



Why Are You So Angry?

Why Can't You Just Get Over It?

**Anger Management for Today,
Tomorrow, and for Life.**

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Introduction—How to use this book

Anger is a destructive emotion to both those who deliver it and those who take it. No one comes out on the winning end of angry outbursts, tirades or rage. It may seem like there's no way to control it. Perhaps you've tried and failed before. Maybe you did okay for awhile but then reverted back to old behaviors. And it's probably safe to say you're tired of being angry, frustrated, and impatient.

You, of course, are not alone. Often times, through no fault of their own, people don't receive any counseling or the type of counseling they receive is not what works best for anger management.

It's unfortunate that many anger management counselors and group leaders have very little direct education in anger management. They pick at different bits and pieces of different types of psychotherapy and put them in a mish-mash with the results being nothing of much substantive help.

And that's where we come in. We have compiled this information from our vast resources as well as our 30+ years of anger management counseling and psychotherapy. We've made it easy to follow and easy to understand how to apply it to yourself and your situation.

The method we use is called Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and is considered the most direct and effective type of counseling globally, proven both scientifically and therapeutically. It is considered the first Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and its creator, Dr. Albert Ellis is the grandfather of the CBT movement in psychotherapy.

You'll find it laid out for you on the following pages. It's important to read it from start to finish—don't move ahead or bounce around--then go back and pick parts you want to review again. This guidebook is not only for learning to take control of your anger now, but also for any time in the future when you start to backslide. *This is truly an anger guidebook for life.*

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The Insights to Anger

Insight # 1: No one makes you mad. Ever.

In basic terms, anger occurs when you don't get what you want and exercise minimal patience with the resulting frustration. You tend to blame others, when actually it's what's happening in your own head that creates the anger. When you don't know what steps to take, you'll get angrier and angrier.

These are the steps in thinking that lead to anger.

1. I want something; then I get frustrated because you won't give me what I want.
 2. That's uncomfortable -- and I can't stand to be uncomfortable.
 3. I've changed my mind; I don't just want something -- now I DEMAND that I get whatever I want.
 4. You are bad and worthless because you are frustrating or depriving me.
- . To make you give me what I want, I'm going to be very severe with you.

Those are the basic thoughts behind anger. But before we can fix those you need to have an understanding of where our emotions come from, what drives them, how they affect us and what we can do to improve the way we act and feel.

Insight # 2 : Who Pulls the Strings on Your Emotions and Happiness?

Who's in control of your happiness? Are you in someone's spell or do you have complete command of your feelings? The key to a life filled with happiness is to first identify where your emotions are coming from.

Before you can take on the task of changing how you feel to maintain true happiness in your everyday life, it's important to understand some basics about your thinking—your self-talk. It's astounding how what you say to yourself affects how you feel!

By understanding and utilizing rational thinking, it becomes easy to muscle the stress right out of your life. What's rational thinking? The best answer is: The opposite of irrational thinking.

And it's actually something that is not new. Much of its origin can be traced back to Greek and Roman philosophers, such as Zeno of Citium, Epicurus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

More familiar names include ancient Asian philosophers, such as Confucius, Guatama Buddha, and Lao-Tsu. Others, too, had a hand in the teachings, but more importantly: Are the basic ideas valid?

The fact that we as humans are mainly responsible for how we think, feel, and behave is one of the cornerstones to change. IT IS NOT the events in our lives, which "cause" us to feel certain ways, such as depressed, anxious, guilty, or angry, but much more significant, how we **think** about these events which drive human emotions.

Subsequently, behavior that follows is an extension of these emotions and both are directly related to how you think. Therefore, if you want to change how you feel, and adopt new behaviors, it's important for you to know what kind of thinking is driving the feelings you wish to rid. Dispute it, challenge it, and replace it with new ideas which promote health and happiness.

Some people resist the idea that others are not the cause of their emotions. It's common, yet quite irrational, to say: "He made me mad;" "this upcoming interview is making me a nervous wreck;" or "I feel so bad that I hurt his feelings," etc.

But the idea that you are mainly responsible for how you think, feel, and behave can be validated with a simple example. The one I often use is this: let's say we are at a social event interacting with old and new friends. I decide to tell a joke. This joke has sexual overtones and it is a mixed crowd.

One joke: we'll call it the event. Is it reasonable to suggest that we're going to get multiple reactions, feelings from the group? Probably so!

One joke, many reactions.

If it were true that events are responsible for how we feel, then it would follow that each person would feel the same. But they don't! How come? The reason is that each person thinks differently about the joke.

Thoughts are based upon 1) genetics - what some people call hard-wiring, 2) your learning history - what you have been taught directly, as well as, the experiential learning or life experiences, and 3) how you feel at the time.

You may be tired, hungry, or had a long day, which all may affect how you think. All this is the basis of your thinking and largely responsible for how you react to the joke. One joke, multiple reactions.

The joke does not have the power to create human emotions. Words cannot come out of my mouth, float through the air, bounce off the walls, jump into your body, and create an emotional reaction.

We say that thoughts are mainly responsible because we as humans have four basic life processes: Perception, Thought, Feeling, and Behavior. These interrelate and therefore we cannot think without feeling, feel without behaving, behave without perceiving, nor engage in any life process in isolation.

Our focus is on thinking because it is the most responsible for sustained emotions and behavior, which are the ones which most concern us. Once you've learned to identify your thinking, then you can maintain steadily in light of difficult moments. And it's how you'll achieve a life filled with much more happiness.

Let's continue...

Insight # 3: How Your Thoughts and Self-Talk Directly Affect Your Emotions and Behavior.

REBT: What is it, how it works, and why it works for anger management

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), was developed by Dr. Albert Ellis in 1955. It has since flourished and spawned a variety of other cognitive-behavior therapies (CBT). It's effectiveness, ease of learning, and short-term nature are major reasons for its popularity. It is the model for which our highly successful anger management therapy program is based.

REBT is based on a few simple principles having profound implications:

***You are responsible** for your own emotions and actions,*

***Your harmful emotions** and dysfunctional behaviors are the product of your irrational thinking,*

***You can learn** more realistic views and, with practice, make them a part of you,*

***You'll experience a deeper acceptance** of yourself and greater satisfaction in life by developing a reality-based perspective.*

REBT distinguishes clearly between two very different types of difficulties: practical problems and emotional problems. Your flawed behavior, unfair treatment by others, and undesirable situations represent practical problems. Unfortunately, human tendency is to upset yourself about these practical problems, thereby unnecessarily creating a second order of problems--emotional suffering. REBT addresses the latter by helping you:

- 1. Take responsibility for your distress.** The first lesson in healthy emoting and relating was stated by the Roman philosopher Epictetus more than 2000 years ago: only you can upset yourself about events--the events themselves, no matter how undesirable, can never upset you.
- 2. Recognize that neither another person, nor an adverse circumstance, can ever disturb you--only you can.** No one else can get into your gut and churn it up. Others can cause you physical pain--by hitting you over the head with a baseball bat, for example--or can block your goals. But you create your own emotional suffering, or self-defeating behavioral patterns, about what others do or say.
- 3. Identify your "musts."** Once you admit that you distort your own emotions and actions, then determine precisely how. The culprit usually lies in one of the three core "musts:"

Ascertain what you're demanding of yourself, of your significant others, or of your circumstances. Not until you have discovered the "must" can you then go on effectively to reduce your distress.

"Must" #1 (a demand on yourself): "I MUST do well and get approval, or else I'm worthless." *This demand causes anxiety, depression, and lack of assertiveness.*

"Must" #2 (a demand on others): "You MUST treat me reasonably, considerately, and lovingly, or else you're no good."

This "must" leads to resentment, hostility, and violence.

"Must" #3 (a demand on situations): "Life MUST be fair, easy, and hassle-free, or else it's awful."

This thinking is associated with hopelessness, procrastination, and addictions.

Dispute your "musts." The only way you can ever remain upset about adversity is by vigorously and persistently agreeing with one of these three "musts." Thus, once you've identified these demands in your thinking, relentlessly confront and question them to reduce your disturbance.

Begin by asking yourself: "What's the evidence for my `must?' " "How is it true?"
"Where is it etched in stone?"

And then by seeing: "There's no evidence." "My `must' is entirely false." "It's not carved indelibly anywhere."

Make your view "must"-free, and then your emotions will heal.

Reinforce your preferences and conclude:

Preference #1: "I strongly PREFER to do well and get approval, but even if I fail, I will accept myself fully."

Preference #2: "I strongly PREFER that you treat me reasonably, kindly, and lovingly, but since I don't run the universe, and it's a part of your human nature to err, I, then, cannot control you."

Preference #3: "I strongly PREFER that life be fair, easy, and hassle-free, and it's very frustrating that it isn't, but I can bear frustration and still enjoy life considerably."

Step-by-Step Anger Management

Step 1: Adjust your self-talk to positively impact your life.

Before we delve further into the details of anger we must first have a detailed understanding of where our emotions come from. How are they created? Why are yours different than others'?

Most people want to be happy. They would like to feel good, avoid pain, and achieve their goals. For many, though, happiness seems to be an elusive dream.

In fact, it appears that we humans are much better at disturbing and defeating ourselves! Instead of feeling good, we are more likely to worry, feel guilty and get depressed. We put ourselves down and feel shy, hurt or self-pitying. We get jealous, angry, hostile and bitter or suffer anxiety, tension and panic.

On top of feeling bad, we often act in self-destructive ways. Some strive to be perfect in everything they do. Many mess up relationships. Others worry about disapproval and let people use them as doormats. Still others compulsively gamble, smoke and overspend - or abuse alcohol, drugs and food. Some even try to end it all.

The strange thing is, most of this pain is avoidable! We don't have to do it to ourselves. Humans can, believe it or not, learn how to choose how they feel and behave.

As you think, so you feel.

"People feel disturbed not by things, but by the views they take of them."

Ancient words, from a first-century philosopher named Epictetus - but they are just as true now.

Events and circumstances do not cause your emotions and reactions. They result from what you tell yourself about the things that happen.

Put simply, thoughts "cause" feelings and behaviors. Or, more precisely, events and circumstances serve to trigger thoughts, which then create reactions. These processes are intertwined.

The past is significant. But only in so far as it leaves you with your current attitudes and beliefs. External events - whether in the past, present, or future - cannot influence the way you feel or behave until you become aware of and begin to think about them.

To fear something (or react in any other way), you have to be thinking about it. The cause is not the event - it's what you tell yourself about the event.

The ABCs of feelings & behaviors

The ABC process is at the core of this book. This easy to use process is how you will reduce and eliminate anger and other emotional disturbances in your life. It requires thought and practice. The more you exercise it and use it, the easier it will become.

('A') refers to whatever started things off: a circumstance, event or experience - or just thinking about something which has happened. This triggers thoughts ('B'), which in turn create a reaction - feelings and behaviors - ('C')...Much more on this to come in the following pages!

To see this in operation, let's meet Alan. A young man who had always tended to doubt himself, Alan imagined that other people did not like him, and that they were only friendly because they pitied him.

One day, a friend passed him in the street without returning his greeting - to which Alan reacted negatively. Here is the event, Alan's beliefs, and his reaction, put into the ABC format:

A. What started things off:

Friend passed me in the street without speaking to me.

B. Beliefs about A.:

He's ignoring me. He doesn't like me.
I could end up without friends forever.
That would be terrible.
For me to be happy and feel worthwhile, people must like me.
I'm unacceptable as a friend - so I must be worthless as a person.

C. Reaction:

Feelings: worthless, depressed.
Behaviors: generally avoiding people.

Now, someone who thought differently about the same event would react in another way:

A. What started things off:

Friend passed me in the street without speaking to me.

B. Beliefs about A.:

He didn't ignore me deliberately. He may not have seen me.
He might have something on his mind.

I'd like to help if I can.

C. Reaction:

Feelings: Concerned.

Behaviors: Went to visit friend, to see how he was.

The examples above show how different ways of viewing the same event can lead to different reactions. The same principle operates in reverse: when people react alike, it is because they are thinking in similar ways.

The Basic ABC

- A = Activating Event
 - What do you think happened?
 - What would a camera see?
- B = Beliefs about Activating Event
 - What did you tell yourself?
- C = Consequences
 - How did you act?
 - How did you feel?

Step 2: The Rational Management of Anger

What causes anger? Let's delve deeper.

First let us dispose of a common misconception. People do not become angry just because they are frustrated. Frustration is a normal reaction to unwanted events and circumstances, and will result when a person fails to get something they want or ends up with something they don't want.

Extreme anger, on the other hand, is what people experience when they fail to get what they think they *need* or *must* have. It is an emotional response to a frustrated demand. And those two words—and their variations—are very important to the process of eliminating anger.

***Events and circumstances alone do not cause anger.
Anger results from how people view what happens to them.***

There are four types of thinking that typically create dysfunctional anger:

Cognitive causes

What does cause anger? People with anger problems often have a simple answer. They believe that other people cause their emotional upsets. But this raises two questions.

--How can an external event create an internal reaction?

--And why is it that one person can be disappointed but calm in the face of a circumstance to which another reacts with rage?

1. Inferential distortions such as mind-reading, fortune-telling, filtering, and emotional reasoning lead people to misinterpret what is happening around and to them. More important, misinterpretations are followed by self-defeating evaluations.

2. "Awfulizing" and low frustration tolerance about unwanted events (often called 'cant-stand-it-itis'). Anger frequently results from anxiety, and violence often represents an attempt to ward off perceived threats. These threats may be of two types:

--perceived threats to well-being (discomfort anxiety)

--perceived threats to self-image (ego anxiety).

3. Expectations that are held as demands.

Demands typically lead to low-frustration tolerance - a key cause of dysfunctional anger:

--moralizing about how people 'should' or 'should not' behave;

--believing that *the world* or *one's circumstances* 'have' to or 'need' to be a certain way.

4. Global rating of other people:--labeling a person as a 'bitch', 'bastard', or some other all-encompassing label makes it easier to be angry with them.

The role of cognitions in creating anger can be illustrated with the ABC model.

Following is an example:

A: Activating event (experience, event, or situation that started things off):

The children were playing noisily. I could not hear the television program.

B: Beliefs (self-talk that led from 'A' to 'C') Thoughts specific to the situation:

-I can't stand their noise.

-They shouldn't be so noisy when I am trying to relax.

-I have to make them behave.

Underlying rules (the thoughts above then lead to the thoughts below)

-I hate feeling frustrated.

-Others should never do things that frustrate or upset me, and when they do, I must get them under control.

C: Consequence (reaction to the 'A'--the activating event):

-Emotions: Got angry.

Anger Management and the ABCs

The "ABC's" provide an exercise that is effective and simple enough to be used by anybody and -- it works.

The "ABCs" help us to stop being victimized by our own thinking.

A common example is the issue of someone else's behavior "making us angry." This is a very common way of expressing something and we hear it often, but in fact, it distorts the situation it attempts to describe.

A more accurate description of "someone making me angry" is to say that I feel angry about their behavior. They are not making me anything- *they are simply behaving in a way that I am getting angry about.* I notice their behavior and then I become angry. The responsibility for the anger is mine, not theirs.

This can sound strange at first, but dealing with problematic anger and frustration this way works. It's a fact that it is generally irrational and self-defeating to get all worked up about someone else's behavior.

Think about anger for a moment. Someone does something you do not like. You have a "right" not to like it. You have a "right" to share your dislike with them. But where does it follow that since you do not like it, they therefore SHOULD not do it? Do you own, control, or possess them?

You have a very rational preference that someone change their behavior and then you take this preference and escalate it to a DEMAND, as if you were granted supreme power by someone to rule how people should and should not behave.

In addition, *their* behavior is also governed by how they think and feel at that time and is consistent with their thoughts. In fact, their behavior at that moment cannot be anything different than it is (*this is reality based thinking.*)

You don't like it, and you wish it were different, but it is consistent with their thinking. You may still be left with a practical problem. "How do I get them to change their behavior?" Now you become problem solving, instead of problem-focused.

The result is that you may still feel annoyed or irritated about their behavior, but not angry or enraged. You simply have changed your very irrational DEMAND to a very rational PREFERENCE. The less intense emotion will allow you to become much more creative in trying to convey your feelings to the other person with an attempt to get them to change.

Once you downgrade the DEMAND to a simple PREFERENCE, the heat is reduced and you can function again. After all, it's now only a preference!

As you have read previously, there is a simple exercise to help us make this adjustment, called "the ABCs". It is used to analyze the situation and change our thinking about it so that without trying to change external reality, we can feel better about it.

This doesn't mean that we should never try to change external reality- sometimes it is appropriate. It's when it isn't an appropriate or effective response that we can choose to have a different response to feel better.

While the ABCs can be used to help with any emotional upset, anger is the example we'll use here.

To use this ABC exercise for yourself, just pick any situation where you were angry about someone's behavior and realize what it is you are thinking about it that is DEMANDING and irrational, and change it into something more rational- a PREFERENCE.

It is irrational to demand that people behave in the way we want them to! Here is an example using drunk people making a lot of noise late at night as they pass by..

- **A. (Activating event)** Drunk people outside, making some noise.
- **B. (irrational Belief (iB))** I have about A) They MUST NOT make any noise.
- **C. (Consequences)** of having those beliefs about A) When noisy drunk people pass in the street outside late at night and wake me up. I feel angry. It feels bad. I lie awake feeling angry and upset and don't get back to sleep for a long time.
- **D. (Dispute the irrational Beliefs (iBs))** in B by turning them into questions and answers) WHY shouldn't they make any noise? Where is that commandment written in stone? Where is the evidence? Who made you Supreme Ruler of the Universe dictating how people Should or Must act?
- **E. (Effective new thinking-** substitute a rational belief for the B) Drunk people are often noisy, but it's no BIG deal. I don't like it, but I can damn well deal with what I don't like. Maybe I will touch base with them in the morning (when they are sober).

I will CHOOSE to *not* upset myself about this, and I may even stop noticing it because I am no longer *demanding* it be different than it obviously is. When this happens I will say "Ah, the drunk people who pass in the night" and maybe go back to sleep.

You can make an ABC exercise really short:

A. (Activating Event) Drunks walking past outside, making some noise.

B. (irrational Belief (or IB) I have about A) They SHOULDN'T make any noise

C. (Consequences of having those beliefs about A) I feel angry, etc.

D. (Dispute the irrational Belief/s in B) WHY shouldn't they make any noise?

E. (Effective new thinking) Drunk people do make noise. It's what they're good at - it's like a natural talent for them. I will CHOOSE to not upset myself about this.

And you can do this with many situations that you are bothered about and reclaim your peace of mind. Just look for the DEMAND and turn it into a PREFERENCE.

Here's another one...

A. (Activating Event) I tried to do something and failed.

B. (irrational Belief I have about A) I must always be successful.

C. (Consequences of believing B) I feel bad, depressed, etc.

D. (Dispute the Irrational Belief in B) Where is it written that I must always be successful?

E. (Effective new thinking to replace B) I would prefer to always be successful, but let's be realistic. That isn't very likely, is it? I am human and humans are fallible, therefore do not succeed in everything they attempt. If success is important, then I will work harder, recognizing that failure may occur again.

Be aware of "*should-ing*" and "*must-urbation*" (these simply mean the occurrence of problem-causing DEMANDS in your thinking).

Here are some things you might think or believe but are irrational in nature. These could be your "iB"s (Irrational Beliefs):

- I MUST NOT feel overwhelmed with responsibilities...I CAN'T STAND IT when I feel (bored, sad, lonely, whatever)
- People MUST not take me for granted
- Other people SHOULD behave in the way I want
- They MUST see it my way
- I MUST NEVER display weakness
- The sun MUST shine tomorrow
- People who do bad things MUST ALWAYS be punished, etc.

See the next section for a complete list of Rational Beliefs and Irrational Beliefs. A further section contains an ABC graphic and work area.

Step 3: The Four Types of Self-Defeating Thinking and Overcoming Them With Rational Thinking.

There are four typical ways of thinking that will make you feel bad or behave in self-defeating ways, including angry and anxious.

Demanding: using 'shoulds' (moralizing) or 'musts' (musturbating) - e.g. 'I should not have done that,' 'he/she/they should not have done that,' 'I must not fail', 'I need to be loved'.

"Awfulizing": using words like 'awful', 'terrible', 'horrible', 'catastrophic' to describe something - e.g. 'It would be terrible if ...', 'It's the worst thing that could happen', 'That would be the end of the world'.

"Can't-stand-it-itis": viewing an event or experience as unbearable - e.g. 'I can't stand it', 'It's absolutely unbearable', 'I'll die if I get rejected', 'I hate this.'

People-rating: labeling or rating your total self or someone else's - "I'm stupid," "She is hopeless," "He is worthless," "They are useless."

Rational thinking

Rational thinking presents a vivid contrast to its illogical opposite:

It is based on reality - it emphasizes seeing things as they really are, keeping badness in *perspective*, *tolerating* frustration and discomfort, *preferring* rather than demanding, and *self-acceptance*;

It helps you achieve your goals and purposes;

It creates emotions you can handle; and

It helps you behave in ways which promote your aims and survival.

We are NOT talking about so-called 'positive thinking'.

Rational thinking is realistic thinking. It is concerned with facts - the real world - rather than subjective opinion or wishful thinking.

Realistic thinking leads to realistic emotions. Negative feelings aren't always bad for you, nor are all positive feelings beneficial. Feeling happy when someone you love has died, for example, may hinder you from grieving properly. Or to be unconcerned in the face of real danger could put your survival at risk. Realistic thinking avoids exaggeration of both kinds - negative and positive.

Overcoming obstacles

While change is possible, it is not easy - mainly because of a very human tendency known as 'low-discomfort tolerance' [also called low frustration tolerance or LFT].

Most of us want to be physically and emotionally comfortable. But personal change means giving up some old habits of thinking and behaving and 'safe' ways of approaching life.

Whereas before, you may have blamed others for your problems, now you start to take responsibility for yourself and what you want. You risk new ways of thinking and acting. You step out into the unknown. This could lead to an increased level of stress and emotional pain, temporarily. In other words, you may well feel worse before you feel better.

Telling yourself that you 'can't stand it' could lead you to avoid change. You might decide to stick with the way things are, unpleasant though it is. You know you would be better off in the long run, but you choose to avoid the extra pain now.

Or you might look for a quick solution. Do you hope that somewhere there's a fancy therapy which will cure you straight away - without you having to do anything?

I meet many people who try therapist after therapist, but never stay with one approach long enough to learn anything that will help. They still live in hope, though, and often get a brief boost from meeting new therapists or therapy groups.

As well as fearing discomfort, you may also worry that you 'won't be a real person'. You think that you will end up 'pretending' to feel and behave in new ways, and imagine yourself as false or phony. Somehow, it seems, to choose how you feel seems 'less than human'.

You are, though, already choosing your reactions - even though you may not be fully aware of doing so. And using conscious choice is what sets humans apart from instinct-bound animals. It is also what makes you a unique person - different from every other.

So give up the notion that it is false and machine-like to use your brain to avoid bad feelings. Getting angry, worried, depressed and desperate does not make you more human.

You might worry that learning self-control will make you cold and unemotional, with no feelings at all. *This common fear is quite misguided.* In fact, learning self-control allows an individual to be fully human and fully alive. Self-control strengthens your ability to feel congruent to your value system, but without experiencing emotional disturbance (anger, anxiety, guilt, and depression).

Step 4: Changing Your Thinking from Irrational to Rational—the 12 Most Commonly Held Irrational Beliefs, and the 12 Ways to Overcome Them.

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for adults to be loved by significant others for almost everything they do--

Instead of their concentrating on their own self-respect, on winning approval for practical purposes and on loving, rather than on being loved.

2. The idea that certain acts are awful or wicked, and that people who perform such acts should be severely damned--

Instead of the idea that certain acts are self-defeating or antisocial, and that people who perform such acts are behaving stupidly, ignorantly, or neurotically, and would be better helped to change. People's poor behaviors do not make them rotten individuals.

3. The idea that it is horrible when things are not the way we like them to be--

Instead of the idea that it is too bad, that we would better try to change or control bad conditions so that they become more satisfactory, and, if that is not possible, we had better temporarily accept and gracefully lump their existence.

4. The idea that human misery is invariably externally caused and is forced on us by outside people and events

Instead of the idea that neurosis is largely caused by the view that we take of unfortunate conditions.

5. The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome we should be terribly upset and endlessly obsess about it--

Instead of the idea that one would better frankly face it and render it non-dangerous and, when that is not possible, accept the inevitable.

6. The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face life difficulties and responsibilities--

Instead of the idea that the so-called easy way is usually much harder in the long run.

7. The idea that we absolutely need something other or stronger or greater than ourselves on which to rely--

Instead of the idea that it is better to take the risks of thinking and acting less dependently.

8. The idea that we should be thoroughly competent, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects--

Instead of the idea that we had better do rather than always need to do well, and accept ourselves as quite imperfect creatures, who have general human limitations and specific fallibilities.

9. The idea that because something once strongly affected our life, it should indefinitely affect i -

-

Instead of the idea that we can learn from our past experiences but not be overly-attached to or prejudiced by them.

10. The idea that we must have certain and perfect control over things--

Instead of the idea that the world is full of improbability and chance and that we can still enjoy life despite this.

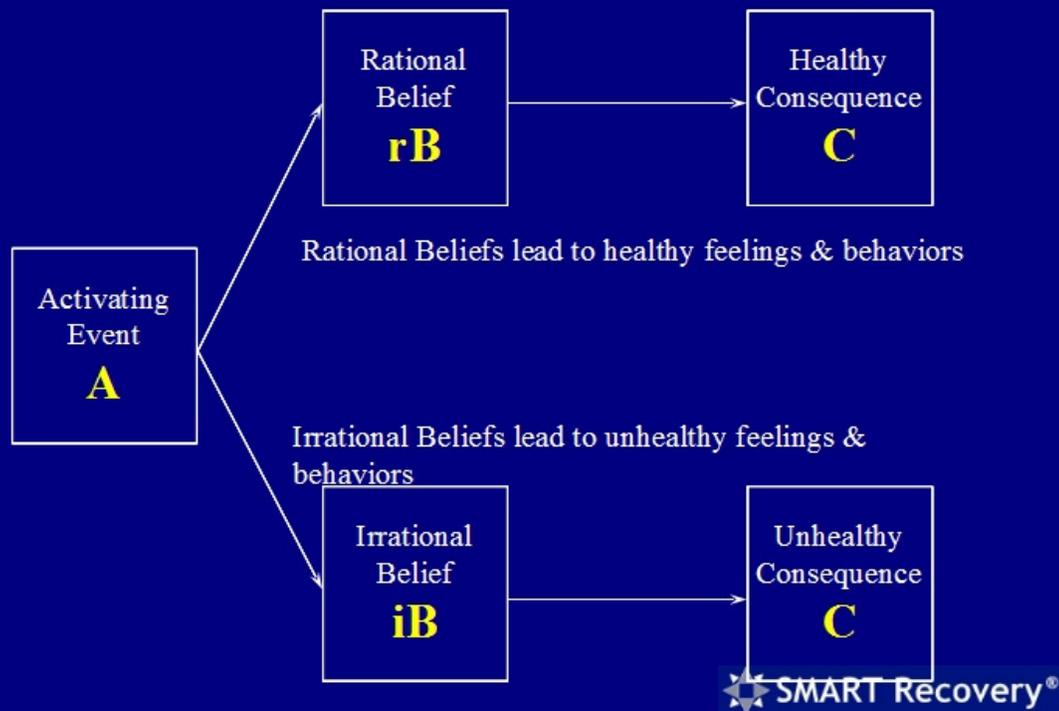
11. The idea that human happiness can be achieved by inertia and inaction--

Instead of the idea that we tend to be happiest when we are vitally absorbed in creative pursuits, or when we are devoting ourselves to people or projects outside ourselves.

12. The idea that we have virtually no control over our emotions and that we cannot help feeling disturbed about things--

Instead of the idea that we have real control over our destructive emotions if we choose to work at changing the “musturbatory” hypotheses which we often employ to create them.

Irrational vs. Rational Diagram



The 12 Rational Beliefs of REBT

Like replacing bad habits with good ones, your irrational thoughts must be replaced with more rational ones. For each of the 12 obvious irrational ideas listed above, what follows are additional reasonable ways to look at the situation. These are facts, not theories. Not new, but instead, long-established scientific facts in the psychotherapy world which will help you with a range of emotions including anger, anxiety, self-acceptance, depression and more.

1. It is not possible for everyone to love and approve of us. Indeed, we cannot be assured that any one particular person will continue to like us. What one person likes, another hates. When we try too hard to please everyone, we lose our identity, we are not self-directed, secure or interesting. It is better to cultivate our own values, social skills, and compatible friendships, rather than worry about pleasing everyone.

2. No one can be perfect. We all have weaknesses and faults. Perfectionism creates anxiety and guarantees failure. Perfectionistic needs may motivate us but they may take away the joy of living and alienate people, if we demand they be perfect too. We (and others) can only expect us to do what we can (as of this moment) and learn in the process.

3. No matter how evil an act, there are reasons for it. If we put ourselves in the other person's situation and mental condition, we would see it from his/her point of view and understand. Even if the person were emotionally disturbed, it would be "understandable" (i.e. "lawful" from a deterministic point of view). Being tolerant of past behavior does not mean we will refuse to help the person who has behaved poorly.

Likewise, our own mean behavior should be understood by ourselves and others. When people feel mistreated, they can discuss the wrong done to them and decide how to make it right. That would be better than blaming each other and becoming madder and madder so both lose.

4. The universe was not created for our pleasure. Children are commonly told, "You can't have everything you want." Many adults continue to have that "I want it all my way" attitude. The idea is silly, no matter who has it. There is nothing wrong, however, with saying, "I don't like the way that situation worked out. I'm going to do something to change it." If changes aren't possible, accept it and forget it. An ancient idea is to accept whatever "is".

5. It is not external events but our views, our self-talk, our beliefs about those events that upset us. So, challenge your irrational ideas. You may be able to change external events in the future and you certainly can change your thinking. Remember, no one can make you feel any way. You are responsible for your own feelings.

6. There is a great difference between dreadful ruminations about what awful things might happen and thinking how to prevent, minimize, or cope with real potential problems. The former is useless, depressing, exhausting, and may even be self-fulfilling. The latter is wise and reassuring. Keep in mind that many of our fears never come true. Desirable outcomes are due to the laws of behavior, not due to our useless "worry." Unwanted outcomes are also lawful, and not because we didn't "worry."

7. As with procrastination, avoidance of unpleasant tasks and denial of problems or responsibilities frequently yields immediate relief but, later on, results in serious problems. The lifestyle that makes us most proud is not having an easy life but facing and solving tough problems.

8. People are dependent on others, e.g. for food, work, etc., **but no one needs to be dependent on one specific person.** In fact, it is foolish to become so dependent that the loss of one special person would leave you helpless and devastated.

9. You can't change the past but you can learn from it and change yourself (and maybe even the circumstances). You can teach an old dog new tricks. Self-help is for everyone every moment.

10. It is nice to be concerned, sympathetic, and helpful. It is not helpful and may be harmful to become overly distraught and highly worried about other people's problems. They are responsible, if they are able adults, for their feelings, for their wrong-doing, and for finding their own solutions.

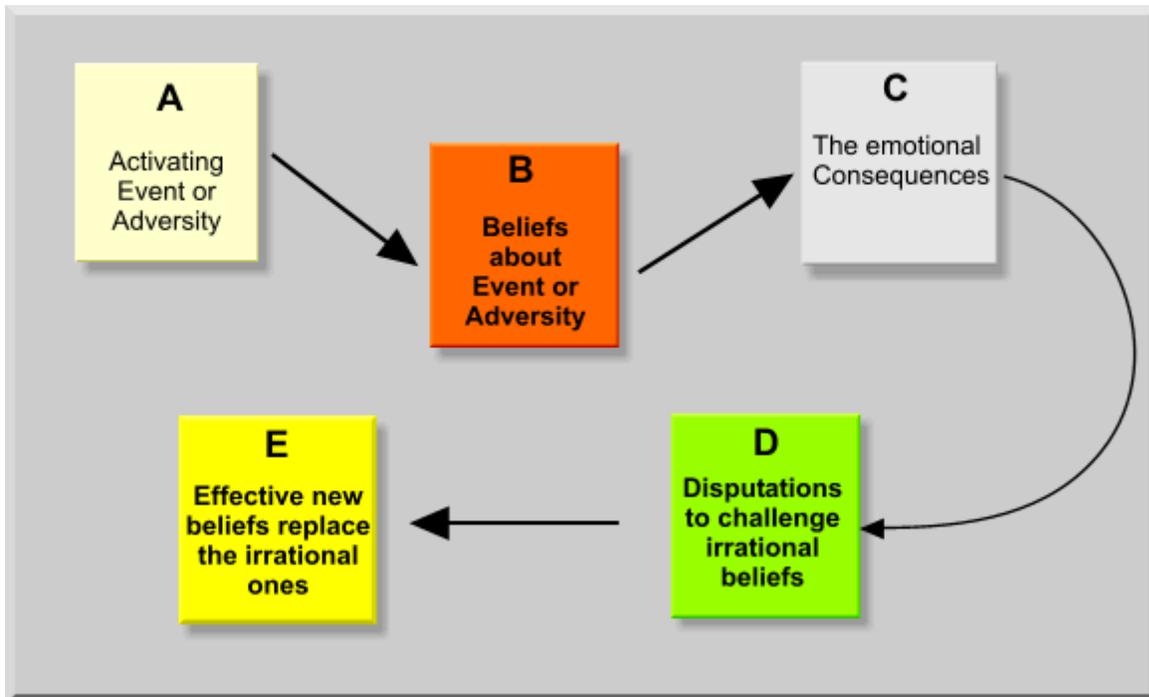
Often there is little you can do but be empathetic. Avoid insisting on rescuing people who haven't asked you for help.

11. A helpless, hopeless "I-can't-change" attitude is not in keeping with modern-day self-help and therapeutic methods. There are many ways to change unwanted feelings. On the other hand, there is merit in "being able to flow with your feelings" in certain circumstances.

Being unable to feel or express certain emotions is a serious handicap, but correctable. Being dominated by one's emotions--a slave to them--is also a serious but correctable problem. As long as our emotions are sometimes destructive and irrational, it is crazy to unthinkingly "follow our feelings."

12. Perfection is NOT the goal. There is no one perfect solution but there may be several good alternatives. Try one, see what happens (observe the laws at work), and try again if your first idea doesn't work. Perfectionism causes problems, including taking too much time, becoming too complicated, causing undue anxiety, and lowering self-esteem.

Step 5: Use this ABC Worksheet to discover/manage your anger hot spots



A = Activating Event

What do you think happened?

What would a camera see?

B = Beliefs about Activating Event

What did you tell yourself?

C = Consequences

How did you act?

How did you feel?

While it may seem odd at the beginning, **you want to start somewhat backwards. Start with the (C).**

Further examples of disputing iBs (irrational Beliefs) and replacing with rB (rational Beliefs.)

1. I MUST do well or very well!

DISPUTE: Why MUST I do very well?

REPLACE w/rB: I'd like to, but things don't always go the way I want. I'll do my best to do well, but when I don't achieve what I think I have to, I'll recognize that life goes on and I can't expect to be perfect at everything I do.

2. I am a BAD OR WORTHLESS PERSON when I act weakly or stupidly.

DISPUTE: Where is it written that I am a BAD PERSON?

REPLACE w/rB: I am a PERSON WHO acted badly, not a BAD PERSON. I BEHAVED stupidly but that does not equate to me being worthless. My worth is not tied to my behavior. People behave stupidly sometimes. It's what we do. I will strive to act differently in the future, but I will not blame myself or get down on myself because I behaved stupidly.

3. I MUST be approved of or accepted by people I find important.

DISPUTE: There is no evidence that I HAVE to be approved of, though I would LIKE to be.

REPLACE w/rB: I can try to seek approval from people when desired, but at times, this may not be successful. That's ok. It is not possible to be approved of or accepted by everyone. Sometimes it just doesn't work. I'll accept it, though I don't like it.

4. People MUST treat me fairly and give me what I NEED.

DISPUTE: What evidence do I have that people MUST treat me fairly? Did I write the 'rules of the world?'

REPLACE w/rB: If I face the facts, "fair" is a subjective term: what's fair to one may be unfair to another. People treat me according to their rules, not necessarily mine. Although, I do have a right not to like their treatment and can choose to challenge their behavior (ideally with less "demandingness" and therefore less disturbance.

5. People MUST live up to my expectations or it is TERRIBLE!

DISPUTE: Is it? What control do I have over what someone else does or doesn't do?

REPLACE w/rB: It's irrational to think I can expect people to be the way I want at all times. When they aren't, it's NOT terrible. Is it really so bad that it's off the chart? Instead, it's certainly unpleasant, undesirable or disappointing...but it is not awful, terrible, or horrible.

Reenactments of Anger Management Sessions excerpted from Dr. Michael Edelstein, “Three Minute Therapy”

Alvin and Peggy

Alvin, a 53 year-old lawyer, came to me because of his miserable marriage. He said that he often had heated rows with his wife, Peggy, who frequently nagged him and complained. He also reported bitterly that Peggy would never keep the house clean enough or prepare meals as he would like them prepared. Upon discussion, it turned out that he judged his wife’s performance by perfectionist standards. Although Alvin said he was finding his marriage intolerable, he revealed, in response to my questions, that he most definitely did not want a divorce and was afraid that Peggy would leave him.

A Demanding Spouse

What was really wrong with Alvin’s marriage? Since she frequently complained and threatened to leave, I asked Alvin what Peggy was so unhappy about.

“I don’t know,” he replied sullenly.

“Well,” I asked him, “if she were here right now, what would she say was making her so unhappy?”

“That I’m always correcting her.”

“And do you always correct her?”

In answer to this, Alvin irritably began again to recite his wife’s shortcomings, especially her failure to clean and cook to his satisfaction. The root of Alvin’s problem was his anger at his wife, which sprang from his demandingness.

Alvin was not at first aware that he was a demander. However, there was a pattern visible in his remarks about his wife. This pattern implied that he was ruler of the universe and his wife his subject. Such an outlook is, of course, ludicrous, but it was implicit in Alvin’s tone of injured resentment and the uncompromising way he described the issues between them.

Made explicit, Alvin’s attitude amounted to the following:

Peggy **MUST** keep the house clean, and she deserves to be punished because she doesn’t

Peggy **OUGHT** to prepare meals just the way I want them

Peggy **SHOULD** understand me (by “understanding” him, Alvin meant that she should agree with his point of view)

Underlying these demands, preferences that reflected Alvin’s tastes, values, and hopes were evident:

I WOULD LIKE the house cleaned and the food prepared to my specifications, and it's disappointing that they're not

I PREFER that Peggy see things my way

Alvin has a legitimate right to such preferences. His preferences weren't his emotional problem. Alvin's disturbance arose when he escalated his subjective preferences into godlike commands: "Because I'd love it if you kept the house cleaner, prepared meals to my taste and didn't hassle me, you MUST do as I say!"

Alvin had an attitude very common in troubled marriages: "Why should I be the one to change? If she treated me better, I wouldn't be so upset. She SHOULD be the one to change." I persuaded Alvin—and he took a lot of persuading—that this attitude was irrelevant and impractical. If he did not want a divorce, then he was stuck with Peggy, and realistically there was no likelihood that she would start behaving according to his ideal picture of how she "should" behave.

Alvin's "musts" were without foundation. No reason exists that Peggy or anyone else MUST do as Alvin likes. If Alvin actually did run the universe, with Peggy as his slave, his demandingness would have been reasonable. You might think it was pretty crazy for Alvin to view himself—a very limited, imperfect person—as ruler of the universe. Yet such a view is the essence of all anger.

Problems With a Preteen: Leanne and Sally

In my psychotherapy practice I continually encounter people with hostility problems: parents angry at their kids, kids angry at their parents, and husbands and wives angry at each other and at their lovers, not to mention their spouses' lovers.

Leanne was 41 and had a 12 year-old daughter, Sally. Leanne came to see me because she was afraid she might one day explode at Sally's delinquent behavior. Sally was playing hooky and lying with increasing frequency.

"I can't understand why Sally lies like she does. After promising every night that she'll go to school next morning, she doesn't do a thing about it."

I asked Leanne what she was doing to help Sally get going in the morning.

"Well, I tell her that if she doesn't get to school I'm going to murder her."

"I see. And how does she respond to that?"

"She pulls the covers over her head and pretends to be asleep."

"How do you feel at that moment?"

“I start to boil inside.”

“Where does it get you to boil inside?”

“Where does it get me? Here, I guess.”

“That’s right. Your anger hasn’t accomplished a thing with Sally. Even worse, you’re working yourself into a frazzle.”

“Yeah, I am. I am.”

“And it seems that the more you rant and rave in the morning, the more Sally tries to escape under her covers.”

“You’re right, I guess. But I just don’t know what else to do. I’m beside myself.”

The first objective with people in Leanne’s situation is to help them clearly understand that they are making themselves angry, and that their anger causes additional problems for them.

Leanne had a practical problem: what to do about her daughter. Her emotional problem was her anger. I managed to convince Leanne that once she had tackled her anger, she would then be better placed to do something about her practical problem.

Eventually, after Leanne had trained herself to avoid anger, we worked out a feasible strategy for changing her daughter’s behavior through a system of rewards and penalties. For example, if Sally got up on time one morning, she would be allowed to watch a desired video that evening.

It turned out that the idea had already occurred to Leanne of using rewards and penalties, and she had even attempted this, but she had not been consistent because of her anger. Effective bribery requires a cool head.

Delays, Demands, and Distress: Heather’s Story

Heather, a 35-year-old woman with long blonde hair and a woebegone look, consulted me because she frequently felt melancholy and lacking in motivation.

“I never feel like getting out of bed in the morning,” she told me sorrowfully. “I just don’t feel that anything’s worthwhile.” As well as feeling generally depressed, Heather often became seriously upset and prone to fits of weeping.

After careful questioning, I concluded that Heather’s dissatisfaction was mostly focused on her six-year-old marriage. In most respects, the marriage seemed fine. Heather’s husband Peter was loving, supportive, and communicative. But she felt she just could not stand his compulsive lateness.

As long as she had known Peter, he had never gotten to appointments on time. As much as he **apologized and resolved to be prompt thereafter, he always appeared at best twenty minutes** late. Needless to say, this created serious problems, not only for himself but also for Heather. In addition to being late for movies and social engagements, Heather missed flights and first acts of plays because of him.

Over the years Heather had tried a number of strategies. For a while she refused to go anywhere with him, but that practically destroyed their social life. Helping him get ready was a failure because he claimed she was underfoot and delaying him even further.

Constantly prodding and reminding him only seemed to make him more prone to lateness, and always ended with Heather having a temper tantrum. She tried lying about the times of appointments, and once or twice this worked, but it ended by giving Peter an additional reason to be late: he began to factor her lying into his calculations and to estimate that the true time of an appointment was later than she said it was.

In response to my questions, Heather admitted with great embarrassment that because of Peter's chronic lateness, she was resenting him to the point where she was seriously considering divorce.

Heather's practical problem was that she was often inconvenienced by her husband's lateness. Her emotional problem was that she was making herself miserable because of the anger she directed against her husband.

Heather's demands included:

Peter **MUST** treat me more considerately

He **MUST** be on time

He **MUST** not ruin my plans

He **MUST** not keep my friends waiting

He **SHOULD** be more caring

Because he is so responsible in other areas of his life, he **SHOULD** act more responsibly in this area

Heather's ABC Exercise

Here's an example of one of the many exercises that Heather wrote out and thought through until she had thoroughly uprooted her "musts."

(Activating Event): Peter treats me inconsiderately by arriving 30 minutes late for our appointment.

(irrational Belief): Peter **MUST** treat me more considerately.

(emotional Consequences): Anger, fury, rage.

(Disputing): Why MUST he treat me more considerately?

(Effective new thinking): There's no law of the universe stating that Peter MUST treat me more considerately. I strongly prefer that he does, but I don't run the universe and I can't control Peter. Since he's an imperfect human with free will and free choice, he's going to act inconsiderately at times. Everyone is imperfect, and persistent lateness is Peter's kind of imperfection. That's very unpleasant but hardly a horror! Although I distinctly do not like such inconsiderate behavior, I can stand what I don't like. Rather than eating myself up inside about it, I had better face the fact once and for all that whenever we make an appointment with anyone, the probability is that Peter will be late. How unfortunate! But the reality is that enjoying the advantages of my marriage means also suffering the disadvantages.

(new Feeling): Displeasure rather than anger.

Two months of therapy helped Heather feel more accepting of Peter's problem. However, she did occasionally experience brief setbacks by demanding that Peter be better at keeping appointments. But immediately, without fail, she took out paper and pencil and did an ABC. These few minutes of concentrated reflection changed her anger to simply keen displeasure about living with the problem.

How can Heather keep her cool?

Dealing with your own anger, resentment, or hostility involves three steps:

First, admit that you are making yourself angry. No other person, experience, or situation is. You can recognize that a person, experience, or situation is unpleasant or undesired. That alone doesn't explain or justify your anger. No matter how obnoxious the object of your dislike may be, the anger is your responsibility. It is never warranted by external circumstances.

Second, identify the demand you are making—the "must" or the "should" you are inventing inside your head—which is leading to your anger about the frustrating person or situation.

Finally, question and dispute this demand ad nauseum, until it loses all plausibility.

Dealing With Difficult People

I can already hear some readers objecting: "Is Heather supposed to put up with this inconsiderate behavior? Are you telling us we have to be meek and mild?"

People who try to justify anger usually speak as though the only alternative to anger is to be passively "meek and mild." But in fact, other alternatives are available, such as calm assertiveness or reasoned compliance. Here are some examples:

A state trooper awarding a speeding ticket is typically neither angry nor passive. He is calm, firm, and assertive.

A professional boxer is not “meek and mild” in the ring, but he is generally not angry. (He may sometimes calculatedly taunt his opponent, if he thinks that the opponent may get angry and thereby become less effective.)

An army private is rather compliant in the face of her sergeant’s commands. It would simply be foolish for her to behave otherwise, for example, to angrily protest: “I’m a sensitive, feeling individual, so consider my uniqueness before ordering me around.” A policy of calculated compliance is usually best with most bosses, when dealing directly with the IRS, or with any other very powerful organization that has the ability to harm you.

Meekness is One Useful Strategy

But still, readers may want to challenge my advice to Heather: “Surely people like Peter can be made to change their bad habits! Surely Heather has every right to be angry! Are you proposing the other-worldly notion of ‘turning the other cheek’? Are we supposed to let people walk all over us and never fight back?”

At first all this sounds like a reasonable response, but it frequently serves as a flimsy justification for anger and irrational demanding. Suppose you are confronted by a “difficult” person. Let’s carefully consider some aspects of the problem:

It may just be that there really is “nothing you can do” (nothing that won’t have far more undesirable consequences than putting up with the other person’s obnoxious behavior). If there really is nothing you can do, then you had better calmly face that fact.

It may be that your only real choice is to leave or stay. If you decide it’s best to leave the other person, then why not leave without anger? (When people look back later on the furious rows that occurred at the time a relationship was terminated, they are often glad the relationship was terminated, but they nearly always regret the angry scenes.)

If you decide to stay, then you accept the probability that he will continue his obnoxious behavior. Either way, anger doesn’t help. Either way, anger is causing you additional problems. And either way, you are more likely to make the best decision about staying or leaving if you first get rid of your anger and accept the other person’s behavior for the time being.

If there is something you can do (other than leaving), it will not be helped by being angry, and being angry will probably reduce your effectiveness at doing it. (If it’s really true—and this is quite exceptional—that showing anger will be effective in getting the other person to do what you want and will not have worse consequences for you, then it’s better to keep a cool head and pretend to be angry.)

If you get rid of your anger and calm down, you can more realistically survey the available options. You can rationally experiment with different tactics for changing the other person. Remember, getting rid of your anger does not mean liking what used to make you angry, nor does it mean being resigned to it.

If the other person's undesirable behavior is of long standing, then there's a strong possibility that he will never change, and if he ever does change it may be slowly, or it may not happen for some years. Even if you hope that he may change significantly in the near future, it would be unwise to assume that he will.

Very often the kind of behavior that flows from anger is almost the worst possible way to get the result you would like. For example, ranting and raving at someone is very rarely an efficacious method for improving their behavior. It usually leads to resistance and resentment in the other person. Even if you are also doing something effective to get him to change, your displays of anger will probably retard his progress.

Surprisingly, angry behavior often fuels the other person's unpleasant behavior. You may find that, simply because you are calm and reasoned all the time, the other person will spontaneously start to improve. Of course, this may not happen, but it happens often enough to be worth mentioning.

Sometimes a consistent display of love and affection (or, in the case of a non-intimate relationship, of amiable respect) is effective in modifying the other person's obnoxious behavior. Angry feelings would almost certainly sabotage that effort.

Yes, Heather does have a right to be angry. We all have a perfect right to be foolish in any number of ways.

There are some circumstances where turning the other cheek may be an effective method for resolving a problem. It's a bad idea to make 'turning the other cheek' into an absolute principle. But where it might work, why not try it?

You may be wondering what happened to Heather. Accepting the reality of Peter's lateness and avoiding anger, she became much less distressed. After several months in which she demonstrated that she did not demand that Peter MUST be on time for appointments, she was able to discuss with him, in a calm and good-humored way, different possibilities for coping with his lateness.

One method—more symbolic than anything else—was for him to pay her a fine of one dollar for every minute he was late. After some weeks of this, Peter's lateness was still a problem, but the average time late had been reduced, and occasionally he would appear on time, much to the pleasure of both of them.

The Case of the Repulsive Relative: Ernie and the In-Laws

Ernie, 28, had a good marriage with a first baby on the way. He came to me because of his anger problem—he described himself as having “a short fuse.” Ernie was a well-liked “captain” (head waiter) at an elegant New York restaurant, yet he was almost fired on two occasions when he exploded at customers who, he complained, were playing “head games” with him.

Over the course of his five years in that job, Ernie generally got along well with his manager. On unexpectedly busy nights, she would sometimes make a last-minute request that he stay later than originally scheduled. Regrettably, Ernie responded angrily.

Worse yet, he once came upon a police officer writing him a parking ticket. In a rage, Ernie foolishly punched the policeman. What probably saved Ernie from criminal prosecution was his thin, diminutive, non-threatening appearance.

A few months later, Ernie called for further therapy. This time, Ernie's most pressing problem involved a new protagonist. In two weeks' time Ernie's in-laws, Leroy and Gloria, would be arriving from the West Coast for their annual month-long stay. It was understandable, after I had heard his description of Leroy, that Ernie wasn't thrilled with the prospect:

"You wouldn't believe it. He's oblivious to the rest of the world. He does what he wants, when he wants to, without the slightest concern for anyone else's privacy or feelings. He's inconsiderate, thick-skulled, and he has body odor."

"Last year Gloria was seriously considering divorce, but she has her own problems. She's insecure and is afraid to leave after thirty years of marriage.

"Leroy doesn't believe in using deodorant. He claims it's unhealthy since it's made with aluminum. But he's sitting at the dinner table and he stinks. And did you ever see anyone who brushes his teeth in the living room while everyone else is watching TV? This drives me up the wall. Or he'll be talking to you and flossing his teeth. Would you believe that I can tell him that he's an idiot and curse him up and down, and it won't bother him? But he's driving me crazy.

"We were out the other day and we needed some film, so we decided to stop at one of those large chain pharmacies. Leroy was chomping down a bag of cookies and a very courteous salesclerk came over to help us. Chewing a mouthful and a half, Leroy asked for film. The salesclerk immediately recoiled, got very short with Leroy, and dispensed with him as quickly as she could.

"After we left the store I confronted Leroy: 'Do you think the salesclerk was a little brusque with you?' He admitted that he had noticed it. But when I asked him why he thought she was, he hadn't the foggiest notion. I gave him my interpretation and he sort of acknowledged that I might be right, but showed no interest in changing. I blew my stack."

We then uncovered some of Ernie's "musts":

Leroy MUST show some interest in making his behavior less unpleasant to others

Leroy MUST act like a respectable human being

Leroy MUST not be so dense

Leroy MUST not be an embarrassment in public

Leroy MUST not be a slob

Ernie's ABC Exercise

Here is one of the Exercises that Ernie did:

(Activating event): Leroy shows no interest in changing his obnoxious behavior.

(irrational Belief): Leroy MUST see things my way, the right way.

(emotional Consequences): Anger.

(Disputing): Why MUST Leroy see things my way?

(Effective new thinking): It would be wonderful if Leroy saw things my way, but no clause in the U.S. Constitution says that he MUST. I distinctly do not like it when he acts inconsiderately, but I can stand what I don't like. Since he's human, that means he's very imperfect, so I can expect him to act imperfectly and even idiotically. Since I don't run the universe, I don't control Leroy. He has free will and free choice so he'll act the way he chooses, not the way I think he MUST. It will be very unpleasant living with him for a month, but not awful, terrible, or horrible. Ripping myself up inside hurts me much more than his obnoxious behavior ever could. At worst, his boorishness would only be a great pain in the ass, but would not give me the high blood pressure that I'm giving to myself. And if it gets worse than I care to put up with, I could tell him to stay at a motel or deny my home to him for future visits.

(new Feeling): Very displeased and frustrated, not angry.

Ernie quickly got back into the habit of spending three minutes each day on writing his ABC Exercises. He thereby minimized his own agitation about Leroy's obnoxious behavior.

Ernie continued to find Leroy highly objectionable to live with, but realized he wasn't likely to influence Leroy single-handedly. So Ernie and I devised a two-part strategy to persuade Leroy to seek therapy.

Ernie began to remind Leroy repeatedly of all the people he was annoying or alienating, including his wife Gloria, his daughter (Ernie's wife), friends, business associates, and sales help. Now that Ernie was over his anger, he felt able to deliver an ultimatum to Leroy without flying into a rage: Either modify your obnoxious habits or stay elsewhere next year.

Leroy accepted Ernie's ultimatum, reluctantly sought therapy, and rather begrudgingly started to change. Soon, Leroy began to notice the somewhat pleased comments he received from those who knew him, and he became a little more enthusiastic about changing.

Leroy has not transformed his entire personality, but he has changed enough to make living with him for one month each year a relatively pleasant experience for Ernie and his wife.

The Top 10 Reasons to Give Up Your Anger

10. Anger often leads to self-destructive behaviors that hurt you and others. These reactions include drinking, drug use, insulting others, yelling, breaking things, and hitting people.
9. People often feel guilty and depressed about the things they do when they are angry.
8. Anger leads to rumination and to a narrow focus that blocks problem-solving.
7. Anger feels bad and the tension uses up your energy and leaves you tired after it ends.
6. Hate is a relationship. Anger connects you with people you dislike.
5. Anger is related to the development of heart disease.
4. Anger destroys relationships.
3. Anger prevents assertiveness that helps you resolve conflicts.
2. Anger drives people away from you.
1. Anger is NOT an aphrodisiac.

These are the facts about anger. Print them out and carry them with you. The more you accept these as fact and react with rational thinking, the more you will find it easier to overcome your anger.

- 1. You're not upsetting me -- I am.** No one can disturb me emotionally unless I talk myself into it.
- 2. If I give up my demandingness,** I'll never get enraged again.
- 3. Not getting what I want is only uncomfortable** and inconvenient; and I can stand it.
- 4. Failing to get my way is not horrible,** awful, or the end of the world.
- 5. You are not evil, bad or a worthless person** for frustrating me. You are a fallible human being and have a right to be wrong.
- 6. Being frustrated is bad enough** -- why should I make things even worse by getting mad?
- 7. I'm not a child; I'm an adult** and don't need to have my way all the time.

It is common to be upset if you feel you are being unfairly accused of something. You want to keep your upset from turning to anger and rage. In order to do this, ask yourself three questions:

- A. Is this statement true?** Do I agree that the behavior in question is undesirable? (If yes, say, "Thank you" and try not to repeat these actions.)
- B. If the statement is true** but you don't believe that you were wrong to behave as you did, then ignore the accusations.
- C. Is the statement false?** If so, consider that the accuser is wrong, upset, or immature, and accept that he or she has a right to an opinion different from yours. After a brief response, agree to disagree.

How long does it take?

Learning new self-talk is not always easy at first. This article explains that learning new ways of thinking are foreign to you in the beginning, but will not take long before it feels normal.

Right after people get started in emotional re-education, they want to know: 'How long will I have to practice?' The most accurate, honest answer is: 'You'll have to practice as long as it takes for you to get the result you want.'

At first, most people think I'm just trying to be funny when I tell them that. To get them to see that I'm sincere and that it's really helpful to keep that answer in mind, I give them this advice: Think of the thinking part of your brain (your neocortex) as being a rider; and think of the feeling part of your brain (your limbic system) as being a horse.

When you start emotional re-education, your neo-cortex is like a rider who has ridden his horse up and down the same straight road to work for ten years. Until now, he could trust the horse to take him to and from work with little or no direct control. But recently, the rider moved to another part of town. Instead of a straight road to work, he now has to make one right turn on the way out and a left turn on the way back.

From the very first day after the move, the rider (the neocortex) remembers and makes the correct turns without mistakes. But the horse (the limbic system) doesn't. Instead, it has a strong urge to go straight down the road, just as it has for the past ten years. The horse will require time and lots of practice in being guided around the correct turns, before it learns to make them without being directed.

How long will it take before the horse learns to make the correct turns automatically? No one can say beforehand. Every horse differs in its ability to learn. Every rider differs in ability and willingness to teach his horse. The rider who gives his horse the most practice will teach his horse to make the correct turns without direction in the shortest time possible.

The same logic applies to people who are giving themselves a rational emotional re-education. Those who consistently practice the rational self-counseling method of emotional re-education will emotionally re-educate themselves in the shortest time possible. But it will still take as long as it takes.

So....if you are persistent in doing what you know is the rational thing to do, even if it doesn't feel right because of old habits, it will eventually become automatic and feel comfortable.

Summary

If you want to maintain continued happiness and eliminate or minimize anger in light of difficult moments then *start by identifying your thinking*. This means that some of the way you think about certain things *may need to change*.

Change is difficult for many people, especially when it involves changing thoughts that you have practiced over and over again for years. And the emotion of Anger is intense and very potent and produces behavior that you often feel justified doing and often not sure if you want to change.

But human beings have a wonderful ability to change how they feel by changing how they think. So how do you know what feelings to change, and aren't we SUPPOSED to feel certain emotions in light of the situations we experience?

The question is not whether you should have feelings, but rather are the feelings I'm experiencing helping me to achieve my goal(s) or are they hindering this process?

Generally speaking, *feelings of anger tend to produce behaviors that hinder our life goals*. That's why we want to change them. Not because they are intrinsically good or bad, not because we shouldn't feel them, **but simply because they tend to interfere with having our wants and desires met**.

Although changing thoughts is not easy at times, it is much more controllable when you are taught how, then practice.

Feelings are also the alarm bell, telling us to slow down, seek consult, take another look, or simply work harder. Sometimes we feel we are on a roller coaster: it can be exhilarating and it can also be frightening. **You judge for yourself, but remember whatever you are feeling you can change.**

Expect progress rather than perfection and the journey will be much more manageable.

Dr. David L. Thomas, LMHC
