Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: Philosophy and Application

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Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy proposes that psychological disturbance is largely created and maintained through irrational philosophies consisting of internal absolutistic demands. This therapy strives to produce sustained and profound cognitive, emotive, and behavioral change through active, vigorous disputation of underlying irrational philosophies and the development of rational alternatives.

Epictetus in 1st Century A.D. – Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them.
A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY

THIRD EDITION

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Objectives

1. Participants will discuss the philosophical underpinnings of REBT.
2. Participants will understand and be able to use the ABC model of REBT as a core component of therapy.
3. Participants will consider how REBT is used to address a variety of disorders/clinical presentations.
REBT Philosophy

- Epistemology – theory of knowledge (search for the truth)
- Dialectics – art of reasoning (Gift from God) – art of logical thinking
- Values – survival and enjoyment (REBT encourages long range hedonism vs. short-term)
Sub-Values

1. Self-interest – may give of themselves to some degree for others, but not completely
2. Social-interest – protecting rights of others helps us survive together
3. Self-direction – it is best to assume responsibility for ourselves vs. demanding that we have excessive support from others
4. Tolerance – allowance for our self and others to be wrong or make mistakes
5. Flexibility – rigidly held beliefs get in the way of happiness
Sub-Values

6. Acceptance of uncertainty – the world is fascinating and full of probability and chance; absolute certainties do not exist. Order is helpful, but complete predictability is not possible or necessary.

7. Commitment – people are generally happier when vitally absorbed in something outside themselves – a creative interest and/or significant interpersonal involvement.

8. Self-acceptance – unconditional self-acceptance (USA) is more conducive to satisfactory life vs. a constant demand to prove one’s self/measure/rate – Ellis was against rating one’s self at all, but in favor of rating behaviors. A person is too complex to be given a global evaluation.
9. Risk-taking – emotionally healthy people are willing to take risks and live life as adventure whether more conservative or risky

10. Realistic expectations – healthy people do not strive for what is not possible – we cannot get all we want

11. High frustration tolerance – lump it when you don’t get what you want – do what you can, accept the rest

12. Self-responsibility – avoid blaming others - take responsibility for the solution by being responsible for your own thinking, emotions and behaviors
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- Values – survival and enjoyment (REBT encourages long range hedonism vs. short-term)
- Will and choice of an individual is important
REBT does not teach self-discovery, but rather self-construction. REBT views the client not as an entity to be found, but as an evolving process.
REBT Philosophy

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• Dialectics – art of reasoning (Gift from God) – art of logical thinking
• Values – survival and enjoyment (REBT encourages long range hedonism vs. short-term)
• Will and choice of an individual is important
• Ethics – treating others well (contrary to what some think, REBT is not blindly hedonistic, it does recognize that when you treat others well, it increases the likelihood of being treated well)
REBT Principles

• Cognition is the most important proximal determinant of human emotion.
• Irrational thinking is a major determinant of emotional distress.
• The best way to conquer distress is to change irrational thinking.
• Multiple factors impact one’s emotions (biology, genetics, environment, culture, etc.), but humans have a tendency to think both rationally and irrationally. It may be that there are short-term benefits from irrational thinking.
REBT Principles

• Emotions have purpose. Negative emotions, in particular, tend to be a cue that there is something wrong – much like physical pain lets us know there is something wrong.

• Although people may have developed dysfunctional patterns of thinking in reaction to experiences or education, the reason people continue in their dysfunctional thinking patterns is continued indoctrination/rehearsal and refusal to challenge them.

• People can change those dysfunctional thinking patterns, but it generally takes persistent, active practice to think in alternative fashion – one of the ways to cement the new belief is to act on the belief – act as if.....
Core Irrational Belief

• Demandingness
  o Frustration Intolerance – choosing short-term comfort or pain avoidance
  o Human Worth Ratings – thoroughly judging ourselves or others based on too little information and ignoring potential
  o Awfulizing/ catastrophizing: un-survivable
Assumption

People generally want to be reasonably happy and/or content and disturbing emotions and behaviors interfere with that goal.
Session Structure

1. brief check on current emotional status
2. review homework
3. set goals for the session
4. assessment of self-defeating (irrational) beliefs using the ABC model
5. disputation
Session Structure

6. rational alternatives

7. problem-solving and skill building

8. review salient points of session

9. assignment/ agreement on homework

10. client feedback
REBT General Goal

Acceptance of self, others, and situation are general goals of REBT while working to improve our situation and increase our capacity/efficacy.
ABC Model of REBT

Activating Event

Consequence

Situations

Emotional and Behavioral reactions

Irritation, disappointment vs. anger, depression, guilt, anxiety
ABC Model

Activating Event

Belief System

Consequence

Situations

I wish ...
I desire ...
I prefer ...

Therefore;

I must ...
You must ...
The world must ...

Emotional and Behavioral reactions

Irritation, disappointment vs. anger, depression, guilt, anxiety
Cognitions are wired into various schemas in order that we might more efficiently function. Therefore, often our thoughts are functionally unconscious although may be accessible to the conscious. This is actually adaptive until we run into difficulties where the schema no longer works for us – then it pays to analyze the thinking and processes we are using to approach life in order that we might formulate new schemas/ patterns of interacting and interpreting the world such that we can better reach our goals and get along more fluidly/ satisfactorily.
Insights

1. Our thinking/belief system has a tremendous influence on how we react to an event or experience (feelings and behavior).

2. Regardless of how we came to our belief system (think the things we do), we keep that belief system alive by repeating the thoughts to ourselves and acting upon them; thus, reinforcing them and refusing to challenge their validity and effectiveness.

3. To change disturbed feelings and behaviors, change the thinking and practice practice practice!
Thinking irrationally is the human condition. We are all born with a tendency to think irrationally and rationally – self-defeatingly and in our self-interest.
REBT

Our emotional and behavioral responses are largely caused/affected by our conscious and unconscious evaluations, interpretations and philosophies.
Distinction between healthy and unhealthy negative emotions

• Concern vs. anxiety
• Sadness vs. depression
• Remorse vs. guilt/shame
• Annoyance/irritation vs. anger/rage
Development of an Emotion

Issue/Event/Situation

Perception is Good!

Emotional Result Is Pleasant!

Perception is Bad!

Emotional Pain: concern, remorse, irritated and sad.

Effective Behaviors: problem-solving, ask for change, plan for similar events, connect with others, learn, make choices

Emotional Pain: anxiety, guilt, anger, and depression.

Ineffective Behaviors: aggression, inactivity, distancing, worry, self-loathing

Perception is Bad!

As bad as this may be, blessings and good remain - now and in future possibilities!

Although I don’t like it when I do, everyone makes mistakes.

As bad as this may be and as much as I don’t like it, I can stand it and God can handle it!

What a catastrophe! This is unovercomeable!

What a Loser!

I can’t stand this!

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Disputation Strategies

• Cognitive – philosophical persuasion by way of Socratic questioning and/or didactic dialogue
• Emotive – Rational Emotive Imagery – forceful expression of the rational alternative
• Behavioral – bibliotherapy, exposure, response prevention, role play, journaling, acting as though giving advice to a friend
• Functional – examining whether or not the thought or belief works over the long-run
Should, Ought, Must
(Red Flag Words?)

Indications of IBs are often seen in words such as should, ought and must.

The challenge is to differentiate between what is advisable vs. what is mandatory!

Therapists new to REBT may find themselves seeking these words and disputing those statements indiscriminately which is generally confusing for the client and may lead to an alliance rupture.
Replacement/ Alternative Rational Beliefs

It is not enough just to do away with the irrational belief, but we want to replace it with a rational alternative.

The alternative belief is to negate the must, affirm the desire, counter the FI/ catastrophizing/ self-denigration/ other-denigration; and develop a behavioral (solution-focused/ problem-solving) strategy to get more of your desire/ preference met and accept what is not yet realized which blocks the tendency to turn the preference into a demand.
Clients often want:

• The situation to change.
• A perfect solution.
• A guaranteed outcome upon making a thought-out decision.
• A solution without effort.
• To avoid discomfort of any kind.
• Others to act differently.
• Others to see things the way you or even most people see things.
• The world to give them what they want or at least more of what they want.
Homework

• Homework has always been a big part of REBT to assist with the continued recovery and application of therapy outside the sessions.

• However, people often do not do it! If you ask about it each time without judgement, it implies that it is important – at least important enough for you to ask about it.
Following disputation, problem-solving and skill building become focus with much ebb and flow to assist with the overall application and prompting of behavioral change.
Discontinuation of Services

When client achieves goals and/or is able to be own therapist using the bibliotherapy and other techniques taught in treatment.

When there is a change in level of distress (Likert Scale/ PCOMS/ other outcome measure), a change in behavior, reports of others, ability to accurately complete self-help forms, etc. Client perception most importantly.

Booster sessions may be helpful.
Random thoughts in conclusion

• Cannot keep thoughts from crossing our minds, but we certainly can do something with them once they do.

• Basically REBT is an educational model that teaches clients to be their own therapists/ how to manage their emotions and behaviors.

• Get and use feedback. Allow client’s voice to be heard. Negotiate with them.

• Insight (how one gets to a place) may be nice and even helpful, but without learning how to change the beliefs or learn a new helpful thought, it may not be enough.
Q&A

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