

ELLIS'S RATIONAL EMOTIVE THERAPY



COURSE: CLINICAL ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION

Paper VII (PGDCP; SEM II); Unit V

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Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy

Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) was one of the first cognitive behavior therapies, and today it continues to be a major cognitive behavioral approach. REBT has a great deal in common with the therapies that are oriented toward cognition and behavior as it also stresses thinking, judging, deciding, analyzing, and doing.

Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) was created and developed by the American psychotherapist and psychologist **Albert Ellis**.

It is a short-term form of psychotherapy that helps to identify self-defeating thoughts and feelings, challenge the rationality of those feelings, and replace them with healthier, more productive beliefs.

REBT focuses mostly on the present time to help understand how unhealthy thoughts and beliefs create emotional distress which, in turn, leads to unhealthy actions and behaviors that interfere with current life goals. Once identified and understood, negative thoughts and actions can be changed and replaced with more positive and productive behavior, allowing to develop more successful personal and professional relationships.

Basic Assumption

The basic assumption of REBT is that people contribute to their own psychological problems, as well as to specific symptoms, by the way they interpret events and situations. **REBT is based on the assumption that cognitions, emotions, and behaviors interact significantly and have a reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship.** REBT has consistently emphasized all three of these modalities and their interactions, thus qualifying it as an integrative approach.



Several therapeutic implications flow from these assumptions:

The focus is on working with thinking and acting rather than primarily with expressing feelings. Therapy is seen as an educational process. The therapist functions in many ways like a teacher, especially in collaborating with a client on homework assignments and in teaching strategies for straight thinking; and the client is a learner, who practices the newly learned skills in everyday life.

View of Emotional Disturbance REBT is based on the premise that although we originally **learn irrational beliefs from significant others during childhood, we create irrational dogmas by ourselves.** We do this by actively reinforcing self-defeating beliefs by the processes of autosuggestion and self-repetition and by behaving as if they are useful. Hence, it is largely our own repetition of early-indoctrinated irrational thoughts, rather than a parent's repetition, that keeps dysfunctional attitudes alive and operative within us. Ellis contends that people do not need to be accepted and loved, even though this may be highly desirable. The therapist teaches clients how to feel undepressed even when they are unaccepted and unloved by significant others.

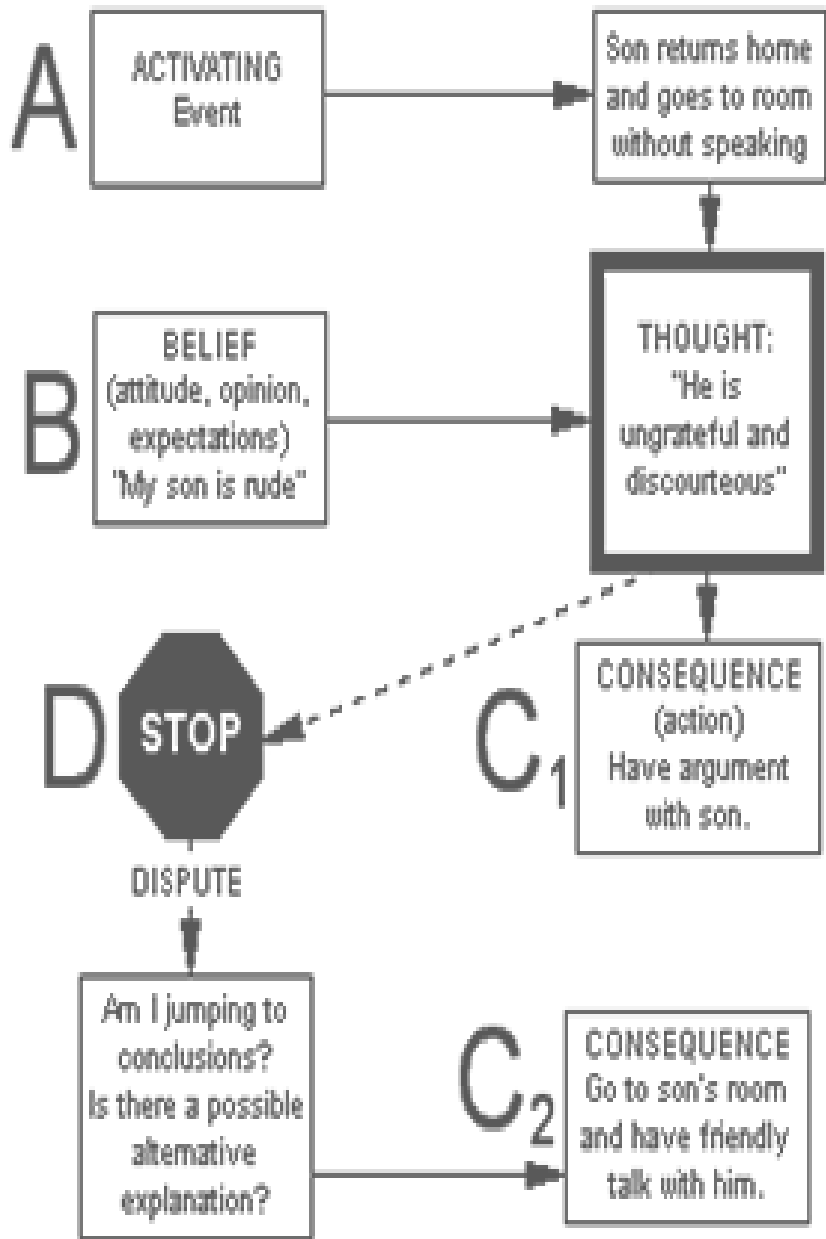
Irrational beliefs

REBT proposes four core irrational beliefs;

1. **Demands**: The tendency to demand success, fair treatment, and respect (e.g., I must be treated fairly).
2. **Awfulizing**: The tendency to consider adverse events as awful or terrible (e.g., Its awful when I am disrespected).
3. **Low Frustration Tolerance (LFT)**: The belief that one could not stand or tolerate adversity (e.g., I cannot stand being treated unfairly).
4. **Depreciation**: The belief that one event reflects the person as a whole (e.g., When I fail it shows that I am a complete failure).

Basic Hypothesis

REBT's basic hypothesis is that our emotions stem mainly from our beliefs, evaluations, interpretations, and reactions to life situations. Through the therapeutic process, clients learn skills that give them the tools to identify and dispute irrational beliefs that have been acquired and self-constructed and are now maintained by self-indoctrination. They **learn how to replace such ineffective ways of thinking with effective and rational cognitions, and as a result they change their emotional reactions to situations.** The therapeutic process allows clients to apply REBT principles of change not only to a particular presenting problem but also to many other problems in life or future problems they might encounter.



Situation:	You've had a bad day, feel fed up, so go out shopping. As you walk down the road, someone you know walks by and, apparently, ignores you.	
	Unhelpful	Helpful
Thoughts:	He / She ignored me - they don't like me	He / She looks a bit wrapped up in themselves - I wonder if there is something wrong?
Emotional Feelings:	Low, sad and rejected	Concerned for the other person
Physical:	Stomach cramps, low energy, feel sick	None - feel comfortable
Action:	Go home and avoid them	Get in touch to make sure they are OK

The A-B-C model states that it is not an *A*, *adversity* (or *activating* event) that cause disturbed and dysfunctional emotional and behavioral *Cs*, *consequences*, but also what people *B*, *irrationally believe* about the *A*, *adversity*. *A*, *adversity* 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



Example of REBT

(Turning a Symptom into an Activating Event)



Although REBT encourages people to experience healthy feelings of sadness over being unaccepted, it attempts to help them find ways of overcoming unhealthy feelings of depression, anxiety, hurt, loss of self-worth, and hatred. Ellis insists that blame is at the core of most emotional disturbances. Therefore, to recover from a neurosis or a personality disorder, we had better stop blaming ourselves and others. Instead, it is important that we learn to fully accept ourselves despite our imperfections.

Three basic musts (or irrational beliefs) that people internalize that inevitably lead to self-defeat are:

- “I must do well and win the approval of others for my performances or else I am no good.”
- “Other people must treat me considerately, fairly, kindly, and in exactly the way I want them to treat me. If they don’t, they are no good and they deserve to be condemned and punished.”
- “I must get what I want, when I want it; and I must not get what I don’t want. If I don’t get what I want, it’s terrible, and I can’t stand it.”

We have a strong tendency to make and keep ourselves emotionally disturbed by internalizing self-defeating beliefs such as these, which is why it is a real challenge to achieve and maintain good psychological health.

Beliefs about circumstances, and disputing the beliefs

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.

In REBT, clients usually learn and begin to apply this premise by learning the *A-B-C-D-E-F* model of **psychological** disturbance and change. The following letters represent the following meanings in this model:

A – The adversity

B – The developed belief in the person of the Adversity

C – The consequences of that person's Beliefs i.e., B

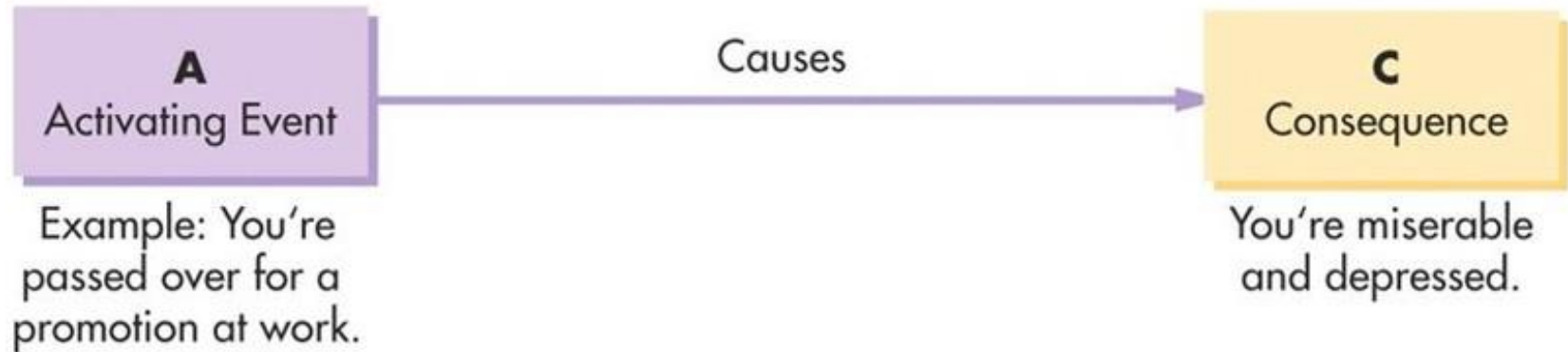
D – The person's disputes of A, B, and C. In latter thought

E – The effective new philosophy or belief that develops in that person through the occurrence of D in their minds of A and B

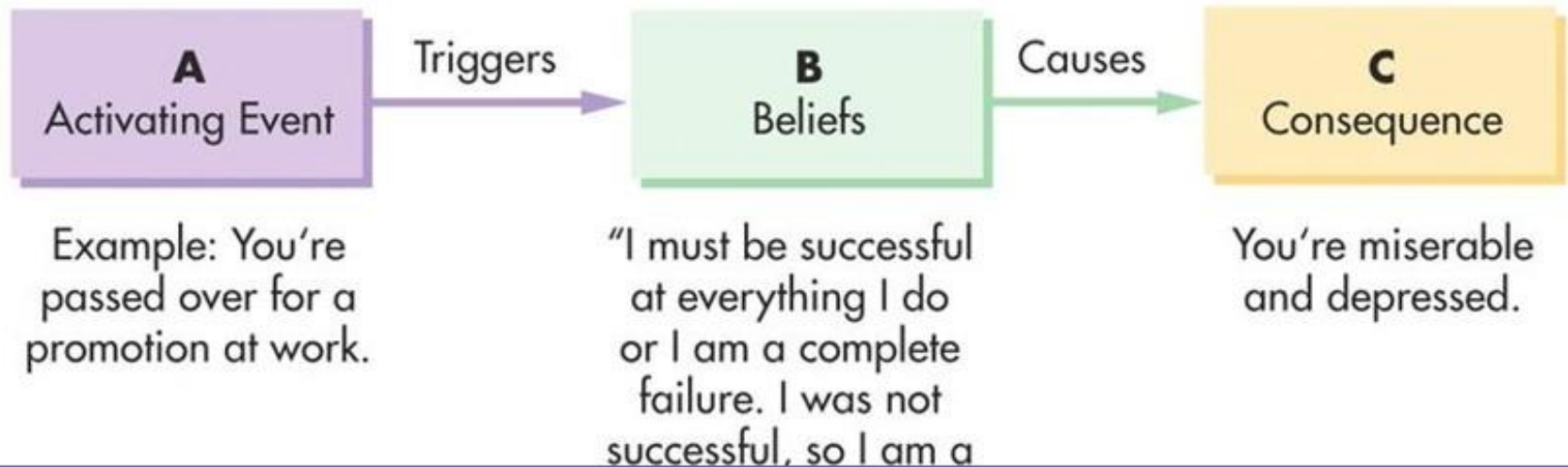
F – The developed feelings of one's self either at point and after point C or

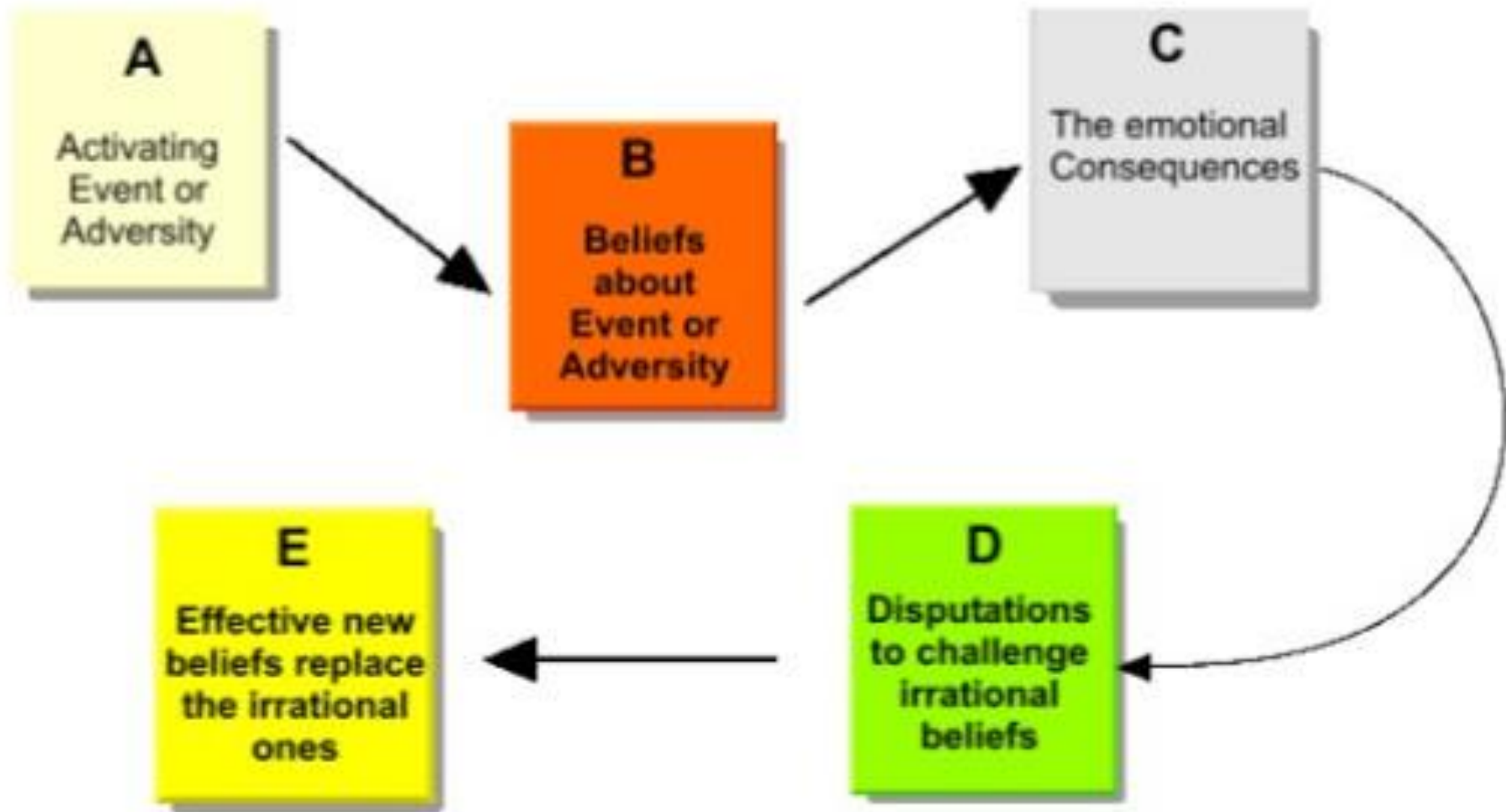
at point after point E.

Commonsense View



Rational-Emotive Therapy's ABC Model





REBT can be particularly helpful for people living with a variety of issues, including:

- **depression**
- **anxiety**
- **addictive behaviors**
- **phobias**
- **overwhelming feelings of anger, guilt, or rage**
- **procrastination**
- **disordered eating habits**
- **aggression**
- **sleep problems**

EMOTIVE TECHNIQUES

REBT practitioners use a variety of emotive procedures, including unconditional acceptance, rational emotive role playing, modeling, rational emotive imagery, and shame-attacking exercises. Clients are taught the value of unconditional self-acceptance. Even though their behavior may be difficult to accept, they can decide to see themselves as worthwhile persons. Clients are taught how destructive it is to engage in “putting oneself down” for perceived deficiencies. Although REBT employs a variety of emotive techniques, which tend to be vivid and evocative in nature, the main purpose is to dispute clients’ irrational beliefs. These strategies are used both during the therapy sessions and as homework assignments in daily life. Their purpose is not simply to provide a cathartic experience but to help clients change some of their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Some of the emotive therapeutic techniques are:

Rational emotive imagery. This technique is a form of intense mental practice designed to establish new emotional patterns. Clients imagine themselves thinking, feeling, and behaving exactly the way they would like to think, feel, and behave in real life. They can also be shown how to imagine one of the worst things that could happen to them, how to feel unhealthily upset about this situation, how to intensely experience their feelings, and then how to change the experience to a healthy negative feeling. As clients change their feelings about adversities, they stand a better chance of changing their behavior in the situation. Such a technique can be usefully applied to interpersonal and other situations that are problematic for the individual. Ellis maintains that if we keep practicing rational emotive imagery several times a week for a few weeks, we can reach the point that we no longer feel upset over negative events.

Using humor. REBT contends that emotional disturbances often result from taking oneself too seriously. One appealing aspect of REBT is that it fosters the development of a better sense of humor and helps put life into perspective (Wolfe, 2007). Humor has both cognitive and emotional benefits in bringing about change. Humor shows the absurdity of certain ideas that clients steadfastly maintain, and it can be of value in helping clients take themselves much less seriously. Ellis himself tends to use a good deal of humor to combat exaggerated thinking that leads clients into trouble. In his workshops and therapy sessions, Ellis typically uses humorous songs, and he encourages people to sing to themselves or in groups when they feel depressed or anxious.

Role playing. Role playing has emotive, cognitive, and behavioral components, and the therapist often interrupts to show clients what they are telling themselves to create their disturbances and what they can do to change their unhealthy feelings to healthy ones. Clients can rehearse certain behaviors to bring out what they feel in a situation. The focus is on working through the underlying irrational beliefs that are related to unpleasant feelings. For example, Dawson may put off applying to a graduate school because of his fears of not being accepted. Just the thought of not being accepted to the school of his choice brings out intense feelings of “being stupid.” Dawson role-plays an interview with the dean of graduate students, notes his anxiety and the specific beliefs leading to it, and challenges his conviction that he absolutely must be accepted and that not gaining such acceptance means that he is a stupid and incompetent person.

Shame-attacking exercises. Ellis developed exercises to help people reduce shame over behaving in certain ways. He thinks that we can stubbornly refuse to feel ashamed by telling ourselves that it is not catastrophic if some designed to attract attention, sing at the top of their lungs, ask a silly question at a lecture, or ask for a left-handed monkey wrench in a grocery store. By carrying out such assignments, clients are likely to find out that other people are not really that interested in their behavior. They work on themselves so that they do not feel ashamed or humiliated, even when they acknowledge that some of their acts will lead to judgments by others. They continue practicing these exercises until they realize that their feelings of shame are self-created and until they are able to behave in less inhibited ways. Clients eventually learn that they often have no reason for continuing to let others' reactions or possible disapproval stop them from doing the things they would like to do.

Use of force and vigor. Ellis has suggested the use of force and energy as a way to help clients go from intellectual to emotional insight. Clients are also shown how to conduct forceful dialogues with themselves in which they express their unsubstantiated beliefs and then powerfully dispute them. Sometimes the therapist will engage in reverse role playing by strongly clinging to the client's self-defeating philosophy. Then, the client is asked to vigorously debate with the therapist in an attempt to persuade him or her to give up these dysfunctional ideas. Force and energy are a basic part of shame-attacking exercises.

BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES

REBT practitioners use most of the standard behavior therapy procedures, especially operant conditioning, self-management principles, systematic desensitization, relaxation techniques, and modeling. Behavioral homework assignments to be carried out in real-life situations are particularly important. These assignments are done systematically and are recorded and analyzed on a form. Homework gives clients opportunities to practice new skills outside of the therapy session, which may be even more valuable for clients than work done during the therapy hour. Doing homework may involve desensitization and live exposure in daily life situations. Clients can be encouraged to desensitize themselves gradually but also, at times, to perform the very things they dread doing implosively. For example, a person with a fear of elevators may decrease this fear by going up and down in an elevator 20 or 30 times in a day. Clients actually do new and difficult things, and in this way they put their insights to use in the form of concrete action. By acting differently, they also tend to incorporate functional beliefs.

Example of Rational Self-Analysis Homework Form

	A	B	C	D/Rational Response	E
	Situation	Belief	Emotion	Disputation	Effects
2/19 8pm	Studying counseling theories	I feel so stupid. I'll never be a good counselor since I already feel lost	Confusion, frustration , anxiety	Just because I don't understand everything about these theories doesn't make me stupid.	Relief, mild tension

APPLICATION

REBT is applicable to a wide range of settings and populations, including elementary and secondary schools. REBT can be applied to couples counseling and family therapy. In working with couples, the partners are taught the principles of REBT.

REBT as a Brief Therapy REBT is well suited as a brief form of therapy, whether it is applied to individuals, groups, couples, or families. Ellis originally developed REBT to try to make psychotherapy shorter and more efficient than most other systems of therapy, and it is often used as a brief therapy. Ellis has always maintained that the best therapy is efficient, quickly teaching clients how to tackle practical problems of living. Clients learn how to apply REBT techniques to their present as well as future problems.

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