

Three Minute REBT

Learning to Roll With the Punches

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People do well when thinking of their happiness and when seeking to attain it. Whether happiness is found in your work, with your mate, or in more short-term endeavors, you do well when you can focus your attention on it and enjoy it.

Unfortunately, bad things happen. They include physical illnesses, acts of self-neglect, problems of aging, and ordinary mistakes.

You may have two cognitive-behavioral reactions to bad events. You may simply accept the problem, i.e., acknowledge that it is bad without demanding that it vanish, or you may add an emotional upset—believe that it shouldn't be as it is and that it's truly awful. (Denial may be considered a third, but it usually comes after the second.)

With either reaction, you have a problem that life has given you. With the second response, however, you have an additional problem, an emotional disturbance that can get you absorbed in your problems while hindering you more. In REBT, we advise getting rid of the disturbance first.

Disputing irrational beliefs is REBT's primary technique. In Disputing, you challenge the belief that bad things shouldn't happen by asking *Is there any evidence my belief is true?* You can do the same with the belief that bad things are awful. The sensible answer is *no*.

By repeatedly challenging your thinking, you realize more deeply the nonsense of your emotional disturbances and conclude that, indeed, bad things do happen. They can happen to you now, and they will happen to you again, and you will do better to accept them. With that, you can more readily change the negative events that can be changed and develop the wisdom to know the difference between those you can and cannot change. (This concept was first clearly stated not by AA but by the philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr.)

Furthermore, you can develop this wisdom to the extent that, in many instances, you can quickly realize you can't change some things. Then you can just roll with the punches and move on toward attaining happiness.