

Michael Neenan and Windy Dryden

Second Edition

# RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

in a nutshell

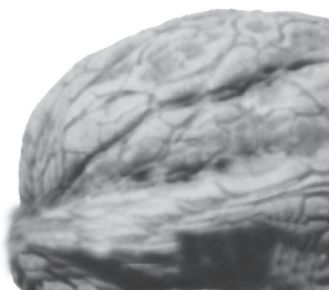
COUNSELLING IN A NUTSHELL SERIES Edited by Windy Dryden



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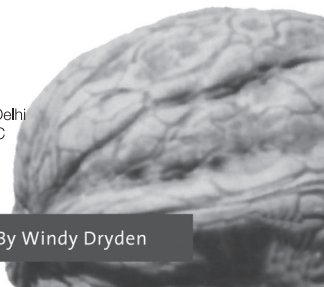
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# Contents

Preface	vi
Acknowledgement	vii
1 The distinctive features of rational emotive behaviour therapy	1
2 The REBT 'Situational ABC' model	18
3 Assessment	37
4 Disputing	47
5 Homework	60
6 Working through and promoting self-change	74
Appendix 1 Thinking distortions and their realistic alternatives	99
References	106
Index	110

# Preface

Our aim in the second edition of the book remains the same as in the first edition: to cover all of the key elements of REBT theory and practice in as few words as possible. We are often asked to compare REBT with CBT, a question we find problematic. We explain our difficulty with this question in the newly written Chapter 1 and instead we have outlined REBT's distinctive theoretical and distinctive features in that chapter.

In the practice chapters (3–6), we have preserved the 'succinct and no-frills introduction to REBT' approach. However, we have somewhat departed from this approach in the newly written Chapter 2. Since understanding REBT's 'ABC' model is so central to understanding this approach, we have chosen to use more professional jargon in this chapter to help you understand important distinctions, e.g. between rational and irrational beliefs.

Otherwise, we continue to hope that this book acts as a counterweight to and relief from the lengthy and sometimes complicated texts that trainees are required to read as part of a standard training course in REBT.

Michael Neenan  
Windy Dryden

# Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank the Association for REBT for granting permission to use the following material in modified form in Chapter 2:

Dryden, W. (2002) 'REBT's situational ABC model', *The Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapist*, 10(1): 4–14.





# ONE

## **The Distinctive Features of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy**

We are often asked what are the similarities and differences between rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). While this seems like a reasonable and straightforward question, we actually find it problematic and difficult to answer. The reason we find the question problematic is this. We consider cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) to be a therapeutic tradition comprising a number of specific approaches, of which REBT is but one. Thus, when we are asked to compare and contrast REBT with CBT, it is like being asked to compare and contrast an orange (a specific piece of fruit) with fruit (a general category).

Thus, rather than compare REBT (a specific CBT approach) with CBT (a general therapeutic tradition), we prefer to outline what makes REBT distinctive within the CBT tradition. So, in this opening chapter, we will discuss fifteen of REBT's distinctive theoretical features and fifteen of its distinctive practical features. So, when you have read the following thirty distinctive features of REBT, you should have a good idea about what makes REBT distinctive within the therapeutic tradition of CBT. Note that we are not saying that these thirty features are unique to REBT and only to REBT. Rather, we are saying that, taken together, these features outline the distinctiveness of REBT.

Before we undertake our task, it is worth saying that REBT is the oldest of the extant specific CBT approaches, being established by Albert Ellis (1913–2007) in the late 1950s. It is thus over fifty years old, and while it is still developing, what appears in this book are its key ideas described in a nutshell!

## The distinctive theoretical features of REBT

In this section, we will outline REBT's major distinctive theoretical features.

### Postmodern relativism

REBT espouses postmodern relativism, which is antithetical to rigid and extreme views and holds that there is, in all probability, no absolute way of determining reality. Note that we have said 'in all probability' here, for had we said that there is no absolute way of determining reality, then this would have been an absolute statement, antithetical to REBT theory.

### REBT's position on human nature

All approaches to counselling and psychotherapy are based on explicit or implicit ideas about human nature. In selecting a schema to outline REBT's views of human nature we have chosen Hjelle and Ziegler's (1992) 'basic assumptions' approach, which puts forward nine continua on which REBT and other approaches can be located with respect to their position on this issue. We have spelt out this position in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1** *Description of the nine basic assumptions concerning human nature and REBT's position on these continua*

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• **Freedom – Determinism**

How much internal freedom do people have and how much are they determined by external and internal (e.g. biological) factors?

**REBT's position: Moderate emphasis towards the freedom end of the continuum**

• **Rationality – Irrationality**

To what extent are people primarily rational, directing themselves through reason or to what extent are they guided by irrational factors?

**REBT's position: Mid-range between the two. People have the capacity to be both rational and irrational. They have to work harder to be rational than irrational**

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**Table 1.1** (Continued)

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• **Holism – Elementalism**

To what extent are people best comprehended as a whole or to what extent by being broken down into their constituent parts?

***REBT's position: Moderate emphasis towards holism end of the continuum***

• **Constitutionalism – Environmentalism**

To what extent are people the result of constitutional factors and to what extent are they products of environmental influences?

***REBT's position: Strong emphasis towards the constitutionalism end of the continuum***

• **Changeability – Unchangeability**

To what extent are people capable of fundamental change over time?

***REBT's position: Moderate emphasis towards the changeability end of the continuum***

• **Subjectivity – Objectivity**

To what extent are people influenced by subjective factors and to what extent by external, objective factors?

***REBT's position: Strong emphasis towards the subjectivity end of the continuum***

• **Proactivity – Reactivity**

To what extent do people generate their behaviour internally (proactivity) and to what extent do they respond to external stimuli (reactivity)?

***REBT's position: Strong emphasis towards the proactivity end of the continuum***

• **Homeostasis – Heterostasis**

To what extent are humans motivated primarily to reduce tensions and maintain an inner homeostasis and to what extent are they motivated to actualize themselves?

***REBT's position: Mid-range between the two***

• **Knowability – Unknowability**

To what extent is human nature fully knowable?

***REBT's position: Moderate emphasis towards the unknowability end of the continuum***

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Source: Hjelle and Ziegler, 1992

### **REBT's distinctive ABC model**

Most approaches to CBT outline an 'ABC' mediational model when the person's responses at 'C' to an event at 'A' are mediated by their thoughts and/or beliefs (B) about the event. This view is articulated in Epictetus's oft-quoted dictum: 'Men are disturbed not by things, but by their views of things'. Now, different CBT approaches have different versions of this ABC model and in Chapter 2 we will outline REBT's distinctive 'Situational ABC' model which highlights key inferential aspects of 'A' and argues that 'C' can be emotive, behavioural and cognitive in nature. It also stresses that 'ABCs' are best understood within a situational context.

### **Rigidity is at the core of psychological disturbance**

REBT argues that a defining characteristic of humans is that we have desires. We want certain things to happen and other things not to happen. However, we also have a strong tendency to transform these desires into absolute musts, shoulds and oughts, etc. When we hold rigid beliefs of this nature, we disturb ourselves. Thus, in REBT, rigidity is seen as being at the core of psychologically disturbed responses to adversity.

### **Flexibility is at the core of psychological health**

As we mentioned above, we have desires as humans. However, if we recognize that we don't have to get what we want and we don't have to be spared of what we don't want, we will not disturb ourselves about the adversities that we face. Thus, in REBT, flexibility is seen as being at the core of psychologically healthy responses to adversity.