

Behaviour Chain Analysis (Made Simple)

Understanding Why Behaviours Happen and How to Change Them

Behaviour Chain Analysis (BCA) is one of the core tools used in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). Rather than asking 'What is wrong with me?', BCA asks 'What happened, what kept the behaviour going, and where can I make changes next time?' This handout is designed to help you understand the process and then practise it using the worksheets that follow.

What is Behaviour Chain Analysis?

A behaviour chain is like replaying a difficult situation in slow motion. Most behaviours do not happen out of nowhere. They are influenced by vulnerability factors, a prompting event, thoughts, emotions, body sensations, urges, actions, and consequences. By understanding each link in the chain, we can identify opportunities to respond differently.

Why use a Behaviour Chain Analysis?

- Increase self-awareness without self-judgment.
- Understand patterns that keep repeating.
- Identify triggers and vulnerabilities.
- Reduce impulsive reactions.
- Strengthen coping skills.
- Build a life that is more consistent with your values.

The Behaviour Chain

1. Vulnerability Factors
2. What made you more emotionally vulnerable before the event? Consider sleep, eating, illness, hormones, stress, loneliness, conflict, substance use or burnout.
3. Prompting Event
4. Describe the event objectively, without interpretations.
5. Links in the Chain
6. Notice each thought, feeling, body sensation, urge and behaviour that followed.
7. Problem Behaviour
8. Describe exactly what you did.
9. Consequences
10. What happened immediately? What happened later?
11. Repair and Prevention

What skills could interrupt the chain next time?

Example

Prompting Event: My friend did not reply to my text.

Thought: They must be upset with me.

Emotion: Anxiety.

Body: Tight chest.

Urge: Send more texts.

Behaviour: Sent six messages.

Immediate consequence: Temporary relief.

Long-term consequence: Conflict and embarrassment.

Alternative skills: STOP, Check the Facts, Wise Mind, self-soothing, waiting 30 minutes before responding.

Worksheet 1: Describe the Behaviour

What behaviour would you like to understand better?

Worksheet 2: Vulnerability Factors

What was happening before the event?

Sleep:

Eating:

Stress:

Physical health:

Relationships:

Work or school:

Other:

Worksheet 3: Behaviour Chain

Prompting Event

Link 1

Link 2

Link 3

Link 4

Link 5

Problem Behaviour

Immediate Consequences

Long-term Consequences

Skills to Try Next Time

Reflection

What surprised you about your chain?

Where could you have interrupted the chain?

What strengths did you notice?

What skill will you practise this week?

Key Takeaways

Behaviours are rarely random. Every behaviour has a context. Curiosity is more effective than criticism. Small changes early in the chain can prevent larger problems later. Lasting change happens through repeated practice, not perfection.

KALM Psychology

Evidence-based therapy for adolescents, adults, couples, and families.

If you found this resource helpful and would like support putting these skills into practice, KALM Psychology offers individual therapy, DBT-informed treatment, therapy intensives, and DBT skills groups.

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