

REBT and ABC

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) was developed by Albert Ellis in the mid 1950s and is based on the concept that emotions and behaviours result from thought processes and that it is possible for human beings to modify such processes to achieve different ways of feeling and behaving. Ellis observed that people tended to get better when they changed their ways of thinking about themselves, their problems and the world. Whilst there is no evidence that Ellis was a Christian, this concept is entirely in line with the Bible:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! **Matthew 6²²⁻²³**

As part of REBT, Ellis developed the ABC model, which is a helpful method of understanding the way in which our beliefs affect our emotions and behaviour and, using this knowledge to make changes for the better.

In this model 'A' represents an *activating event* or experience and the person's inferences or interpretations about the event, 'B' represents their *beliefs* about the event and 'C' represents the *consequential* emotions and behaviours that follow from those thoughts and beliefs. Whilst REBT is not a "Christian" form of counselling, some of the techniques are useful in evaluating and dealing with our view of ourselves in a Godly manner.

Here is an example of an emotional episode, as experienced by a person whose history indicates a proneness to low self-worth and a tendency to misinterpret how she is viewed by other people:

A. Activating event (What happened?)	A friend passed me in the street without acknowledging me. Inferences about the event: "He's ignoring me; he doesn't like me."
C. Consequential emotions and behaviours	Upset, feeling lonely, depressed and avoiding people generally.

In fact there is another stage in between this "cause and effect" type of thinking. 'A' does not cause 'C'. 'A' triggers off 'B', 'B' then causes 'C'. B is always there no matter how briefly or unnoticed as we can see below:

A. Activating event (What happened?)	A friend passed me in the street without acknowledging me. Inferences about the event: "He's ignoring me; he doesn't like me."
B. Belief (What did I believe about the activating event?)	I could end up without friends for ever and that would be awful. For me to be happy and feel worthwhile, people must like me. I am unacceptable as a friend so I must be worthless as a person.
C. Consequential emotions and behaviours	Upset, feeling lonely, depressed and avoiding people generally.

People view themselves and the world around them at three levels; inferences, evaluations and core beliefs. The main objective is to overcome the underlying, core beliefs that are the continuing cause of unwanted or unhelpful behaviours and emotions.

Inferences

We make guesses or inferences about what is 'going on', what we think has happened, is happening or will be happening. Inferences are statements of 'fact' (or what we think are the facts), which can be true or false. In REBT, a person's inferences are regarded as part of the 'A'.

Evaluations

As well as making inferences about things that happen, we go beyond the 'facts' to evaluate them in terms of what they mean to us. Evaluations are sometimes conscious, sometimes beneath awareness. In REBT, a person's evaluations are the first part of the 'B'. Unhelpful evaluations consist of one or more of the following four types:

1. *Demandingness* is the way people use unconditional 'shoulds' and absolutistic 'musts', believing that certain things must or must not happen and that certain conditions (for example success, love, or approval) are absolute necessities. Demandingness implies certain universal laws that must be adhered to. Demands can be directed either toward oneself or others. This is often a characteristic of legalistic, religious behaviour.
2. *Awfulising* is exaggerating the consequences of past, present or future events; seeing something as awful, terrible, horrible, the worst thing that could possibly happen.
3. *Discomfort intolerance* is based on the idea that one cannot bear some circumstance or event ('I can't-stand-it-itis'). It often follows awfulising and leads to unrealistic demands that certain things should not happen. This can affect our relationships with each other and with God. It affects our stepping-out of our "comfort zone", what we pray about and our ability to trust God.
4. *People-rating* is the process of evaluating one's entire self (or someone else's). In other words, trying to determine the total value of a person or judging their worth. It represents an over-generalisation. The person evaluates a specific trait, behaviour or action according to some standard of desirability or worth. They apply the evaluation to their total person. For example, 'I did a bad thing therefore I am a bad person.' People-rating can lead to reactions like self-downing, depression, defensiveness, grandiosity, hostility, over-concern with approval and disapproval, condemnation and judgmental attitudes towards others and oneself

Core beliefs

These are the underlying beliefs that guide how we react to life. What specific events mean to someone (how they evaluate them) depends on their underlying, core beliefs. Most beliefs are outside conscious awareness. They are habitual or automatic, often consisting of underlying 'rules' about how the world and life should be. When an event triggers off a train of thought, a person's conscious evaluation of that event depends on the core beliefs they sub-consciously apply. However, with practice, people can learn to be aware of such sub-conscious beliefs.

Unhelpful core beliefs are described as 'self-defeating', that is they:

1. Create extreme emotions that persist, distress and immobilise, leading to behaviours that harm oneself and others and prevent a person from achieving their purpose in life.
2. Distort reality, leading to a misinterpretation of what is happening unsupported by the available evidence.

3. Contains twisted or filtered ways of evaluating oneself, others and the world (demandingness, awfulising, discomfort-intolerance and people-rating).

For instance, if a person holds a self-defeating core belief, 'For me to be happy, my life must be safe and predictable.' Such a belief will lead them to be hypersensitive to any possibility of danger and overestimate the likelihood of things going wrong. Suppose they hear a noise in the night. Their hypersensitivity to danger leads them to infer that there is an intruder in the house. They then evaluate this possibility as catastrophic and unbearable, which creates feelings of panic.

Here is another example, using the ABC model:

<p>A. Activating event (What happened?)</p>	<p>Your friend phones and asks if you will baby-sit for the rest of the day.</p> <p>You had already planned to catch up with some gardening.</p> <p>You <i>infer</i> what will happen: "If I say no, she will think badly of me."</p>
<p>B. Belief (What did I believe about the activating event?)</p>	<p>You <i>evaluate</i> your inference: 'I couldn't stand to have her disapprove of me and see me as selfish.'</p> <p>Your evaluation comes from the <i>core belief</i>, 'I need love and approval from others, or else I feel am worthless. I must avoid disapproval from any source.'</p>
<p>C. Consequential emotions and behaviour</p>	<p>Feelings of anxiety. So you say, 'Yes that's fine.'</p>

Examples of self-defeating core beliefs are:

- I need love and approval from those significant to me and I must avoid disapproval.
- To be a worthwhile person I must be a success at everything I do and make no mistakes.
- People should always do the right thing. When they behave obnoxiously, unfairly or selfishly, they must be blamed and punished.
- Things must be the way I want them to be, otherwise life will be intolerable.
- My unhappiness is caused by things that are outside my control, so there is nothing I can do to feel any better.
- I must worry about things that could be dangerous, unpleasant or frightening otherwise they might happen.
- I can be happier by avoiding life's difficulties, unpleasantness and responsibilities.
- Events in my past cause my problems and they continue to influence me now.
- I should become upset when other people have problems and feel unhappy when they're sad.
- I shouldn't have to feel discomfort and pain. I can't stand them and must avoid them at all costs.
- Every problem should have an ideal solution and it's intolerable when I cannot find it.

Note that none of the above look to God to provide a solution or a means to cope or manage the feelings and behaviours. Instead, thoughts go to finding some other source to supply the need.

Looking at ourselves differently

It is possible to use the ABC model to analyse ourselves and to overcome the unacceptable feelings and behaviours, resulting from our self-defeating core beliefs. To do this we have to add three further stages, not surprisingly, called 'D', 'E' and 'F', standing for Disputing, Evaluating and Further action respectively.

<p>A. Activating event (What happened?)</p>	<p>A friend passed me in the street without acknowledging me.</p>
<p>B. Belief (What did I believe about the activating event?)</p>	<p>Inferences about the event: "He's ignoring me; he doesn't like me."</p> <p>I could end up without friends for ever and that would be awful.</p> <p>For me to be happy and feel worthwhile, people must like me.</p> <p>I am unacceptable as a friend so I must be worthless as a person.</p>
<p>C. Consequential emotions and behaviours</p>	<p>Upset, feeling lonely, depressed and avoiding people generally.</p>
<p>D. Disputing (Self talk, looking at things rationally, forming new rational beliefs to help me achieve this new reaction)</p>	<p>There's nothing to prove I'll never have friends again, but, even if this did happen, it would be unpleasant rather than the end of the world.</p> <p>There's no proof I'm not acceptable as a friend, but even if I were, this proves nothing about the total 'me', or my self-worth.</p> <p>Love and approval are highly desirable, but, they are not absolute necessities. Making them so is not only illogical, but actually screws me up when I think they may not be forthcoming. Better I keep them as preferences rather than demands.</p>
<p>E. Evaluating (Changes to how I would prefer to feel and behave)</p>	<p>Disappointed, but not depressed.</p>
<p>F. Further action (what I'll do to avoid repeating the same irrational/thoughts reactions)</p>	<p>Take responsibility. Go and see my friend, check out how things really are. If he doesn't want me as a friend, I'll start looking elsewhere. Challenge my unhelpful demand for approval by doing one thing each day (for the next week) that I would normally avoid doing because of fear it may lead to disapproval. Look at the self-defeating core belief that is driving the feelings and behaviours I don't want and see where they originate.</p>

Using this technique honestly, we can look at our self-defeating core beliefs and trace their roots back to their source. Knowing where they originate is a large part of coming to terms with them and putting our lives into perspective. As we retrain ourselves to manage our feelings and behaviours, our confidence will grow and we will begin to modify our beliefs for the better in the light of our new experiences.

<p>A. Activating event (What happened?)</p>	<p>A friend passed me in the street without acknowledging me. Maybe he hasn't seen me. There might be something wrong, I'll check it out later.</p>
<p>B. Belief (What did I believe about the activating event?)</p>	<p>I hope everything is OK but I have enough self-worth based on what God thinks of me to avoid it affecting me</p>
<p>C. Consequential emotions and behaviours</p>	<p>Disappointed and a bit upset if it was deliberate, but not fundamentally distressed because it does not reflect on who I am as a person.</p>

- A** Activating event
- B** Beliefs about that event
- C** Consequential emotions and behaviour
- D** Disputing beliefs by looking at the evidence
- E** Evaluating change in feelings after disputing the beliefs
- F** Further action to change the beliefs and modify behaviour