Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: The Basics

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REBT: The Basics

- REBT is a self-help / self-management type of therapy.
- REBT is popular because it makes sense to most people, and they can and do use it.
- REBT helps them better manage their thoughts feelings and behaviors, so it is ideal for SMART Recovery®, as well as for people with multiple, interacting psychological and addictive problems.
According to REBT, our attitudes, our belief, our thoughts -- the way we think about events and the meanings we give to them -- directly affect how we feel and behave. This is commonsense to most people, making REBT more user-friendly than other therapies.
REBT: The Basics

- REBT is useful to SMART Recovery® because the Institute (see www.rebt.org) offers many self-help pamphlets, books, tapes, videos, pocket-sized cards, etc.

- REBT is also the only cognitive-behavioral therapy that encourages people to examine their philosophy of life - their goals, values, etc. -- and how their philosophy affects their self-help efforts (see SMART Recovery’s® Point 4)
REBT: The Basics

- REBT teaches that even though people are determined to some extent by their genetic givens, their upbringing, their family background, etc., they can change.
- REBT focuses on techniques rather than insight. It teaches people how to change.
- REBT encourages them to accept their limitations while working on self-change.
On a deeper level, REBT teaches a profoundly radical (for some) philosophy:

- **Unconditional Self Acceptance (USA)** (Rate your behavior, not your self.)
- **Unconditional Other Acceptance (UOA)** (Rate what others do, but not them.)

Note: This is not a new idea; it is over 2000 years old. Christ also preached it ("Judge the sin, not the sinner.")
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: The Basics

- R = Rational People think of “rational” in many ways, for example, reasonable, helpful, functional...
Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: The Basics

R = Rational... Most people realize that when they think more rationally and reasonably, their life goes better. So this piece of REBT makes sense to them.

E = Emotive  Most people understand that their emotions are affected by what happens to them and how they think about those events.
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B = Behavior   Most people accept that what they do (their behavior) affects how they think and feel.

T = Therapy...but it can also mean Teaching or Training, especially in the context of SMART Recovery®
REBT: The Basics

- Rational - does not mean cold and calculating
- Rational thinking
  - reflects preferences rather than demands
  - is flexible
  - is realistic
  - is functional, helpful, useful -- in terms of someone’s long-term goals and values
REBT: The Basics

Irrational thinking includes:

- demandingness
- inflexibility / rigidity
- awfulizing / catastrophizing
- I-can’t-stand-it-it is (low frustration tolerance, LFT)
- all-or-nothing thinking
- personalizing
- emotional reasoning
REBT: The Basics

Irrational thinking does not work for us. It does not help us obtain our medium and long-term goals.
REBT’s ABC(DE) Technique

- **A** = Activating Event
- **B** = Beliefs (both rational and irrational (IB’s))
- **C** = Consequences
- **D** = Disputing
- **E** = More Effective ways to think, feel and behave.
Many people are A - C people.

- They believe: “You made me angry.”
- They believe the A - your remark or action - caused the C, their anger.
- Your behavior caused their anger.
REBT argues, no, their Beliefs...between the A and the B -- largely determine how they feel.

- **A (Activating)** - He yelled at me.
- **B (Beliefs)** - I can’t believe he dared to yell at me That’s totally unprofessional. He should never have acted that way. I can’t stand it. I want a drink (and I have to have what I want when I want it). I can get a way with it. It won’t matter.
- **C (Consequences)** - Anger, drinking, etc.
The ABC is the diagnostic step in the ABC technique.

Doing an ABC helps people feel empowered and more hopeful that they can understand and, ultimately, control their own thoughts, feelings and behavior more effectively.
ABC: Part II

In order to feel and act differently, someone doing an ABC moves on to the D and the E.

D (Disputes) - in this step, you dispute or question or challenge your irrational beliefs:
Where is the evidence that no one should ever yell at me?
Where is it written that a boss must always behave professionally?
Why is it so awful? Why isn’t just a “hassle not a horror?”
Where is the evidence that “It won’t matter.”
ABC: Part II

E - then they move on to figure out more EFFECTIVE thoughts, feelings and behaviors

- I don’t like it, but I can stand it.
- Because I really do not like people yelling at me, I will talk to him later when he calms down. But I will remember that I don’t always get what I want.
- I will try to feel annoyed and determined (to keep my job) rather than enraged.
- I will go exercise or go to yoga class tonight because I always think better after I do that.
THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF IRRATIONAL THINKING

I deserve better – poor me!
I’m such a failure
I’m worthless!

Self-pity or Self-doubting

Low frustration tolerance

Demanding-ness

Awfulizing

Life shouldn’t be so hard
You should be different
I should be different

I can’t stand it
It’s terrible, awful, unfair

Negative exaggeration
Negative evaluation
We “crank it up” on our scale

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HOW TO BREAK THE VICIOUS CYCLE

- **Self-Pity: Practice unconditional self-acceptance**
  - I’m such a failure –
  - I’m worthless!
  - I deserve better –
  - poor me!

- **Self-doubt: Question your assumptions**
  - I can’t stand it
  - It’s terrible, awful, unfair

- **Demandingness**
  - Life shouldn’t be so hard
  - You should be different
  - I should be different

- **Awfulizing**
  - Negative exaggeration
  - Negative evaluation
  - We “crank it up” on our scale

- **Low frustration tolerance**
  - Try “Preferential Thinking”
  - Try “combat your rating”

- **Self-pity or Self-doubting**
  - Try an ABC reality check

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REBT: The Basics

REBT teaches people tools with which to better manage our lives:

1. Cognitively - ABC’s, reframing, CBA’s
2. Emotively - REI, shame attacks
3. Behaviorally - role playing, homework
4. Chemically - medicines, nutrition, etc.
5. Spiritually - meanings, goals, values, hedonic calculus
Doing an ABC for Urge Coping: Part I

C -- the potential lapse or relapse.
Doing an ABC for Urge Coping: Part I

B -- Work backwards in time. Identify/uncover the B’s.

C -- the potential lapse or relapse.
Typical B’s to Watch For

Rational and irrational beliefs, and cognitive distortions [shoulds, musts, awfulizing, wonderfulizing, LFT (low frustration tolerance)]

1. I can’t stand what I feel.
2. I deserve it.
3. It’s not fair (poor me). Life should be fair / should be better.
4. I’ll just have two.
5. A drink would help...and I must have what I want now.
6. I can’t stand not going to a prostitute/ gambling/drugging.
7. I can get away with it.
8. It won’t matter.
9. I’m going to do it anyway, eventually.
10. Screw it.
Doing an ABC for Urge Coping: Part I

A’s -- Identify/uncover the Activating Events
B’s -- Work backwards in time. Identify/uncover the Beliefs.
1. It’s not fair (i.e. It should be / must be fair).
2. I want a drink (and I should / must have what I want).
3. ?
C -- the potential lapse or relapse.
Potential A’s

Event(s) /Trigger(s) - real and imagined; internal and external

- the opportunity to use/drink/etc.
- urges; conditioned responses
- unpleasant emotions
- unpleasant physical sensations
- pleasant emotions
- pressure from others
- conflict with others
- socializing
- testing personal control
Doing an ABC for Urge Coping: Part I

A’s -- my girlfriend is on a business trip

B’s --
1. I can get away with it.
2. It won’t matter.
3. I’ll just have two.
4. ?

C’s - feelings of excitement, entitlement, etc; lapse/relapse
Ask members how they might Dispute the IB’s
Disputes are always questions.
They help you dispute and/or examine the
rationality, validity, helpfulness, etc. of your IB’s.

What do you mean by ‘I can get away with it’?

Where is the evidence you can just have two?

What are your long-term “wants?”
Ask Individual Members to Suggest More Effective...

- **thoughts**, for example, counter-statements to the IB’s:

  *I may be able to get away with it tonight, but I won’t always, and the tradeoff is not worth it.*

- **behaviors** (things they could DO):
  exercise, fill out a worksheet, review your pros and cons, go to a meeting,…

- **feelings** - self-determination instead of self-entitlement and self-pity; acceptance instead of excitement
  …which will increase the likelihood I will remain abstinent.
Dealing with Lapses and Relapses

KEY POINTS:
- Emphasize acceptance of self with "slips"
- Review --
  - the A’s and B’s before the slip
  - the B’s and C’s afterwards
- Rehearse -- Better Ways to Maintain Abstinence
General Irrational Beliefs which May Affect How Well You Function as a Facilitator

- I must do very well almost all the time.
- I must have everyone’s approval.
- People should be different.
- I should be different.
- The world should be different.
Specific Irrational Beliefs which May Affect How Well You Function as a Facilitator

1. I must run a good meeting.
2. I must help people who are in serious trouble.
3. Everyone has to like my meeting.
4. I am losing control of this meeting, as I mustn’t. It would terrible if I lost control of this meeting.
5. It would be terrible if other people thought they could run a better meeting.
6. No one must ever appear as if he/she is bored.
7. It would be awful to fail at running good meetings.