



Introduction to Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)

It is important for us to begin by taking a look at the basic theory behind using the tools of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy to assist you in your recovery. Much of what we discuss in group in group and individual sessions lies in the theory behind REBT. Over the coming weeks we will explore the ways in which we can use the tools that we have access to, in order to impact our lives in a positive manner, and help understand the emotional reactions we all experience.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, or REBT, is a form of psychotherapy and self-help that a large number of people find helpful, and an approach that is used on a regular basis when dealing with the issues surrounding addiction. It is an extremely versatile form of psychotherapy that can be used in a number of formats, including self-help groups, individual psychotherapy, reading of REBT literature, and listening to REBT lectures.

It was the brain child of Doctor Albert Ellis, Ph.D. in 1955, and subsequently it has become significantly influential in the field of psychotherapy. For instance, since its introduction, other similar forms of therapy have been formed that include many of the principles of REBT. These include Cognitive Therapy (CT) and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT).

The Theory of REBT

Thoughts, emotions, and behavior are all very closely related. Nearly all of the important concepts in REBT deal with our thinking and how it has a massive influence on us, whether it is beneficial or detrimental.

When you have the thought "I like that", you feel pleased, and when you think, "I don't like that" you feel displeased. We call these thoughts "rational" and the emotions "helpful" because they help us to gain happiness and resolve our daily problems.

It would be nice if we only ever had thoughts like these, but unfortunately, we don't. Most of us add absolutistic and illogical beliefs in to the process, such as "I have to have what I want; I must not be disappointed, and because I have failed in the past, I can never succeed in the future." These beliefs are irrational and give us hindering emotions that usually feel miserable.

Does this mean that we are hopelessly locked into these automatic ways of thinking? No, it definitely does not. We can significantly alter our irrational tendencies by educating ourselves and developing insight into our thoughts, emotions and behaviors through hard work and repeated practice.



The Main Irrational Beliefs

The main irrational Beliefs we tend to experience revolve around self-statements like "should", "ought to", "must" and "have to". Along with these, we add others in to the mix like "awful", "horrible", "terrible", and "can't stand". Furthermore, we add all or nothing thinking, and we tend to damn ourselves for our mistakes and others for theirs.

All-or-nothing thinking, sometimes called black and white or absolute thinking, is one of many negative thought processes we can develop that are known as cognitive distortions. When thinking in all-or-nothing terms, a person splits their views into extremes. This can encompass everything, from the person's view of themselves to their life experiences, and it then becomes divided into black-or-white terms. Consequently this leaves room for little, if any, grey area in between and feeds into our negative thought patterns.

The three main areas in which we develop our irrational Beliefs are:

- Beliefs about ourselves
- Beliefs about other people
- Beliefs about the conditions of the world

Let's look at these three main irrational Beliefs, along with the emotions and behaviors that usually accompany them.

Beliefs About Yourself

I must do well and gain the approval of others or else I am no good; it's awful when I do less well than I want to do; I can't stand it when I do badly, I should be severely punished.

Beliefs like this create the hindering emotions of anxiety, guilt, shame, self-loathing, and self-hatred, and it sometimes precedes anger. It also may contribute to the behaviors of procrastination and can lead to suicidal ideation.

Beliefs About Other People

You, meaning others, must treat me nicely and kindly, and in just the way I want or else you're no good; your lousy behavior is awful, and I can't stand to be in your presence. When you do badly you should roast in hell.

Beliefs like this accompany anger, hostility, and rage, and it may lead to fights, and revenge or "getting even".

Beliefs About the Conditions of the World

The world should make it easier for me to gain happiness, and it absolutely must not give me hassles or else it's a lousy, rotten world that is totally unfair; I can't stand the difficulties and hassles the world gives me; it's awful to put up with this hardship.

Beliefs like this contribute to frustration intolerance, depression, procrastination, suicidal ideation, and addiction.



Secondary Upsets



Not only do we make ourselves upset because of these beliefs, we often *notice* that we are upset, and then upset ourselves further because of our upsets!

We might notice that we are depressed, and then internally say to ourselves I shouldn't be depressed; I can't stand it. Or, we notice that our thinking is crooked and we tell ourselves, I shouldn't be thinking so crazily; I'm a real oddball, and I must not be that way; it's awful.

Finally, we can notice our self-defeating behavior and become upset about it by thinking, for example, I got drunk last night after a month's sobriety; that means I'm a hopeless case, and I will always fail; what a horrible person I am.

We call the first upset a Primary Upset and the second a Secondary Upset. The Secondary Upset usually gives us more than twice the misery and makes it harder to overcome the primary upset.

Why? When you upset yourself at something, you easily deal poorly with it. When you upset yourself at your upset, you deal poorly with the upset, which means you keep it longer. Some people keep it for a very long time. They have severe problems due to their upsets; they may even deny they have them, and they end up never doing anything about them.

Next time we will look at some of the tools we can use to change the way we think, and therefore start to alter the emotional responses we are dealing with. By doing this we can begin to build a repertoire of tools at our disposal for working with the many problems life can throw our way