

Notes on Albert Ellis and Rational Emotive Therapy (RET), now sometimes called Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy since 1993 (REBT)

Ellis--father of RET and grandfather of cognitive-behavioral therapy as it's most commonly used.

Ellis, like Beck, was initially a psychoanalyst who broke away from psychoanalysis because it was too superficial and unhelpful.

Overview of RET:

didactic, directive, emphasizes analyzing and doing, influenced by Alfred Adler, involves reciprocal determinism between cognitions, emotions, and behaviors.

RET's basic hypothesis: our emotions stem mainly from our beliefs, evaluations, interpretations, and reactions to life situations. Our distress largely results from faulty thinking. In RET, clients learn to identify and dispute irrational beliefs (IRBs). RET is more like an educational process in which the therapist functions as a teacher and the client as a learner.

See handout for more key assumptions underlying RET and 6 Principles of RET

According to Ellis, emotional and behavioral difficulties occur when humans take simple preferences (desire for love, approval, success) and turn them into dire needs. Humans have inborn tendencies for growth and self-actualization. We also have tendencies to engage in irrational thinking and in self-defeating patterns that are fueled by our irrational thinking.

Our own repetition of early indoctrinated IRBs, rather than our parents' IRBs, keeps dysfunctional attitudes alive and operating within us.

Blame is the core of most emotional disturbance: blame on self, others, and the world.

Also, turning preferences into dogmatic, "absolutistic" shoulds, musts, oughts, demands, and commands create disturbances.

4 Core IRBs that Usually Underlie Emotional Disturbances:

1. Musts or shoulds

shoulds turned inward=depression

shoulds turned outward=anger

oughts or musts=demanding stance with low frustration tolerance

2. Awfulizing/Catastrophizing

You interpret events and arbitrarily decide that they are outside our capability to cope with them.

3. Self-Worth beliefs

You arbitrarily decide that your self-worth is contingent upon a certain criteria, which you also arbitrarily decide. SW should not be based on anything--it just is as it is, and we all have intrinsic self-worth—it's not something to be earned or achieved.

4. Needs

Human needs (aside from basic needs) tend to be based on emotional realities. what we think we need is usually not grounded in reality.

Goals of RET:

- Elegant solution--acceptance of self and life without judgment or disturbance.
- Unconditional self-acceptance (USA)—we accept ourselves as is and we recognize our self-worth.
- When one stops trying to attain USA, they have it.
- In tx, to have client recognize and label their IRBs, to learn to dispute them themselves, and to generate RB in order to have effective new philosophies and more adaptive emotional and behavioral responses.

Criticisms of RET:

- too nomothetic
- therapists can be too aggressive
- RET itself can be judgmental by deciding that others' thoughts are irrational— may be experience by client as evaluative and punitive—You shouldn't have that should. Beck prefers to use "distorted thinking" b/c he thinks "irrational beliefs" is too judgmental.
- Warmth is marginally important to some RET therapists. However, RET does state that unconditional positive regard for the client is a necessary element in tx.

Key Assumptions of RET and 6 Treatment Principles of RET

Key Assumptions (Ellis, 1979b in Corey, 1991)

- People condition themselves to feel disturbed, rather than being conditioned by external sources.
- People have the biological and cultural tendency to think crookedly and to needlessly disturb themselves.
- Humans are unique in that they invent disturbing beliefs and keep themselves disturbed about their disturbances.
- People have the capacity to change their cognitive, emotive, and behavioral processes; they can choose to react differently from their usual patterns, refuse to allow themselves to become upset, and train themselves so that they can eventually remain minimally disturbed for the rest of their life.
- Humans are self-talking, self-evaluating, and self-sustaining.
- Emotional disturbances occur when preferences are turned into dire needs.

6 Principles of RET

1. Cognition is the most important and proximal determinant of human emotion.
2. Dysfunctional thinking is the major determinant of human distress.
3. Changing thinking is the best way to change determinants.
4. Multiple factors are related to the etiology of rational and irrational thinking.
5. RET emphasizes the present rather than historical influences on behavior.
6. Beliefs can be changed.

Tips for Using RET

- Be sure to question your assumptions as you work with a client.
- Doing an ABC should be collaborative and educational.
- Don't address rational beliefs too soon--it could be premature.
- Have client sit with irrationality in the connection between their IRBs and their emotions.
- If a person becomes very emotional and you want to help them regulate themselves, have them describe their physiological sensations, label the feeling, and then have them tell you what they were thinking about when they had the feeling.
- Have clients summarize sessions and tell you what they have learned.
- There is an objective difference between rational and irrational beliefs--RBs are: goal-oriented, provable, and realistic, whereas IRBs are hard to prove, unrealistic, and lead away from goal attainment.
- Be cognizant of two levels of reaction when doing an ABC--primary reactions--the distressing feeling, and the secondary reactions--usually evaluative reactions about the primary feeling. I'm depressed, and I shouldn't be depressed, and so I'm also angry because I am depressed. Depression--primary; anger--secondary reaction.
- RET does not challenge a client's values, rules, and standards--it challenges the musts and demands about those values, rules, and standards. Be sure to not get hooked into disputing the A in RET. Find the core IRB and dispute that.
- The elegant solution in RET is acceptance of life without judgment. The elegant solution in RET represents a profound philosophical change so that a person becomes more scientific and flexible in their thinking.
- Unconditional self-acceptance is not about change, but it's about acceptance and being emotionally ok with our weaknesses.