**Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy (Ellis)**

**Theoretical assumptions**

A fundamental premise of REBT is humans do not get emotionally disturbed by unfortunate circumstances, but by how they construct their views of these circumstances through their language, evaluative beliefs, meanings and philosophies about the world, themselves and others.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-ellis1-11) This concept has been attributed as far back as the Roman philosopher [Epictetus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epictetus), who is often cited as utilizing similar ideas in antiquity.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-12) In REBT, clients usually learn and begin to apply this premise by learning the *A-B-C*-*D-E-F* model of [psychological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological) disturbance and change. The A-B-C model states that it is not an *A*, *a*dversity (or *a*ctivating event) that cause disturbed and dysfunctional emotional and behavioral *C*s, *c*onsequences, but also what people *B*, irrationally *b*elieve about the *A*, *a*dversity. *A*, *a*dversity can be an external situation, or a thought, a feeling or other kind of internal event, and it can refer to an event in the past, present, or future.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-dryden1-13)

The *B*s, irrational beliefs that are most important in the *A-B-C* model are explicit and implicit philosophical meanings and assumptions about events, personal desires, and preferences. The *B*s, *b*eliefs that are most significant are highly evaluative and consist of interrelated and integrated cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects and dimensions. According to REBT, if a person's evaluative *B*, *b*elief about the *A*, *a*ctivating event is rigid, absolutistic, fictional and dysfunctional, the *C*, the emotional and behavioral *c*onsequence, is likely to be self-defeating and destructive. Alternatively, if a person's belief is preferential, flexible and constructive, the *C*, the emotional and behavioral *c*onsequence is likely to be self-helping and constructive.

Through REBT, by understanding the role of their mediating, evaluative and philosophically based illogical, unrealistic and self-defeating meanings, interpretations and assumptions in disturbance, individuals can learn to identify them, then go to *D*, *d*isputing and questioning the evidence for them. At *E, e*ffective new philosophy, they can recognize and reinforce the notion no evidence exists for any psychopathological *must*, *ought* or *should* and distinguish them from healthy constructs, and subscribe to more constructive and self-helping philosophies.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-14) This new reasonable perspective leads to *F*, new *f*eelings and behaviors appropriate to the *A* they are addressing in the exercise.

The REBT framework assumes that humans have both innate rational (meaning self-helping, socially helping, and constructive) and irrational (meaning self-defeating, socially defeating, and unhelpful) tendencies and leanings. REBT claims that people to a large degree consciously and unconsciously construct emotional difficulties such as [self-blame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-blame), [self-pity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-pity), clinical anger, hurt, guilt, shame, [depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clinical_depression) and [anxiety](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anxiety), and behaviors and behavior tendencies like [procrastination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procrastination), compulsiveness, avoidance, [addiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Substance_dependence) and [withdrawal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_withdrawal) by the means of their irrational and self-defeating thinking, [emoting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotion) and behaving.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-ellis3-15) REBT is then applied as an [educational](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education) process in which the therapist often active-directively teaches the client how to identify irrational and self-defeating beliefs and philosophies which in nature are rigid, extreme, unrealistic, illogical and absolutist, and then to forcefully and actively question and dispute them and replace them with more rational and self-helping ones. By using different cognitive, emotive and behavioral [methods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodology) and activities, the client, together with help from the therapist and in [homework](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homework_in_psychotherapy) exercises, can gain a more rational, self-helping and constructive rational way of thinking, emoting and behaving. One of the main [objectives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goal) in REBT is to show the client that whenever unpleasant and unfortunate activating events occur in people's lives, they have a [choice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choice) of making themselves feel healthily and self-helpingly sorry, disappointed, frustrated, and annoyed, or making themselves feel unhealthily and self-defeatingly horrified, terrified, panicked, depressed, self-hating and self-pitying.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-ellis2-16) By [attaining](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Attainment&action=edit&redlink=1) and [ingraining](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ingraining&action=edit&redlink=1) a more rational and self-constructive philosophy of themselves, others and the world, people often are more likely to behave and [emote](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotion) in more life-serving and adaptive ways.

Albert Ellis[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-ellis2-16) posits three major insights of REBT:

**Insight 1** – People seeing and accepting the reality that their emotional disturbances at point C are only partially caused by the activating events or adversities at point A that precede C. Although A contributes to C, and although disturbed Cs (such as feelings of [panic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic) and [depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clinical_depression)) are much more likely to follow strong negative As (such as being assaulted or raped), than they are to follow weak As (such as being disliked by a stranger), the main or more direct cores of extreme and dysfunctional emotional disturbances (Cs) are people’s irrational beliefs — the "absolutistic" (inflexible) "musts" and their accompanying inferences and attributions that people strongly believe about the activating event.

**Insight 2** – No matter how, when, and why people acquire self-defeating or irrational beliefs (i.e. beliefs that are the main cause of their dysfunctional emotional-behavioral consequences), if they are disturbed in the present, they tend to keep holding these irrational beliefs and continue upsetting themselves with these thoughts. They do so not because they held them in the past, but because they still actively hold them in the present (often unconsciously), while continuing to reaffirm their beliefs and act as if they are still valid. In their minds and hearts, the troubled people still follow the core "musturbatory" philosophies they adopted or invented long ago, or ones they recently accepted or constructed.

**Insight 3** – No matter how well they have gained insights 1 and 2, insight alone rarely enables people to undo their emotional disturbances. They may feel better when they know, or think they know, how they became disturbed, because insights can feel useful and curative. But it is unlikely that people will actually get better and stay better unless they have and apply insight 3, which is that *there is usually no way to get better and stay better except by continual work and practice in looking for and finding one’s core irrational beliefs*; actively, energetically, and scientifically disputing them; replacing one’s absolute "musts" (rigid requirements about how things should be) with more flexible *preferences*; changing one's unhealthy feelings to healthy, self-helping emotions; and firmly acting against one’s dysfunctional [fears](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fears) and [compulsions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsive_behavior). Only by a combined cognitive, emotive, and behavioral, as well as a quite persistent and forceful attack on one's serious emotional problems, is one likely to significantly ameliorate or remove them, and keep them removed.

Regarding cognitive-affective-behavioral [processes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_processes) in mental functioning and dysfunctioning, originator Albert Ellis explains:[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-ellis2-16)

"REBT assumes that human thinking, emotion, and action are not really separate or disparate processes, but that they all significantly overlap and are rarely experienced in a pure state. Much of what we call emotion is nothing more nor less than a certain kind — a biased, prejudiced, or strongly evaluative kind — of thought. But emotions and behaviors significantly influence and affect thinking, just as thinking influences emotions and behaviors. Evaluating is a fundamental characteristic of human [organisms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisms) and seems to work in a kind of closed [circuit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_circuit) with a [feedback mechanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feedback_mechanism): First, [perception](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception) [biases](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bias) response, and then response tends to bias subsequent perception. Also, prior perceptions appear to bias subsequent [perceptions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perception), and prior responses appear to bias subsequent responses. What we call feelings almost always have a pronounced evaluating or appraisal element."

REBT then generally proposes that many of these self-defeating cognitive, emotive and behavioral tendencies are both innately [biological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biology) and [indoctrinated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indoctrination) early in and during life, and further grow stronger as a person continually revisits, clings and acts on them. Ellis alludes to similarities between REBT and the [general semantics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_semantics) when explaining the role of irrational beliefs in self-defeating tendencies, citing [Alfred Korzybski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Korzybski) as a significant modern influence on this thinking.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-17)

REBT differs from other clinical approaches like [psychoanalysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoanalysis) in that it places little emphasis on exploring the past, but instead focuses on changing the current evaluations and philosophical thinking-emoting and behaving in relation to themselves, others and the conditions under which people live.

**Psychological dysfunction**

One of the main pillars of REBT is that irrational and dysfunctional ways and patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving are contributing to much, though hardly all, human disturbance and emotional and behavioral self-defeatism and social defeatism. REBT generally teaches that when people turn flexible preferences, desires and wishes into grandiose, absolutistic and fatalistic dictates, this tends to contribute to disturbance and upset.

Albert Ellis has suggested three core beliefs or philosophies that humans tend to disturb themselves through:[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-ellis2-16)

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| *"I absolutely MUST, under practically all conditions and at all times, perform well (or outstandingly well) and win the approval (or complete love) of significant others. If I fail in these important—and sacred—respects, that is awful and I am a bad, incompetent, unworthy person, who will probably always fail and deserves to suffer."* | *"Other people with whom I relate or associate, absolutely MUST, under practically all conditions and at all times, treat me nicely, considerately and fairly. Otherwise, it is terrible and they are rotten, bad, unworthy people who will always treat me badly and do not deserve a good life and should be severely punished for acting so abominably to me."* | *"The conditions under which I live absolutely MUST, at practically all times, be favorable, safe, hassle-free, and quickly and easily enjoyable, and if they are not that way it's awful and horrible and I can't bear it. I can't ever enjoy myself at all. My life is impossible and hardly worth living."* |
| Holding this belief when faced with adversity tends to contribute to feelings of [anxiety](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anxiety), [panic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic), [depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depression_%28mood%29), [despair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Despair_%28emotion%29), and worthlessness. | Holding this belief when faced with adversity tends to contribute to feelings of anger, rage, fury, and vindictiveness. | Holding this belief when faced with adversity tends to contribute to [frustration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frustration) and discomfort, [intolerance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toleration), self-pity, [anger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anger), [depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depression_%28mood%29), and to behaviors such as [procrastination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procrastination), [avoidance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avoidance_coping), and inaction. |

There are 10 irrational beliefs which were identified by Ellis.

1. The idea that you must have love or approval from all the significant people in your life.
2. The idea that you absolutely must be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving or The idea that you must be competent or talented in some important area.
3. The idea that other people absolutely must not act obnoxiously and unfairly, and, that when they do, you should blame and damn them, and see them as bad, wicked, or rotten individuals.
4. The idea that you have to see things as being awful, terrible, and catastrophic when you are seriously frustrated or treated unfairly.
5. The idea that you must be miserable when you have pressures and difficult experiences; and that you have little ability to control, and cannot change, your disturbed feelings .
6. The idea that if something is dangerous or fearsome, you must obsess about it and frantically try to escape from it.
7. The idea that you can easily avoid facing many difficulties and self-responsibilities and still lead a highly fulfilling existence.
8. The idea that your past remains all-important and because something once strongly influenced your life, it has to keep determining your feelings and behavior today.
9. The idea that people and things absolutely must be better than they are and that it is awful and horrible if you cannot change life’s grim facts to suit you.
10. The idea that you can achieve maximum happiness by inertia and inaction or by passively and uncommittedly enjoying yourself.

REBT commonly posits that at the core of irrational beliefs there often are explicit or implicit rigid demands and commands, and that extreme [derivatives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derivative) like awfulizing, frustration [intolerance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toleration), people [deprecation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deprecation) and over-generalizations are accompanied by these.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-dryden1-13) According to REBT the core dysfunctional philosophies in a person's evaluative emotional and behavioral belief system, are also very likely to contribute to unrealistic, arbitrary and crooked inferences and distortions in thinking. REBT therefore first teaches that when people in an insensible and devout way overuse absolutistic, [dogmatic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogma) and rigid "shoulds", "musts", and "oughts", they tend to disturb and upset themselves.

Further REBT generally posits that disturbed evaluations to a large degree occur through over-generalization, wherein people exaggerate and globalize events or traits, usually unwanted events or traits or behavior, out of context, while almost always ignoring the positive events or traits or behaviors. For example, awfulizing is partly [mental](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind) [magnification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnification) of the importance of an unwanted situation to a [catastrophe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disaster) or [horror](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horror_and_terror), elevating the rating of something from bad to worse than it should be, to beyond totally bad, worse than bad to the intolerable and to a "[holocaust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocaust)". The same exaggeration and overgeneralizing occurs with human rating, wherein humans come to be arbitrarily and [axiomatically](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axiom) [defined](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Definition) by their [perceived](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perceive) flaws or misdeeds. Frustration intolerance then occurs when a person perceives something to be too difficult, painful or tedious, and by doing so exaggerates these qualities beyond one's ability to cope with them.

Essential to REBT theory is also the concept of secondary disturbances which people sometimes construct on top of their primary disturbance. As Ellis emphasizes:[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_emotive_behavior_therapy#cite_note-ellis2-16)

"Because of their self-consciousness and their ability to think about their thinking, they can very easily disturb themselves about their disturbances and can also disturb themselves about their ineffective attempts to overcome their emotional disturbances."