Rational-Emotive Therapy’s A-B-C Theory of Emotional Disturbance

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“People are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them.” Epictetus, 1st century AD
It is not the event, but rather it is our attitudes and beliefs about it, that causes our emotional reaction

A - Activating experience
Woman friend breaks the news that she is going out with another man, and therefore wishes to break off her relationship with you.

B - Irrational Beliefs about the experience
“I really must be a worthless person.”
“I’ll never find another great woman like her.”
“She doesn’t want me; therefore no one could possible want me.”
and/or
“This is awful! “Everything happens to me!”
“That bitch!” She shouldn’t be that way.”
“I can’t stand the world being so unfair and lousy.”

C - upsetting emotional Consequences
Depression and/or Hostility

D - Disputing of irrational ideas
“Where’s the evidence that because this woman wishes to end our relationship, that I’m a worthless person; or that I’ll never be able to have a really good relationship with someone else; or even that I couldn’t be happy alone?”

“Why is it awful that I’m not getting what I want?”
“Why shouldn’t the world be full of injustices?”
“How does her rejecting me make me a bad person?”

E - new Emotional consequence or Effect
Sadness: “Well, we did have a nice relationship, and I’m sorry to see it end – but it did have its problems and now I can go out and find a new friend.”
OR...
Annoyance: “It’s annoying that she was seeing someone but it isn’t awful or intolerable.”