

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy Techniques for Change

In the first session (Introduction to Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) we explored the theory of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy and learned the ways in which it can alter our behaviours by challenging the way we think. In this reading we will begin to introduce some of the tools available for you to use to alter your emotional reactions, and deal with life on life's terms.

Is it really possible for people to change themselves so that they diminish their upsets, and therefore, no longer upset themselves? The simple answer to this is yes, it is. REBT offers many techniques designed to eliminate these upsets, and many people use these tools with a great degree of success around the world today.

People do not usually eliminate their problems in their entirety, as this would be an extremely unrealistic expectation, however, they do eliminate them enough that they can feel better, and do better on a daily basis. When we work the techniques we will introduce to you in the next few readings for a long time, the hope is that they become second nature, habitual, and just the normal way we deal with life.

The following are some the main techniques we use:

Working the ABC's

The ABC's of REBT are the first technique we try with people. With the ABCs, people can discover their irrational Beliefs.

A - The A in the ABCs is the Activating Event or Adversity, the event about which the person upsets himself. The A may be something the person did, something others did, or conditions they face.

B - The B is the Belief that is usually developed about the A.

C - The C is the Consequent emotions and behaviors.

When working an exercise involving the ABCs, sometimes it is beneficial to first ask yourself for the C, or the consequence, and then move on to the A, activating event, but sometimes it may be beneficial to start at the beginning, this is all depending on your state of mind, or ability to see the problem in its entirety.

For example, if John says he feels depressed, and wants to work on his depression, we already have the C, the Consequent emotion being depression. Next we ask what was the activating event (A), in order to begin work on the irrational belief (B) that causes the depression.



Disputing Irrational Beliefs (DIBs)

As stated, we do the ABCs exercise first in REBT, just as we did in the example above. This procedure helps people to understand their upset, and in particular, it helps them discover their irrational Belief that creates the upset. At first however, it may not seem like an irrational belief, in fact you may think it is a perfectly rational way of thinking.

In order to take a closer look at the belief it is important to dispute its nature, to do this there are several key questions to ask:

- Where is holding on to this belief getting me?
- Is the belief helpful, or is it self-defeating?
- What do I get out of holding on to this belief?
- Where is the evidence to support my belief?
- Is my belief consistent with actuality?
- Is my belief rigid or flexible?
- What's another way I could look at this?
- What other helpful belief can I use to replace this unhelpful belief?

Rational Emotive Imagery

Rational Emotive Imagery (REI) was devised by psychiatrist Maxie Maultsby. It's frequently used in REBT to help us become aware of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions as related to outside influences and events.

REI allows one to view the "big picture", not just a small part of it. It's a technique of the visualization of events to experience and practice emotions and behaviors, involving imagining yourself behaving or feeling differently about a situation by focusing more directly on your emotions rather than the situation or event itself, and then practicing responding to the situation in a different, more rational and effective manner.

So how do you do it? By thinking, of course! Practicing REI will help reduce the emotional upset when encountering the event or the person again. Further, it helps achieve a more rational response style to events or persons that affect you negatively, even if it's the first time you have encountered them.

For example, imagine an event or a person which you get upset about. Get yourself as upset as you possibly can by thinking about it. Once you are vividly into the image and very upset, deliberately settle yourself down. That's right... change your emotional feelings!

Our thoughts have a strong influence on our resulting behaviors. No matter what emotion one is feeling, we can change our thoughts and perceptions about it. It is not so much the emotions (or events) themselves that color our lives; it is our perception of them.

Rational Self-Statements



Rational Self-Statements are designed to replace irrational Beliefs, they are usually helpful to people after disputing a belief, but not before. They will not replace the disputing exercise because even if people combat their irrational thinking with "positive thinking", they will tend to keep their irrational Beliefs unless they challenge them and find them to be nonsense.

However, Rational Self-Statements can be helpful after irrational beliefs are successfully disputed; here are some examples of Rational Self-Statements:

- When others dislike my behavior, it does not make me worthless.
- I'm never a loser, no matter what others say.
- Even though I want the approval of others, I don't "need" it.

Behaviour Change

REBT strongly emphasizes behavior change. To live better, people need to do better, not just feel better. Sometimes directly working on behavior change is very helpful in changing irrational Beliefs.

For example, overcoming shyness. Someone who is shy is often thinking as a "perfectionist", they put themselves down for failure, and they do not approach people to talk with them.

Disputing will help them eliminate their irrational thinking, but working hard at approaching people is very important for eliminating this problem. After all, that's what the problem is, a failure to talk to people. Overcoming the problem means approaching people, not just eliminating the irrational beliefs and anxiety.

In the next session we will look at each tool in more depth and explore the possible ways in which you can maximise their use for your own recovery journey.