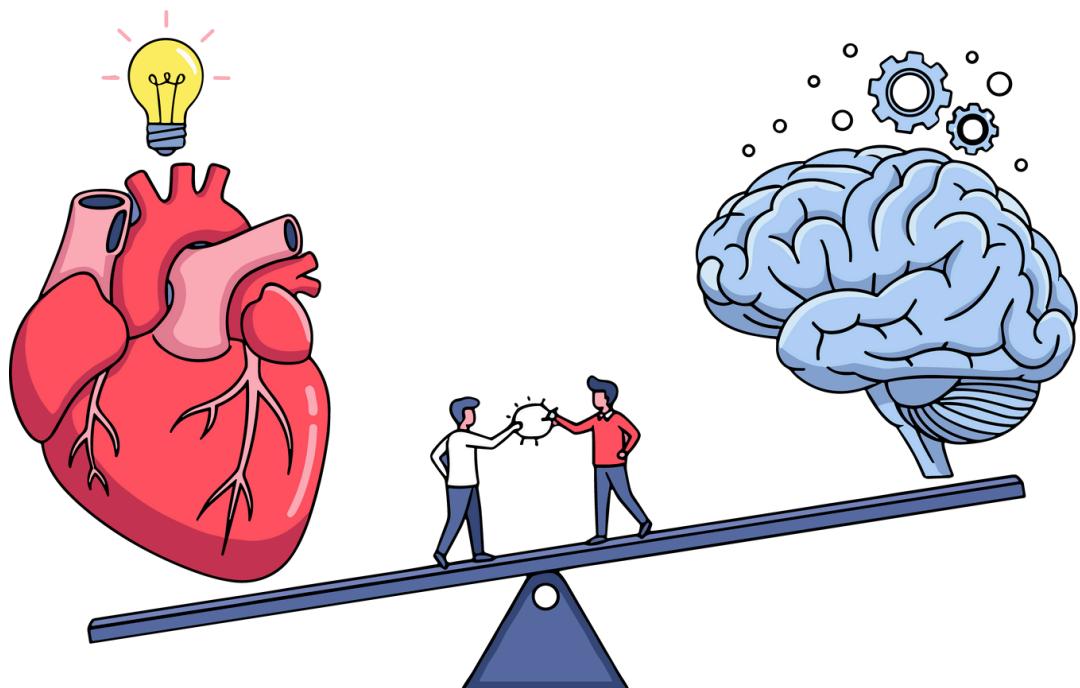




**The Healing Collective**  
Therapy & Wellness

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# RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY



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# Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)

## Essentials of REBT

### The ABCs of emotions:

REBT centers around a simple model called the ABC model. A stands for an Activating event (something that happens), B stands for Beliefs about that event, and C stands for Consequences, meaning how you feel and act as a result. The key insight is that B (your Beliefs) causes C (the Consequences), not A (the event) directly. In other words, it's not the event itself that upsets you, but what you tell yourself about the event.

For example:

A = You text a friend and they don't reply for hours.

B = could be "They must secretly hate me" and

C = you feel anxious, hurt, maybe even avoid that friend. But if B were "They're probably just busy," C would be minor (maybe you feel only slightly concerned or not bothered at all).

REBT helps you see and change those B beliefs to healthier ones.

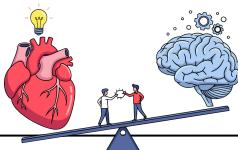
### Irrational vs. rational beliefs:

REBT specifically targets irrational beliefs - these are extreme, rigid thoughts often starting with "must," "should," or "awful." For instance, "I must be liked by everyone or I'm worthless," or "It's awful and I can't stand it when I fail a test." Such beliefs are unrealistic and lead to painful emotions.

A rational belief, in REBT terms, is more flexible and reality-based: "I want to be liked, but not everyone has to like me. If someone doesn't, it's okay." REBT teaches that irrational beliefs cause unhealthy negative emotions (like panic, despair), while rational beliefs lead to healthier negative emotions (like concern, regret) that are more manageable.

### Active disputing:

In REBT, you don't just identify irrational beliefs – you challenge them head-on. This is the D in the expanded ABCDE model: Dispute the irrational belief. You learn to become a lawyer or scientist arguing against that harsh belief. Using the earlier example, if your belief is "I'm a total loser because I failed that test," in REBT your therapist will encourage you to dispute that: "What's the evidence you're a 'total loser'? You passed other classes. Can a single test grade truly make someone a loser? Isn't it more accurate to say you're a person who did poorly on one test?" By vigorously arguing against the irrational thought, you poke holes in it. Then comes E: adopting a new Effective belief, like "I don't like failing tests, but it doesn't mean I'm stupid or a loser. It just means I need to study differently next time." This new belief will lead to a healthier emotion, maybe disappointment instead of depression - and motivation to improve rather than giving up.



## Philosophy of tough love (with compassion):

REBT was founded by Albert Ellis, who was known for his no-nonsense, sometimes humorous style. REBT can feel a bit more direct than other therapies. There's often a focus on personal responsibility realizing that while you can't always control events, you can control your beliefs about them, and thus a lot of your feelings. The vibe isn't cold; it's actually very hopeful because it says you have the power to change how you feel by changing how you think. But be prepared: REBT therapists might call out your self-defeating beliefs in a frank way. For example, if you say "I know I'm worthless because my ex broke up with me," an REBT therapist might respond, "That's an irrational belief. It's unpleasant to be dumped, but it absolutely does not determine your worth as a person." They do this to shake up that harmful belief system – while still being supportive. Many people find this direct approach refreshing, as it doesn't sugarcoat things and it gives you clear steps to feel better.

## What will I do in REBT?

In REBT, get ready to do some mental workout. Sessions often feel like a vigorous debate – with your own thoughts. A typical REBT session might go like this: you describe a situation that's bothering you (e.g. "I had a panic attack during my presentation in class"). The therapist then helps you break it down into A, B, C. You'll identify A (presenting in class), C (panic symptoms, like racing heart, and thoughts like "I have to escape"). Then you'll dig into B: what belief flared up? Perhaps you uncover something like, "If I panic, it will be horrible and everyone will think I'm crazy." That belief "It would be horrible and everyone will judge me" is what REBT calls irrational (it's a prediction that's extreme and likely not true).





## Now the work begins:

Your therapist will help you dispute (D) that belief. This is often done by answering some tough questions: “Why would it be the end of the world if you panicked? Maybe it’d be uncomfortable and embarrassing, but could you survive it? What’s the evidence everyone would think you’re crazy? Have you seen others get nervous and did you judge them as harshly?” You’ll actually discuss and reason it out. You might realize, “Okay, maybe a few people would notice, but most would probably be focused on the presentation content or worrying about their own. And even if someone did think less of me, it wouldn’t ruin my life – it’d just feel bad for a bit.” By the end, you come up with a new Effective belief (E) such as, “It’s not ideal to panic, but it’s not catastrophic. I can handle it, and it doesn’t make me a weak person.”

In addition to these thought-challenging dialogues, REBT may involve homework like writing down ABC charts for emotional episodes during the week, or practicing speaking back to your negative beliefs (some people even stand in front of a mirror and say, “I do not need everyone’s approval!” to reinforce a new belief). You might also do behavioral homework – for example, if you have the belief “I must not make mistakes or I’m worthless,” your therapist could give you a bold assignment: purposely do something slightly wrong or goofy in public (like wear two different socks or mispronounce a word) to prove to yourself that the world doesn’t end and people don’t all mock you. This is called a “shame-attacking exercise,” a classic REBT technique to directly crush the fear of embarrassment.

Expect your therapist to encourage a bit of humor too. Ellis believed if you can laugh at some of the absurd things your irrational mind says, it helps deflate them. So you might even exaggerate a fear to make it sound funny, or give your inner critic a silly nickname. The atmosphere in REBT is often upbeat – you’re tackling challenges head-on and actively seeing your progress as your beliefs shift. Over time, what you’ll be doing is training yourself in a new way of thinking: catching irrational beliefs in real time and talking yourself down in a healthy way. The ultimate goal is that you become your own therapist – when life throws a curveball, you’ll automatically go, “Okay, A happened, I’m telling myself B, and that’s why I feel C. Let’s challenge that B and feel better.” It’s a skill for life.



# What can I expect from my REBT therapist?

## Your REBT therapist will:

- Be direct and active: An REBT therapist typically takes an active leadership role in sessions. They won't just sit back and say "uh-huh." You'll notice they ask a lot of pointed questions and even challenge some of your statements. This is done in a supportive spirit – they're like a personal trainer for your thoughts, pushing you to question assumptions that make you unhappy. For example, if you say, "I must get an A or I'm stupid," they might respond, "Why must you? Who decided that rule?" They keep the conversation focused on identifying and debating those beliefs.
- Teach you the REBT framework: Early on, they'll introduce you to the ABC model and make sure you understand it. They might even draw it out on paper. They'll teach you how to distinguish an event from a belief and a feeling. As therapy progresses, they'll have you doing a lot of the ABC analysis yourself – their goal is for you to master this technique.
- Emphasize rational thinking: Your therapist will consistently guide you toward more rational, balanced thoughts. Don't be surprised if you hear the word "irrational" a lot – not as an insult, but as a description of certain beliefs. For instance, they might say, "That sounds like an irrational belief. Let's turn it into a rational one." They'll model rational thinking in how they talk to you. If you say, "I'm a failure for feeling anxious," they might gently but firmly correct you: "You're not a failure for feeling anything. Let's rephrase that." Over time, you'll internalize this more logical, forgiving way of thinking.
- Use compassion with a bit of tough love: Ellis (the founder of REBT) was known for being kind of blunt, and while not every REBT therapist is as blunt as he was, the approach is definitely honest. Your therapist won't sugarcoat destructive beliefs – they'll call them out. For example: "You're telling yourself life is over because of one breakup – isn't that a bit of an exaggeration?" However, this is paired with compassion. They're not mocking your feelings; they're separating you from the irrational belief. In fact, they deeply empathize with how much pain those beliefs cause you, which is why they're being so adamant about changing them. You should feel that your therapist accepts you as a person (unconditionally, as REBT says) even while pushing you to change specific thoughts or behaviors.
- Give homework and expect follow-through: REBT therapists often assign homework exercises - like keeping daily ABC diaries or practicing certain new behaviors – and they take them seriously. They'll likely start your next session by reviewing your homework. If you didn't do it, they'll explore why (procrastination? fear?) and encourage you to try the next assignment. It's not about scolding; it's about showing you that the real change happens when you apply these ideas between sessions. So expect a bit of accountability. They might say, "This week, try the 'shame attack' exercise we planned – wear a wild shirt and note how you feel. We'll talk about it next time." And you better believe they'll ask how it went!

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- Be results-oriented: REBT therapists keep an eye on the prize: reducing your emotional distress and improving your life. They will periodically ask how your feelings or behaviors have changed on the issues you're working on. If you started therapy unable to go to social events due to anxiety, they'll check, "How did that party go? Anxiety out of 10 this time?" When progress happens, they'll highlight it: "See, your belief about 'everyone will laugh at me' has really weakened – you went and actually enjoyed yourself!" If something isn't improving, they'll double down and adjust the approach rather than just shrug. They are quite invested in you learning the methods and getting better. The tone is often optimistic – they've seen REBT help many people and they'll communicate a confidence that, with practice, you will get a handle on those runaway thoughts and feelings.

