

Chain Analysis: Understanding a Difficult Moment

When something difficult happens — an urge acted on, a blow-up, a moment we regret — it can feel like it came out of nowhere. It rarely did. A chain analysis slows the sequence down, link by link, so the moment becomes something to understand and work with rather than a mystery to dread.

How to use this: Pick one specific incident, not a general pattern. Work through the chain in order. Be as concrete and specific as you can — exact thoughts, exact body sensations, exact words — rather than summarising.

The chain

Vulnerability factors

What made you more susceptible that day — poor sleep, skipped meals, illness, an earlier stressful event, substance use?

The prompting event

What specifically set this off? Be precise — the exact moment, not the general situation.

Thoughts

What went through your mind in the moments right after?

Feelings

What emotions came up, and how intense were they (0–100)?

Body sensations

What did you notice physically?

The urge or action

What did you feel like doing, and what did you actually do?

Immediate consequence

What happened right afterward — relief, shame, a reaction from someone else?

Longer-term consequence

What happened over the following hours or days?

Where could this have gone differently?

Looking back along the chain, is there a link — a vulnerability, a thought, a moment right before the action — where a different response might have changed what followed? This isn't about blame; it's about finding the earliest, most changeable point in the sequence.

Grounded in behaviour chain analysis as used in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (Linehan).