

## Three Minute REBT: Characteristics of Irrational Thinking

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The roots of human irrationality are largely biological. Albert Ellis stated this as early as 1960. If you blame your parents for any of your problems, blame them not for their behavior toward you, but for the genes they gave you.

Our biology facilitates self-generated beliefs. These include *shoulds*, *oughts*, *musts*, *can't stands*, *awfuls*, *horribles* and beliefs of *worthlessness* and *damnation*. These beliefs are absolutistic, and they lead to demandingness, whining, and low self-esteem. When you are trying to use REBT to help yourself, understanding some of the characteristics of these beliefs may be helpful. Several follow.

We add these beliefs to our desires. We go from thinking *I want* to *I must have*, from *I don't like* to *I can't stand*, and from *I failed* to *I'm worthless*. When you eliminate these beliefs, you can act better on your desires so that you get more of what you want.

We create these beliefs easily. Going from desire to irrational thinking is about as effortless as our bodies turning too many calories into fat.

We may be unaware that we have these beliefs, but we can become aware of them by bringing our attention to them. In your recovery group, someone may point out your irrational thinking to you. Also, in REBT we teach the ABCs, a self-discovery procedure that can help you discover your irrational beliefs. (You may find descriptions of this procedure in several of my articles at [www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org).)

These beliefs usually take work to eliminate. You may believe that quitting drinking *must* be easy. Effort is usually required to eliminate this belief. You may (1) dispute this belief by asking yourself *Is there any evidence my belief is true?* (2) discover the answer is *no*, but (3) continue to hold to the belief. Doing repetitive disputing (more work), however, can serve to weaken the belief more and more until you no longer believe it. (You may also find more on disputing irrational beliefs by reading my articles at [www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org).)

To summarize and conclude, your irrational beliefs aren't mere erroneous ideas that you've learned from your parents or your culture. They are self-generated ideas that are directly connected to your desires that can be changed by work and practice. Change them, and you will do better.