper, car swerved. I was stopped by a cop and taken in on a DUI.*

6. List new, more **skillful** behaviors to replace ineffective behaviors. Use the ABC-EF list.

1st. *Listen to why my sister could not come.*

2nd. *Remember that my sister and my boyfriend love me.*

3rd. *Check the facts; is my sister going to reject me over this?*

4th. *Call my sister back and apologize for being angry (since I know she will validate how I feel).*

5th. *Download a movie, work on a puzzle, or call a friend instead.*

6th. *Try my TIP skills to bring down arousal.*

7th. *Walk down the street and have a dinner out, because I won't drink too much in public.*

8th. *Call my boyfriend and ask him to come over for a while.*

9th. *Take a long bath, try TIP skills again; Keep checking the facts; remember these emotions will pass; call my therapist for help.*

5. What exactly were the *consequences* in the environment?

Short-term: I had to spend the night in jail.

Long-term: My boyfriend has less trust in me; my sister is upset about it.

And in myself?

Short-term: I am ashamed and furious with myself.

Long-term: I will have to pay more for car insurance and may have trouble getting a job.

What *harm* did my problem behavior cause?

It hurt me by giving me a DUI record. My sister feels guilty because she upset me.

7. *Prevention plans*:

Ways to reduce my *vulnerability* in the future:

Make plans for how to cope whenever my boyfriend is out of town.

Ways to prevent *precipitating event* from happening again:

I can't keep the precipitating event from happening, so I need to practice coping ahead and have plans for how to manage when I am at home alone.

8. Plans to *repair, correct, and overcorrect* the harm:

Apologize to my sister and reassure her that she has a perfect right to change her plans.

Work with her to plan a new time for a visit. Ask if it would be easier for her if I came to visit her.

GENERAL WORKSHEET 3

(General Handout 8)

Missing-Links Analysis

To understand missing effective behavior, do a missing-links analysis.

Due Date: _____ Name: _____ Date: _____

Missing Behavior: _____

Use this sheet to first figure out what got in the way of doing things you needed or hoped to do, or things you agreed to do or others expected you to do. Then use that information to problem-solve, so that you will be more likely to do what is needed, hoped for, or expected next time.

1. Did I know what effective behavior was needed or expected? Yes ___ No ___

IF NO to Question 1, what got in the way of knowing? _____

Describe problem solving: _____
_____ STOP

2. IF YES to Question 1, was I willing to do what was needed? Yes ___ No ___

IF NO to Question 2, what got in the way of wanting to do what was needed? _____

Describe problem solving: _____
_____ STOP

3. IF YES to Question 2, did the thought of doing what was needed or expected ever enter my mind? Yes ___ No ___

IF NO to Question 3, describe problem solving: _____

4. IF YES to Question 3, what got in the way of doing what was needed or expected right away?

Describe problem solving: _____
_____ STOP