



Emotional ABC's

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Name: _____

A cognitive therapy workbook
By www.keepyourchildsafe.org
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You've probably heard the phrase: "I think, therefore I am." But have you ever stopped to think about why you think the things you do?

Especially when it comes to our feelings, it's important to know where our thoughts come from, so that we can spot negative ideas when we have them.



What a person thinks when things go badly will determine how they feel. For instance, Jessica was on her way to lunch when she slipped on a banana peel. People started laughing. This made Jessica think: "Oh my gosh, I'm such a klutz. I can't believe that happened. How embarrassing. What a horrible, awful thing . . . everyone must think I'm a real idiot."



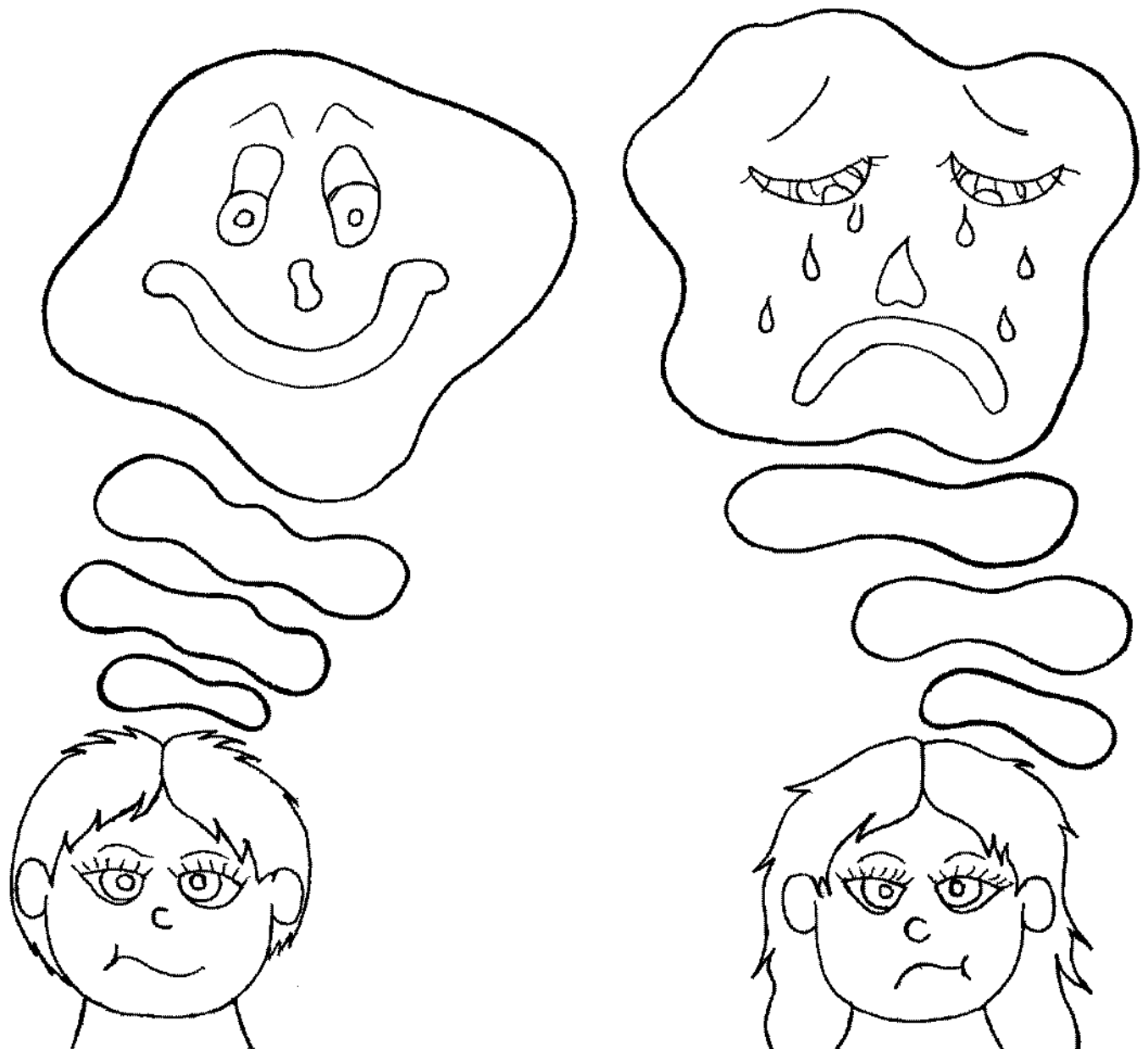
John was heading to lunch when he slipped on the same banana peel. People started laughing. John also laughed and thought: "How hilarious! How often in life do you actually slip on a banana peel? It's just like a cartoon . . . how awesome! That would have been really cool if I could have rode it all the way to the lunch trays. I can't wait to tell everyone about this crazy experience.

Tell me: Which person do you think had worse feelings afterwards . . . John or Jessica?

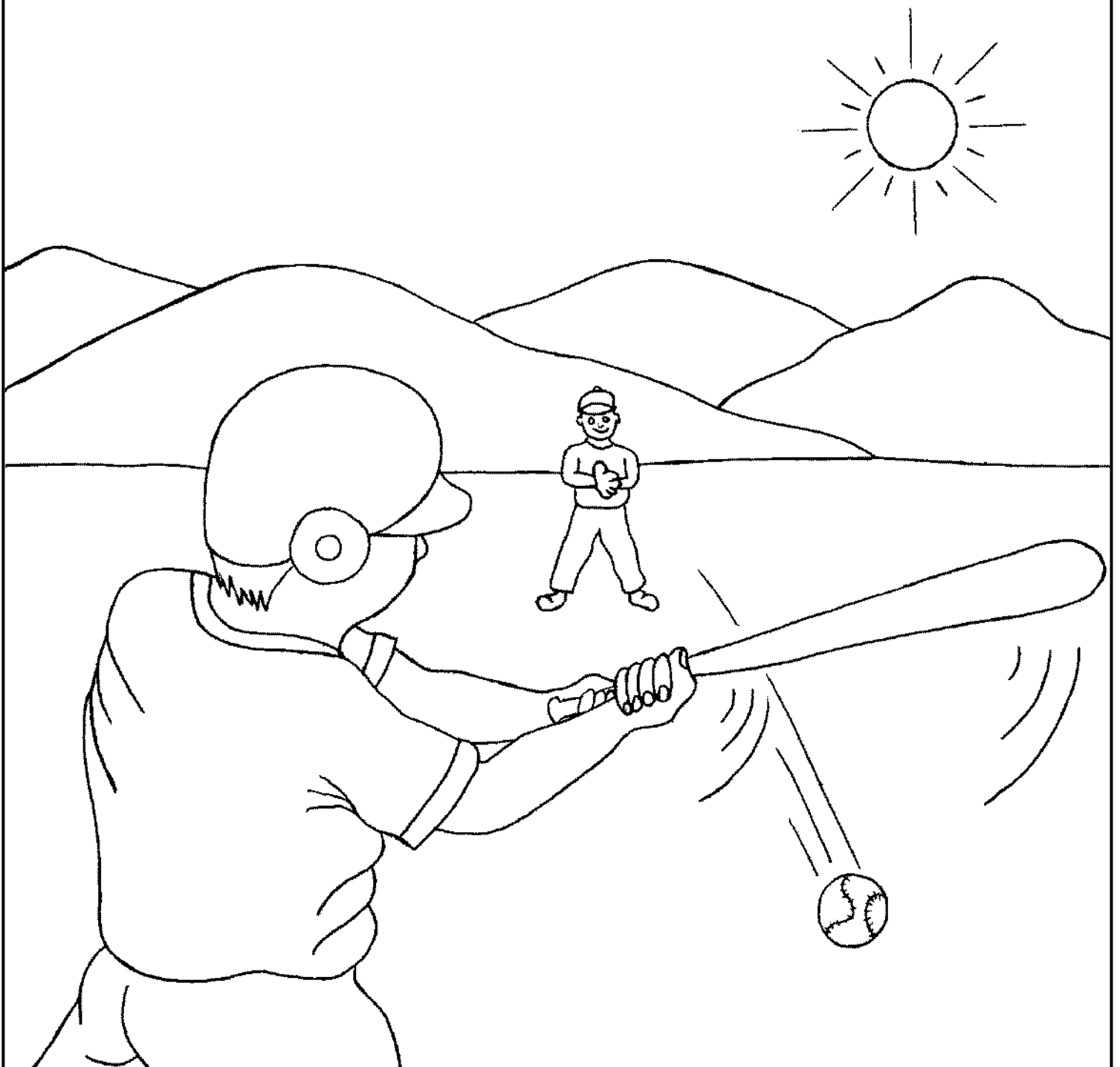


Both kids had the exact same thing happen to them. But because they each thought about their experience in different ways, each person had completely different feelings afterwards. One person felt happy and energized, while the other felt sad and embarrassed.

The truth is that our feelings don't just pop out of nowhere . . . we create them with our thoughts. We're going to teach you a simple formula that spells out how we come to feel the way we do, and it's as simple as A-B-C.



A stands for **A**ction or **A**ctivating event. In other words, something happens. Maybe you trip on the sidewalk. Maybe you strike out while playing baseball and lose the game. Maybe your parents yell at you. Maybe someone hits you or says something mean and hurtful. All of these things stir our emotions and are called activating events.



In the space below, think of 3 things that have happened to you recently and how they made you feel:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

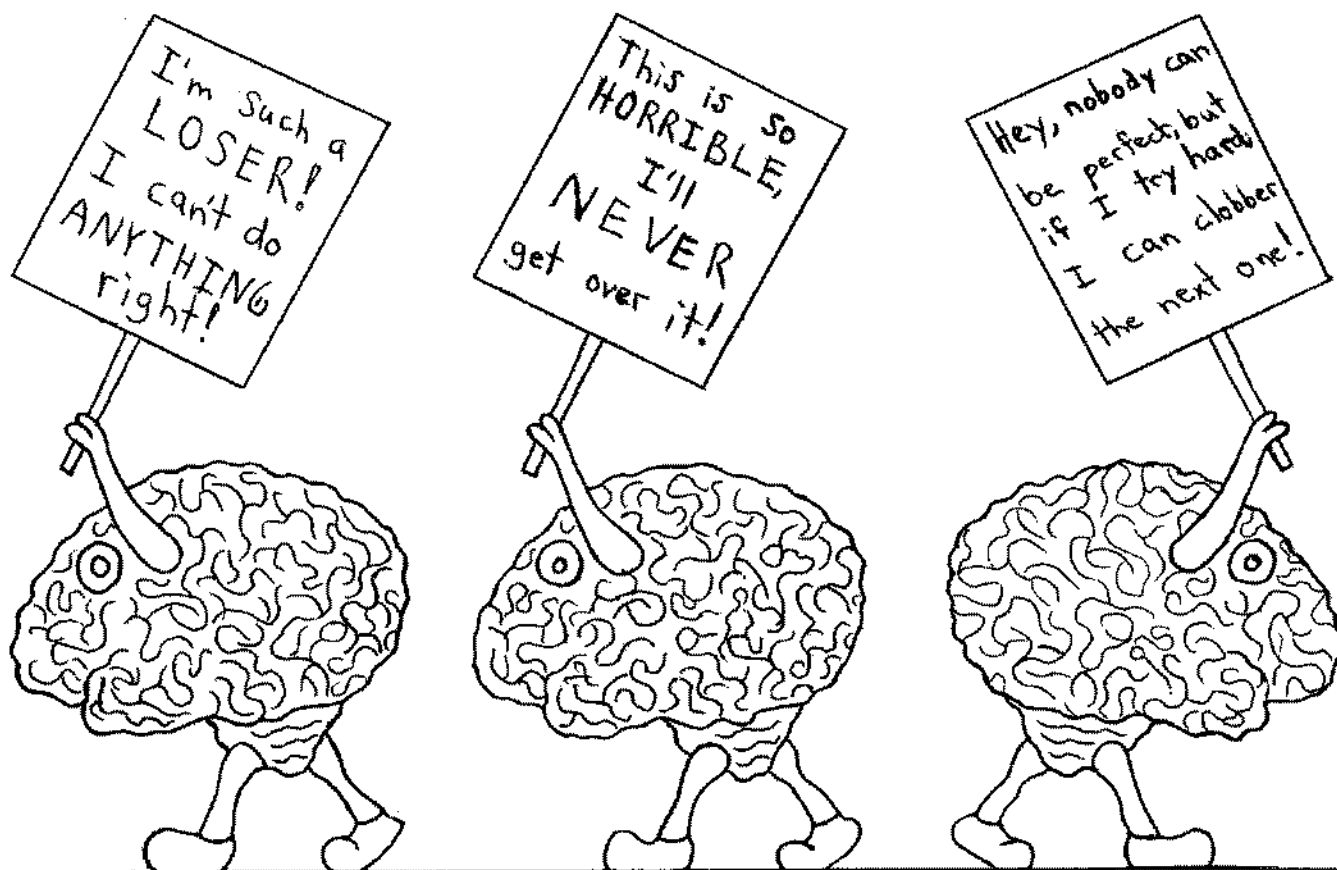
As soon as something happens, our brain goes to work trying to figure out what it all means. Almost instantly, we form Beliefs about this action or event. We ask ourselves:

Why did this happen? Why did he do that?

How does it affect my life?

What does it mean about me as a person?

How we answer these questions will determine how we feel. If I strike out while playing baseball and tell myself, "this happened because I'm terrible at baseball; I let my team down and now they all hate me, I'm such a horrible person . . ." then I'll feel bad. But if I tell myself: "Wow! That was a good pitch. Normally I can hit fast balls. That's OK though, we'll try hard to beat them next time because I'm a good player and we have a good team," I won't feel nearly as bad.



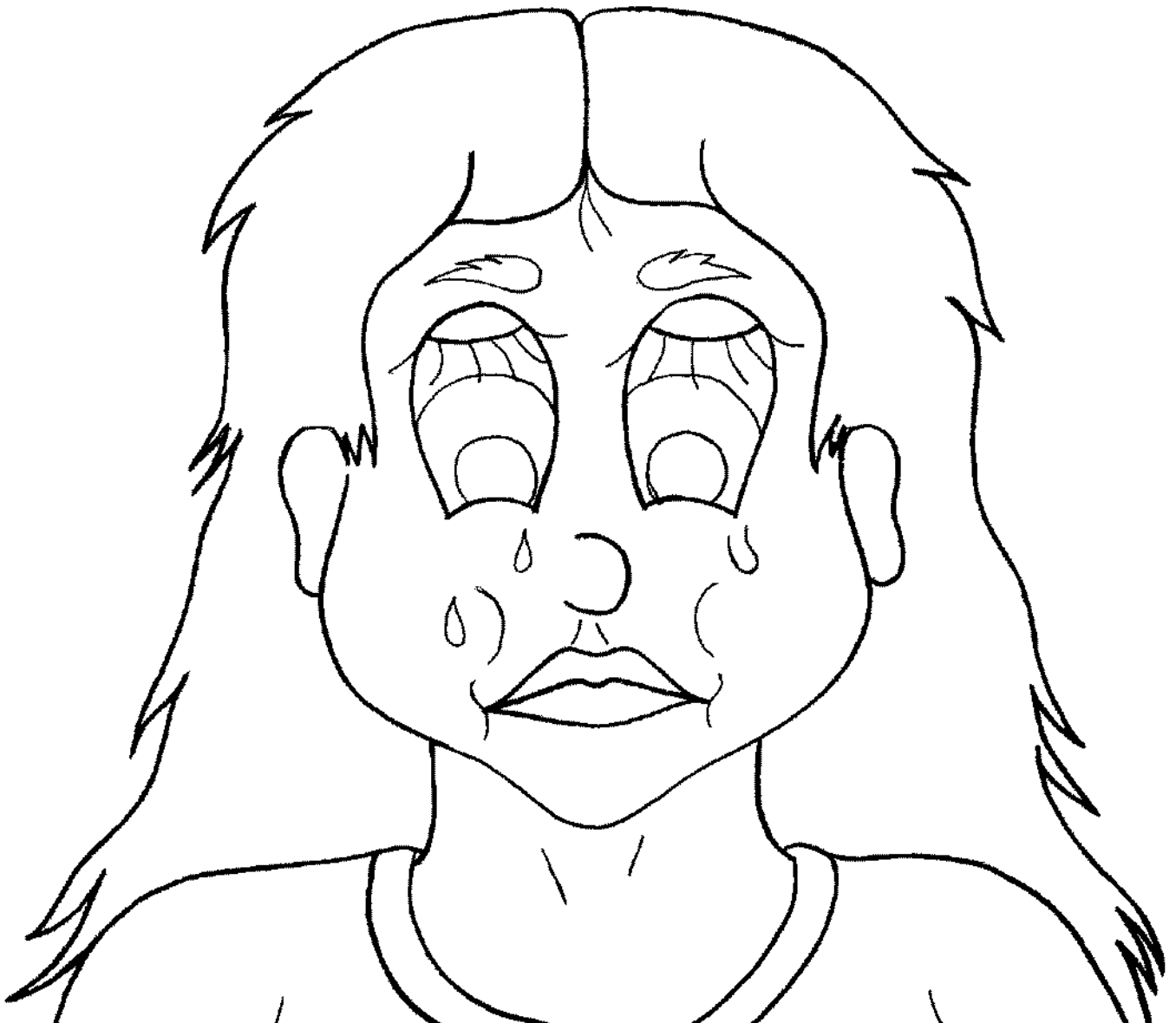
Think back to the 3 recent events you wrote about earlier. For each one, write down the thoughts that go through your head when you first think about these things. When you're done, think about asking a friend, parent, or teacher to read through these thoughts and tell you how accurate they are.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Finally, C is for Consequences. When you put A and B together, you get C. When Jessica slipped on the banana peel and believed that this made her look like a fool, the consequence was that she was embarrassed and felt bad the rest of the day. She was so busy feeling ashamed of herself that she didn't do as well as she could have on a math test, which is normally her best subject! In fact, she continued to feel bad each time she merely *thought* about this experience, long after the day was over.



We can't always change what happens to us. Life is messy, people are imperfect, and difficult experiences are bound to happen from time to time. But *we can* change our belief and adjust the way we think about things. You get to decide how you let these experiences affect you. Change your thoughts and you can completely change your feelings!

