

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy

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Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is a comprehensive approach to psychological treatment that deals not only with the emotional and behavioral aspects of human disturbance, but places a great deal of stress on its thinking component. Human beings are exceptionally complex, and there neither seems to be any simple way in which they become "emotionally disturbed," nor is there a single way in which they can be helped to be less-defeating. Their psychological problems arise from their misperceptions and mistaken cognitions about what they perceive; from their emotional under reactions or over reactions to normal and unusual stimuli; and from their habitually dysfunctional behavior patterns, which enable them to keep repeating non-adjustive responses even when they "know" that they are behaving poorly.

Rational emotive behaviour therapy developed by Dr Albert Ellis, is a system of counselling or psychotherapy which teaches clients how their belief systems largely determine how they feel about and act towards situations, problems and life events in their lives. It focuses

on four types of thinking that largely cause stress: rigid demands such as 'musts' and 'shoulds'; awfulizing such as, 'Life is really awful; low frustration tolerance, e.g. 'I can't stand the pressure of work'; damnation of self or others, e.g. 'As I failed my exam, I am a real failure as a person'. What we think determines what we feel. But what types of thinking are problematical for human beings - an irrational thinking. It blocks persons from achieving their goals, creates extreme emotions that persist and which distress and immobilise, and leads to behaviours that harm oneself, others, and one's life in general. It distorts reality (it is a misinterpretation of what is happening and is not supported by the available evidence); it contains illogical ways of evaluating oneself, others, and the world: demandingness, awfulising, discomfort-intolerance and people-rating.

ABC Framework of REBT

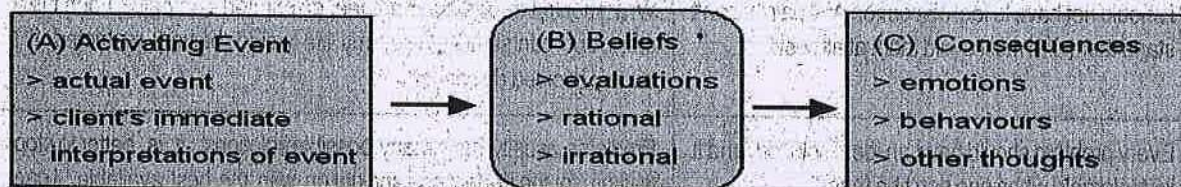
REBT employs the 'ABC framework' — depicted in the figure below — to clarify the relationship between activating events (A); our beliefs about them (B); and the cognitive, emotional or behavioural con-

sequences of our beliefs (C). The ABC model is also used in some renditions of cognitive therapy or cognitive behavioural therapy, where it is also applied to clarify the role of mental activities or predispositions in mediating between experiences and emotional responses.

The figure below shows how the framework distinguishes between the effects of rational beliefs about negative events, which give rise to healthy negative emotions, and the effects of irrational beliefs about negative events, which lead to unhealthy negative emotions.

In addition to the ABC framework, REBT also employs three primary insights:

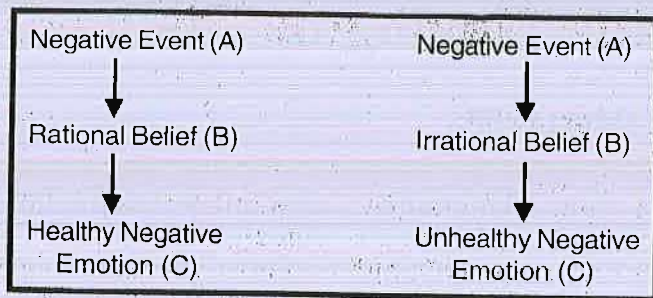
1. While external events are of undoubted influence, psychological disturbance is largely a matter of personal choice in the sense that individuals consciously or unconsciously select both rational beliefs and irrational beliefs at (B) when negative events occur at (A).
2. Past history and present life conditions strongly affect the person, but they do not, in and of themselves, disturb the person; rather, it is the individual's re-



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Rational and Irrational Beliefs

Self-defeating Beliefs	Rational Beliefs
I need love and approval from those significant to me - and I must avoid disapproval from any source.	Love and approval are good things to have and I'll seek them when I can. But they are not necessities - I can survive (even though uncomfortably) without them.
To be worthwhile as a person I must achieve, succeed at whatever I do, and make no mistakes.	I'll always seek to achieve as much as I can - but unflinching success and competence is unrealistic. Better I just accept myself as a person, separate to my performance.
People should always do the right thing. When they behave obnoxiously, unfairly or selfishly, they must be blamed and punished.	It's unfortunate that people sometimes do bad things. But humans are not yet perfect - and upsetting myself won't change that reality.
Things must be the way I want them to be - otherwise life will be intolerable.	There is no law which says that things have to be the way I want. It's disappointing, but I can stand it - especially if I avoid catastrophising.
My unhappiness is caused by things outside my control - so there is little I can do to feel any better.	Many external factors are outside my control. But it is my thoughts (not the externals) which cause my feelings. And I can learn to control my thoughts.
I must worry about things that could be dangerous, unpleasant or frightening - otherwise they might happen.	Worrying about things that might go wrong won't stop them happening. It will, though, ensure I get upset and disturbed right now.
I can be happier by avoiding life's difficulties, unpleasantness, and responsibilities.	Avoiding problems is only easier in the short term - putting things off can make them worse later on. It also gives me more time to worry about them!
Everyone needs to depend on someone stronger than himself / herself.	Relying on someone else can lead to dependent behaviour. It is OK to seek help - as long as I learn to trust myself and my own judgement.
Events in my past are the cause of my problems - and they continue to influence my feelings and behaviour now.	The past can't influence me now. My current beliefs cause my reactions. I may have learned these beliefs in the past, but can choose to analyse and change them in the present.
I should become upset when other people have problems and feel unhappy when they're sad.	I can't change other people's problems and bad feelings by getting myself upset.
I should not have to feel discomfort and pain - I can't stand them and must avoid them at all costs.	Why should I in particular not feel discomfort and pain? I don't like them, but I can stand it. Also, my life would be very restricted if I always avoided discomfort.
Every problem should have an ideal solution, and it is intolerable when one can't be found.	Problems usually have many possible solutions. It is better to stop waiting for the perfect one and get on with the best available. I can live with less than the deal.



sponses which disturb them, and it is again a matter of individual choice whether to maintain the philosophies at (B) which cause disturbance

3. Modifying the philosophies at (B) requires persistence and hard work, but it can be done.

Techniques used in REBT

Ellis recommends a 'selectively eclectic' approach to therapy, using strategies from REBT and other approaches, but ensuring the strategy is compatible with REBT theory. Following are some examples of procedures in common use.

Cognitive Techniques

Rational analysis, Double-standard dispute, Catastrophe scale and Reframing

Imagery Techniques

Time projection and The 'blow-up' technique.

Behavioural techniques

Exposure, Risk-taking, Stepping out of character and Postponing gratification.

Homework

Probably the most important REBT strategy is homework. This can include such activities as reading, self-help exercises, and experiential activities. Therapy sessions are really 'training sessions', between which the client tries out and

uses what they have learned.

Application of REBT

REBT techniques are applied to the treatment of a range of common clinical problems such as anxiety, depression, anger, marital difficulties, poor interpersonal skills, parenting failures, personality disorders, obsessive / compulsive disorders, eating disorders, psychosomatic disorders, addictions, psychotic disorders, to develop social-skills training and develop self management.

REBT is based on a few simple principles having profound implications:

- ◆ You are responsible for your own emotions and actions,
- ◆ Your harmful emotions and dysfunctional behaviors are the product of your irrational thinking,
- ◆ You can learn more realistic views and, with practice, make them a part of you,
- ◆ You'll experience a deeper acceptance of yourself and greater satisfactions in life by developing a reality-based perspective.

REBT suggests that there are three basic musts:

1. Demands about the self;
 2. Demands about others;
 3. Demands about the world.
- Demands about the self will lead to ego disturbance; demands about others and the world will lead primarily to dis-

comfort disturbance.

Conclusion

The basic assumption of the REBT approach to counseling is that most people in our society develop many irrational ways of thinking. These irrational thoughts lead to irrational or inappropriate behavior. Therefore, counseling must be designed to help people recognize and change these irrational beliefs into more rational ones. The accomplishment of this goal requires an active, confrontative, and authoritative counselor who has the capacity to use a great variety of techniques.

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