

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Rational Emotive Approach

Introductory Eight-Week Workbook

By Michael Miello, Ph.D.

Introduction: The Cognitive Behavioral Therapies

A Family of Therapies

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy refers to a family of psychotherapies all of which are based on the idea that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interrelated—AND—that the best way to make changes in how we feel is to change the way we think. I said it's a family of psychotherapies because, from the start, there have been multiple and distinct forms of cognitive therapy and new forms have continued to be developed. The two primary forms of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy are Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy which was created by Albert Ellis and Cognitive Therapy which was created by Aaron T. Beck. One source of confusion is that the name 'Cognitive Therapy' or 'CT' is often mistakenly used to refer to all types of cognitive therapies. For clarity, I will use the term 'Cognitive Behavioral Therapy' to refer to the family of related psychotherapies and only use the abbreviation 'CT' when I am specifically referring to Beck's distinct variety of cognitive therapy. In this brief workbook, however, we will primarily be exploring Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT).

What is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy?

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy is one form of Cognitive Therapy, arguably the original form. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) was created by Albert

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Ellis, considered by many to be one of the greatest psychologists of the twentieth century, when he became dissatisfied with the effectiveness of more traditional psychodynamic treatments. REBT continues as a thriving force in psychotherapy carried on through the work of the Albert Ellis Institute and a generation of psychotherapists personally trained by Albert Ellis.¹

REBT's central idea is that our self-defeating irrational beliefs are the source of our disturbance. REBT also emphasizes the way our beliefs can create either healthy or unhealthy negative emotions.²

How long does Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Take?

Cognitive Therapy with a trained and qualified therapist is designed to be a short-term treatment. You should be discussing the most important aspects of your difficulty in only a few sessions. Many people experience a benefit after only 8-12 sessions. However, in order to make this kind of rapid progress, you must be willing to spend your sessions learning the process of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and

to work outside the session to complete worksheets and other assignments that will help you use what you have learned.

As I have said, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy deals with the interaction of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. However, in this workbook, I will strongly emphasize cognitive techniques—those that deal primarily with thinking. This does not mean that behavioral approaches (for example using schedules, rewards, strategies, problem-solving, exercises, social skills training, dietary changes, learning organizational techniques, and modifying incentives) are not powerful techniques. They are, and they can be critical for success in many circumstances. Nevertheless, Cognitive Behavioral Therapists tend to believe that thought-based skills are even more powerful because, once learned, they will apply to many different situations. Moreover, the right mindset would ensure that any behavioral changes you make will be more successful.

¹ Acknowledgement: This work would not have been possible without author's training by the faculty of the Albert Ellis Institute including Ray DiGiuseppe PhD and Kathleen Doyle PhD. The writer has also received particularly helpful guidance by Walter Matweychuk PhD an authority of REBT. Much of this work is adapted from [The Practitioner's Guide to Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy](#) (2013) by DiGiuseppe, Doyle, Dryden, and Backx, as well as [Dealing with Emotional Problems Using Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy: A Practitioner's Guide](#) (2012) by Windy Dryden.

² Beck's CT, by contrast, focuses more on the accuracy and objectivity of our thoughts with the goal of reducing the occurrence of negative emotions overall. While CT focuses on our thoughts, REBT focused on our evaluations of the events that happen to us. The difference is, admittedly, subtle, but it will become clearer as we proceed.

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Does CBT Work?

Yes! Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a collection of the most widely used and broadly researched evidenced-based treatment for improving mental health. The type of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy we will emphasize in this book (REBT) specifically has been shown to be reliably effective across a wide variety of studies³ and there is strong support for its central tenet, that emotional disturbance is associated with irrational beliefs.⁴

How does Cognitive Therapy Work?

Cognitive Therapy works by improving the way we think about ourselves, others, and what happens to us. We can summarize the method used to do this as, “**Discover, Review, Improve, and Practice**” (DRIP). In order to accomplish this, we must first discover the beliefs that we use to evaluate the situations we face. Only then can we review our beliefs to ensure that they are helpful, rational, and true. Once we can see these patterns, we will be able to improve our beliefs by making sure they are logical, beneficial, and true. In order to really make the benefits of this process stick, we need to practice these beliefs and turn them into a new mental habit.

This workbook will provide eight weeks’ worth of lessons and exercises that will teach you the core skills of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, outlined in the table below. Each section will contain about a week’s worth of homework assignments that are designed to take only a few minutes a day. Completing the homework assignment is critical for us to be able to complete the program in 8 weeks.

Core Skills of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy

1. Distinguish between healthy and unhealthy emotions.
2. Notice your thoughts
3. Uncover your beliefs
4. Learn to use the ABC Model
5. Improve your beliefs
6. Recognize the four Irrational Belief styles
7. Learn the four Rational Belief styles
8. Support your new beliefs with changed behavior

³ David, D., Cotet, C., Matu, S., Mogoase, C., & Simona, S. (2018). 50 years of rational-emotive and cognitive-behavioral therapy: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical P*, 74(3), 304-318. doi: 10.1002/jclp.22514. Epub 2017 Sep 12. The full text is available here: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jclp.22514/full>.

⁴ *Višlā, A.,Flückiger, C.,Grosse Holtforth, M., & David, D. (2016). Irrational beliefs and psychological distress: A meta-Analysis. Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, 85(1), 8-15.* The full text is available here: <http://albertellis.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/REBT-Theory-Metaanalysis.pdf>

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Distinguishing Between Thoughts and Feelings

People frequently use the words “think” and “feel” interchangeably, but in Cognitive Behavior Therapy, these words have very different meanings. By ‘thinking,’ we mean mental statements that you either consciously create or passively experience. Thinking is usually language based—sentences you experience in your mind, although thoughts can also consist of images. Feelings (also called emotions) are, by contrast, states you feel in your body such as happiness, sadness, anger, or guilt. It is a main idea in all forms of CBT that our thoughts, behaviors, and feelings are interrelated. For example, the thought, “I am a loser” will likely have a negative effect on your emotions (You might feel sad after having this thought) and could also influence your behavior (you might be less likely to take a risk or work towards a goal if you have this thought).

Exercise: The Goal Setting Worksheet:

Before we even begin the eight-week program it will be helpful for you to set some goals for yourself. Spend some time thinking about your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For each of those, what would you like to experience more of (for example, more thoughts of gratitude, less self-critical thoughts, more contentedness and joy, less arguing with other people, more physical fitness activities and creative behaviors)? Keep in mind, however, that the methods of REBT are designed to help you change yourself, not other people, and, therefore, your goals must be about you. Making your boss less mean, your child more motivated, or your mother more appreciative of just how much you do for her are not appropriate goals for REBT.

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My Goals Table (Example)

Instructions: Take a few moments to think about your thinking. What kinds of thoughts would you like to experience more of? What kinds of thoughts would you like to experience less of? Repeat this process for your feelings and behaviors. Remember: This is only about *your* thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You cannot use CBT to change someone else!

Domain	Things I want to experience more of:	Things I would like to experience less of:
Thoughts	I would like to experience more thoughts about what is most important to me.	Fewer thoughts about my regrets, fewer self-critical thoughts such as "I am a freak." Fewer pessimistic thoughts such as "No one will ever love me."
Emotions	More calm, peace, contentment, happiness, gratitude.	Less depression, guilt, anxiety.
Behaviors	More exercise, more work towards my professional goals, more time with my family doing recreational activity like going to the park.	Less procrastination, less yelling, less mindlessly surfing the internet.

My Goals Table

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Instructions: Take a few moments to think about your thinking. What kinds of thoughts would you like to experience more of? What kinds of thoughts would you like to experience less of? Repeat this process of feelings and behaviors. Remember: This is only about *your* thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You cannot use CBT to change someone else!

Domain	Things I want to experience more of:	Things I would like to experience less of:
Thoughts		
Emotions		
Behaviors		

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Week One: Describing Emotions

REBT is a powerful system of psychotherapy that can change your relationship with your emotions. Our primary goal is to reduce the extent to which painful, unhealthy negative emotions affect your life. More than that, our goal is to work towards eliminating unhealthy emotions from your life. In this chapter, we will explore the difference between healthy emotions and unhealthy emotions.

If you made a list of the major human emotions, it might be very different from someone else's list. Individuals seem to choose their own set of emotion labels that help them make sense of how they feel, but some people make use of fewer emotion names than others when they describe their feelings. Research has shown that having fewer emotion concepts leads to more emotional difficulty while having more emotion concepts (sometimes called having high emotional granularity) helps individuals become more emotionally resilient. In other words, having a vocabulary to describe your emotions more precisely helps people recover from negative experiences as compared to people

who have a relatively poor vocabulary for describing their emotions.⁵ So why, then, don't we just teach everyone the correct list of emotions and teach them to recognize them?

Unfortunately, it's a little more complicated than that. Neuroscience researchers have for decades tried and failed to identify specific emotion circuits in the brain. They don't seem to be there, suggesting that the way we describe emotional experiences may be something that we learn from our culture.⁶ For better or worse, we may never have a scientifically-validated, definitive system for labeling and categorizing emotions. But there is good news in this finding—simply by learning new emotional labels you can alter your emotional concepts to create a system that is more resilient. That is why I encourage you to use whatever words seem most fitting to you. If you would rather say you get “pissed” or “blue” rather than “angry” and “depressed” than by all means use those words.

But with all of that said, there will be a real benefit to learning a system of emotions that differentiates healthy from unhealthy emotions—particularly if this list expands the number of emotions you are able to recognize in

⁵ For a typical study in this area featuring a nice summation of the literature see Barrett, L.F., Christensen, T. C., & Benvenuto, M. (2001) Knowing what you're feeling and knowing what to do about it: Mapping the relation between emotion differentiation and emotion regulation. *Cognition and*

Emotion, 15(6), 713-724. The full text is available here: <https://www.affective-science.org/pubs/2001/01MaprelationDiffReg.pdf>

⁶ See *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* by Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017) Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

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yourself. Next, I will describe one such system of labeling emotions that has been developed by REBT theorists.

The REBT System of Emotions

Albert Ellis and Ray Digiuseppe ([Citation needed]) have proposed a system in which emotions come in two varieties—the healthy, normal variety (which still may be quite unpleasant) and the exaggerated, unhealthy variety that leads to unnecessary suffering and stops us from moving forward.

Healthy versus Unhealthy Emotions

Healthy Negative Emotions:

- Focus our attention on a problem
- Are likely the result of an accurate perception of the problem
- Create in us a desire to do something that will address, solve, or offer relief from the problem.

Unhealthy Emotions:

- Focus our attention on a problem
- Are more likely to be based on an exaggerated assessment of the significance of the problem
- Create in us a desire for an extreme reaction to the problem that may be counter-productive, self-defeating, or lead to undesirable outcomes.

Rather than one list of emotions, we can consider several families of emotions. A family of emotions includes both the healthy variety and the unhealthy variety. For the purposes of this book I will consider the following eight families⁷ of negative emotions:

- Concern/Anxiety
- Sadness/Depression
- Sorrow/Shame
- Remorse/Guilt
- Healthy Anger/Unhealthy Anger
- Disappointment/Hurt
- Healthy Jealousy/Unhealthy Jealousy
- Healthy Envy/Unhealthy Envy.

Our goal in this REBT-based program will be for you to drastically reduce the number of times you experience unhealthy emotions and, instead, feel healthy negative emotions when they are called for. Your ability to do this will be enhanced if you learn to recognize the eight emotional families presented in the table below.

⁷ Here I am drawing on the REBT perspective on emotions as presented by Windy Dryden in his very useful (2009) book, *Understanding Emotional Problems: The REBT Perspective*.

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Healthy vs. Unhealthy Emotions

Healthy Negative Emotions

Concern. You recognize that there is a threat to you or that a disadvantageous situation is likely, resulting in a state of readiness to respond to that situation.

Sadness. The melancholy feeling following a loss or disappointment in which one becomes reflective on the repercussions of the situation, often with a desire to express this feeling to others in some way before moving on with life.

Sorrow. Occurs when we believe that other people are aware of a failure, humiliation, shortcoming, or immoral behavior that we (or a group we belong to) have endured, associated with a realistic assessment of how others will disapprove. However, sorrow also includes the assumptions that others may be compassionate in this situation and that we can be compassionate to ourselves.

Remorse. Occurs when we are displeased with our own behavior and feel the need to change our behavior in the future or make amends.

Unhealthy Negative Emotions

Anxiety. Heightened physiological arousal that occurs when we perceive a threat or when a disadvantageous situation is seen as a disaster that must not occur. Anxiety leads to an intense desire to avoid or escape the situation.

Depression. Unhealthy, exaggerated sense of heaviness or emptiness following a loss or setback that is viewed as horrible, resulting in the impression that self-worth has been lost and future happiness will be impossible, leading to reduced motivation and loss of hope.

Shame. Occurs when we believe that other people are aware of a failure, humiliation, shortcoming, or immoral behavior that we (or a group we belong to) have endured, associated with a certainty that others will shun us, resulting in a tendency to avoid (or in some cases defensively condemn) others.

Guilt. Occurs when we believe we have done something horribly wrong or immoral, resulting in an assessment of ourselves as being a hopelessly inferior person.

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Healthy Negative Emotions

Healthy Anger. Occurs when one of our goals have been obstructed or someone has broken one of our rules, leading to a tendency to assertively request changes, while recognizing that others may not be entirely wrong and do not necessarily have to do what we ask of them.

Disappointment. Occurs when others mistreat you, suggesting that they do not value the relationship as much as you thought they did, leading to the desire to express your feelings to the person while attempting to be fair and not devaluing the relationship completely.

Healthy Jealousy. Experienced when there is a threat to a valued relationship from another person or as a result of uncertainty about your partner's loyalty, leading to a tendency to seek to strengthen the relationship while respecting your partner's freedom.

Healthy Envy. The recognition that someone else has something desirable that we do not have, which often includes a realistic assessment of how desirable the object is, and an acknowledgment that the person is fortunate to have this advantage. Healthy Envy leads to a realistic desire to strive to achieve the desired thing.

Unhealthy Negative Emotions

Unhealthy Anger. Felt when one of our goals have been obstructed or someone has broken one of our rules, leading to a tendency to make demands of others, damn and blame them, and seeing them as completely at fault in the situation, often leading to thoughts about how we could punish them for their actions.

Hurt. Felt when others mistreat you, suggesting that they do not value the relationship as much as you thought they did. This may lead to withdrawing from the relationship, devaluing the other person, or dwelling on how you have been similarly hurt by others in the past.

Unhealthy Jealousy. Occurs when one perceives a threat to a valued relationship from another person, or as a result of uncertainty about your partner's loyalty, resulting in the perception that the relationship will end imminently, leading to a tendency for increased scrutiny, demanded reassurance, attempts to restrict the other's freedom, or an increased likelihood of social withdrawal or retaliatory transgressions.

Unhealthy Envy. The recognition that someone else has something desirable that we do not have, leading to thoughts about how we must have what we desire, devaluing what we do have, and possibly to thoughts about spoiling the other's advantageous situation for them. Also leads to a tendency to devalue the other person or to devalue the thing that you actually desire.

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Monitoring Your Emotions Over the Week

This week's challenge is to monitor your emotions and record any time you experience an unhealthy negative emotion. If you did experience an Unhealthy Negative Emotion, also briefly describe the situation in which it occurred. Then, for each of these situations try to identify what you would have preferred to feel in this situation (i.e. what would you consider the healthy emotion to be). Be careful not to pick an unrealistically positive emotion. Remember you can use any emotion words you want or use one of the suggested emotion names from the eight emotion families presented above.

You might ask, "OK, it's nice that I can imagine a healthier emotion that I *might* have felt—but right now that just seems like a make-believe fantasy! Am I ever going to be able to make that a reality?" The answer is "Absolutely!" That is the whole point of this program—to teach you how to experience the healthy emotions instead of unhealthy ones. The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about the emotions you are currently experiencing and what it might be like if they were different.

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Monitoring Unhealthy Emotions Weekly Worksheet (Example)

Instructions: For each day write down any Unhealthy Negative Emotion you felt. Also, write down what situation you were in when you felt the emotion (note that it is certainly possible to experience more than one emotion at the same time). Then write down what healthy negative emotions you would have hoped to have felt instead.

	Unhealthy Emotion(s)	Situation	Preferred Healthy Emotion(s)
Day 1	None		
Day 2	Depressed	Didn't get the job I wanted. Now I am stuck having to keep working weekends.	Sad
Day 3	Hurt	When I told my spouse about not getting the job they weren't very sympathetic.	Disappointed
Day 4	Unhealthy Anger	Got charged a late fee I don't think I deserved. This is total BS!	Healthy Anger
Day 5	Unhealthy Jealousy	My spouse's new coworker is quite attractive. I don't want them to work together.	Healthy Jealousy
Day 6	Unhealthy Envy	My sister bought a much nicer car than I could ever afford. She thinks she is so great!	Healthy Envy
Day 7	Shame	I yelled at my spouse and I think the neighbors heard me.	Sorrow

Unhealthy Negative Emotions: Anxiety, Depression, Shame, Guilt, Unhealthy Anger, Hurt, Unhealthy Jealousy, Unhealthy Envy.

Healthy Negative Emotions: Concern, Sadness, Sorrow, Remorse, Healthy Anger, Disappointment, Healthy Jealousy, Healthy Envy

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	Unhealthy Emotion(s)	Situation	Preferred Healthy Emotion(s)
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

Unhealthy Negative Emotions: Anxiety, Depression, Shame, Guilt, Unhealthy Anger, Hurt, Unhealthy Jealousy, Unhealthy Envy.

Healthy Negative Emotions: Concern, Sadness, Sorrow, Remorse, Healthy Anger, Disappointment, Healthy Jealousy, Healthy Envy

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