

A DIALOGUE FOR LEARNING RATIONAL SELF COUNSELING

Robert L. Turknett, Ed.D.



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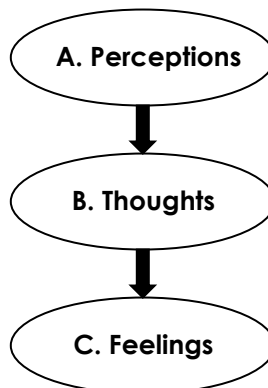
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(C = Client; T = Therapist)

- C. *I have heard so much talk about people taking classes or courses in Rational Self-Counseling. What is it?*
- T. Rational Self-Counseling, also known as rational psychotherapy, rational-emotive therapy, rational emotive therapy education, rational behavior therapy, and rational behavior training, is a self-help theory based on scientific principles of human behavior.
- C. *A theory sounds quite sophisticated. Is it very difficult to learn?*
- T. Whether we recognize it or not, we all think and act according to our theories or philosophies. Rational Self-Counseling is common-sensical, and easily teachable to others.
- C. *How did this theory get started?*
- T. Over 2000 years ago, a Greek philosopher named Epictetus said, "It's not the facts and events that upset man, but the view he takes of them." However, it was not until 20 years ago that Dr. Albert Ellis, a clinical psychologist, developed the theory known as rational-emotive psychotherapy. More recently however, Dr. Maxie Maultsby, a psychiatrist, made some adaptations to the theory and called it Rational Behavior Therapy or RBT.
- C. *Why are the classes called Rational Self-Counseling?*
- T. Regardless of any counseling one receives, whether it is from a psychologist, a minister, or from reading a book, it is always self-counseling. Once a person accepts and believes an idea or fact, it becomes his idea or belief and he is in effect counseling himself, even though it may have been originally stated by someone else. Thus, all therapy and counseling is actually self-counseling.
- C. *I always thought that therapy or counseling was a lengthy process and even a little mystical. My first thoughts, in fact, are of a person lying on a couch talking about his childhood to his psychotherapist.*
- T. There are many kinds of therapies with specific theoretical formulations. Rational Self-Counseling is based on cognitive/behavior theory and is thus more easily teachable than some of the other therapies.
- C. *If a person reads this manual and uses the knowledge correctly, can he learn to become happier?*

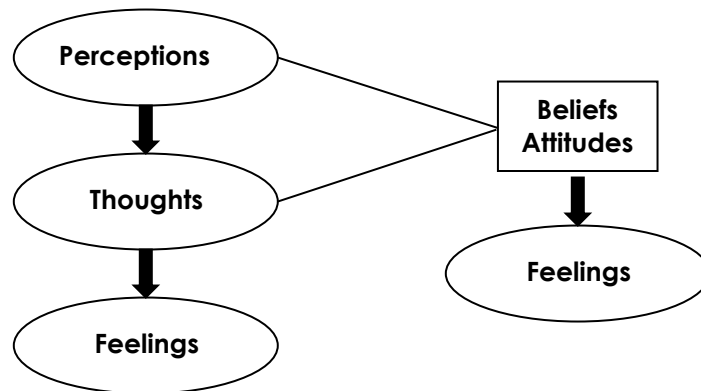
- T. Although there is no guarantee of happiness, the probability is high that a person can learn to make himself happier. The probability is even greater that he will learn to eliminate those feelings that he does not want.
- C. *I do not understand how a person can "make himself happier" or "eliminate those feelings that he does not want." You talk as if I can control my feelings.*
- T. Although you may not always be aware of it, you do control your feelings. What I am suggesting is that you learn to control your feelings in your own best interest, to learn to make yourself feel the way you want to feel.
- C. *Okay, I would like to get rid of my bad temper, my recurrent periods of depression, and my frequent feelings of guilt. In fact, I have been trying for years to get rid of these feelings, but I keep getting worse instead of better.*
- T. Well, let's start with your bad temper. What happens when you get angry?
- C. *Well, there are two people who make me angry most often: my wife and my boss. It would take a long time for me to tell you all the things they do to make me angry.*
- T. First of all, neither your wife nor your boss ever makes you angry. The reality is that you always make yourself angry based on what you think or believe about your wife's or boss's actions.
- C. *Well, you would get angry too if you knew more of the details.*
- T. That may be true, but that would only prove that I chose to think or believe in a way to make myself angry. The important question is whether or not your thinking is in your own best interest. Before going any further, let's look at how an emotion works, using Maultsby's diagram:

How an Emotion Works:



- T. When you say that your wife makes you angry, you are saying that your perception (A) of your wife's behavior causes your feelings (C) of anger. Actually, it was not your wife's behavior that made you angry; it was what you thought (B) about your wife's behavior that caused you to feel angry. If it were really your wife's behavior that made you angry, then you would always have to get angry when your wife behaved that way.
- C. *I always do get angry when she behaves that way.*

- T. Yes, but not because of her behavior, but because of what you think about her behavior. Think about this example for a minute: Suppose you and I both went to hear a speech on amnesty. Let's assume that you are against amnesty and I am for amnesty. After the speech is over, I state that the speech made me feel happy and you state that the speech made you feel angry. Did the speech make either of us have these feelings? No, it was what we thought about the speech that caused our feelings.
- C. *Then you would say that my wife never makes me angry, that I always make myself angry based on what I think about my wife's behavior.*
- T. Yes, that would always be true.
- C. *Well, how do you explain the fact that I sometimes get angry or upset without thinking about anything?*
- T. Okay, let's look at the diagram and add to it:



Over a period of time your perceptions and thoughts become paired to form certain beliefs and attitudes. Once you have developed a particular belief or attitude, you are now able to respond automatically, and your feelings seem to be caused by the situation. However, your feelings actually result from your beliefs or attitudes. For example, let's assume you are terrified at the sight of snakes. If you were walking in the woods and your leg touched anything that slightly resembled a snake, you might become terrified. The snake (or stick) did not make you feel terrified; rather it was your belief about snakes that caused the automatic fear reaction.

- C. *So, you are saying that it is my thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes about my wife's behavior that actually caused my feelings of anger.*
- T. Yes, for example you probably think or believe that it is terrible for your wife to behave that way, that she should not do it, and you can't stand it.
- C. *Yeah, that's pretty accurate. Do you think she should do something that she knows I can't stand for her to do?*
- T. That's not the issue. The point is that when you think, "It's terrible, that she should not do it, and I can't stand it," you are exaggerating life's difficulties and, consequently,

you become very angry. You are thinking in ways that can almost be guaranteed to make you angry.

- C. *But that's the way I learned to think. Most people would feel the same way I did under those circumstances.*
- T. True, because most of us learned similar ways of thinking. All that says is that many people conditioned themselves to think in exaggerations, unfortunately causing themselves needless emotional anguish.
- C. *Okay, but I still think that her behavior is terrible, that she should behave differently, and I cannot stand for her to behave that way. Are you saying I should ignore those thoughts?*
- T. No, it is possible that by ignoring those thoughts or pretending those beliefs don't exist, you would then learn to suppress your feelings, which may eventually cause you more emotional difficulty than would getting angry frequently. Rather, I would suggest or encourage you to question and challenge your thinking to determine whether it is based on reality or in your own best interest.
- C. *How do I do that?*
- T. In order to assist people in determining whether or not their thinking is rational, Maultsby developed five criteria for rational thinking as a guide. According to him, thinking is rational when it:
1. Is based on objective reality.
 2. Helps you protect your life.
 3. Is goal-producing.
 4. Prevents significant emotional conflict.
 5. Prevents significant conflict with others.

Using these criteria, you can determine whether a specific thought, feeling, or action is rational or in your best interest.

- C. *Can you give me an example?*
- T. Okay, lets examine the statements you made about your wife to determine whether they were rational or in your best interest.
- C. *Okay.*
- T. First, you stated "It's terrible." Using the first criterion, the statement is not based on objective reality. "Terrible" is an exaggeration that, once stated or thought, obligates you to feel angry or upset. More realistically, you might state that "It is unfortunate," which would cause you to feel disappointed but not angry or upset.
- C. *The second criterion, "Helps you to protect your life," doesn't seem that relevant in this instance.*

- T. True; however, if you think exaggeratedly frequently enough, you can certainly cause yourself physiological problems in addition to the emotional upset that kind of thinking produces.
- C. *So, this kind of thinking probably won't kill me, but it isn't conducive to my mental or physical health.*
- T. Exactly! To continue using the criteria as a guide, you would ask yourself if that thought is goal-producing.
- C. *No, it's definitely not goal-producing. I certainly don't enjoy feeling angry and upset.*
- T. You would then ask yourself whether this thought prevents significant emotional conflict.
- C. *Well, feeling angry and upset is certainly significant emotional conflict for me.*
- T. Yes, and you might also tell yourself that the situation is already not what you prefer it to be, so why add emotional misery. That only compounds the existing problem.
- C. *You mean that I not only have the problem of disliking my wife's behavior, but I have also added my own emotional misery. It was already bad enough!*
- T. Right. Also, you are expending your energies feeling miserable rather than using your resources to decide what to do about the problem. What about the fifth criterion?
- C. *Well, when I exaggerate life's difficulties and make myself upset, it certainly hinders my relationships with others. In fact, I have noticed that others don't like to be around me when I am in that kind of mood.*
- T. That's good insight! Now, getting back to your statement, "It is terrible," you have shown how it did not satisfy any of the five criteria.
- C. *And it would be best for me to learn to substitute, "It is unfortunate," and use my energies toward problem-solving rather than upsetting myself.*
- T. Good. I want to comment on the word "significant" used in the fourth and fifth criteria. Each person decides for himself or herself what is significant emotional conflict or significant conflict with others. For example, if you were a tax collector, you may be willing to tolerate a high degree of conflict with others because it is goal producing for you to do so. Your livelihood, for example, may depend on it. So what is significant for one person may not be significant for another. In your situation, thinking "It is terrible" produced both significant emotional conflict and significant conflict with others because it did not help you in obtaining your goals and produced useless negative feelings.
- C. *Are negative feelings ever useful?*
- T. A guide that can be used to determine whether negative feelings are useful is to ask yourself the question, "Is this negative feeling helping to motivate me to take some action in my own best interest?" For example, a feeling of dissatisfaction or irritation (rather than anger) may be sufficient to motivate you to try to improve the situation.

Negative feelings can be viewed as signals, just as physical pain is a signal for examination and corrective action. If viewed in this way, negative feelings can be cues for initiating problem-solving activity.

- C. *And problem-solving activity will help me to reach my goals, whereas my anger will interfere with my goals.*
- T. Right. Now, let's take one more example using the five criteria and then we will discuss the others in a more general way. Once you have become accustomed to doing this, you will be able to determine quickly whether your thinking is rational without going through all of these steps.
- C. *How about the thought, "I can't stand it"?*
- T. Okay, this thought would not satisfy the first criterion because it is not based on objective reality. Actually, you can stand it and you prove that you can by continuing to live with your wife despite the fact that she continues behaving in a way that you dislike. More realistically, you might tell yourself that you dislike that particular behavior and that you will do what you can to influence her to behave differently. If you are unsuccessful in influencing her to behave differently, it will still be in your best interest not to tell yourself, "I can't stand it," because that would create additional problems for you. Not only would you still have the problem of your wife behaving in a way you dislike, but you also would have to deal with the emotional upset this kind of unrealistic thinking creates.
- C. *That certainly makes sense.*
- T. For the second criterion, you would probably use the same kind of appraisal you did for the thought, "It is terrible." The thought, "I can't stand it," is not life threatening, but it certainly doesn't aid you in attaining optimum mental and physical health.
- C. *That's for sure. Also, thinking, "It is terrible," is not goal producing because it causes me much emotional upset, leaving less time and energy for problem solving.*
- T. Very good. So you would then say it does not satisfy the fourth criterion because it produces, rather than prevents, emotional upset.
- C. *That's correct and it also does not satisfy the fifth criterion because when I think, "I can't stand it," I feel extremely anxious and react impulsively, usually making the situation worse. My wife and I often just get furious with each other and we never resolve it.*
- T. Excellent. Although you cannot control your wife's behavior, you certainly have a high degree of influence on her behavior. Altering your thoughts, feelings and actions may have a beneficial effect on your relationship. Even if it does not, you have at least eliminated the emotional misery you were causing yourself.
- C. *It seems so simple and makes such good sense. What about the thought, "She should not do it"?*

- T. When we say someone should behave differently, we are really demanding that the person change her behavior. Then, when the person, in fact, does not choose to change her behavior, we feel angry. It would be more realistic to think, "I do not like her to behave thus and so, and I will do whatever I can to influence her to behave differently toward me." Then, we are likely to feel dissatisfaction or irritation rather than anger and are probably better emotionally prepared to act in our own best interest.
- C. *It sounds as if you are excusing her behavior.*
- T. No, she is responsible for her behavior. You are in effect trying to control her behavior, which is not possible. The best you can do is influence her to choose to behave differently. Just as your thinking determines your feelings, her thinking determines her feelings and behavior. She has to decide whether she wants to behave differently. So why upset yourself merely because you cannot control another person's behavior? You already have an unpleasant situation, given the fact that she is behaving in a way you dislike, so why cause yourself more emotional pain by thinking unrealistically and exaggeratedly. You can continue trying to influence her to behave differently without making it even worse for yourself by thinking the exaggerated and unrealistic thoughts that produce emotional upset and anger.
- C. *Are you saying I should never get angry?*
- T. I am not saying you should do anything. If you want to maximize your comfort or pleasure in life and minimize your emotional pain, then I would recommend that you stop insisting that things must be the way you want them to be. Because we are human, though, we all will continue to upset and anger ourselves merely because we cannot make things be the way we want them to be. However, we can all certainly learn to minimize the frequency and intensity of our feelings of anger, depression, guilt, worry, anxiety, etc., if we are willing to work at it.
- C. *What if I cannot, or refuse to, think rationally or realistically? Would I be acting in my best interest to try to hold in my feelings?*
- T. Again, suppressing or "holding in" frequent and intense negative feelings is probably more harmful to you in the long run than expressing these feelings. However, all of us are capable of re-learning emotional responses so that we can feel more often the way we would like to feel.
- C. *It sounds like a no-lose proposition. Would not anyone want to learn to feel the way he would like to feel?*
- T. It seems that way, but it depends on a person's values and his hierarchy of values. Also, remember, adults have already developed long-practiced attitudes and beliefs. First of all, we are not taught to value ourselves as the most important person to us. Unfortunately, a person who admittedly views himself as most important is thought of as being selfish.

Even if our goal was to use our life in service of others, the best way to achieve that goal would be to make ourselves as physically and psychologically healthy as possible. In order to do this, it is essential that you consider yourself as the most important person in your life. I personally know many people who treat their neighbors and friends much more kindly than they treat themselves. The most common excuse for people not to continue working on self-improvement is that they just did not have the time. We attend to the most minor physical problems we have, but seldom attend to our emotional problems unless they are quite severe.

C. *I agree, but why is this true?*

T. Physical health is a high priority value in our society. Mental health, because of learned associations with “insane asylums,” is still a concept not well understood by many people. Improving one’s mental health can be viewed as improving one’s thoughts and feelings and acting in one’s own best interest. As long as the stigma remains, however, I think people will continue to place mental health as a low priority within their value system and unfortunately choose to live a life filled with much needless emotional pain.

C. *Okay, I understand that even though I may think something is in my best interest, I may not follow through.*

T. Yes. For example, I showed you how to challenge your irrational statements that caused you to make yourself angry. You might then say, “Yes, that makes sense and I would like to think the more rational or realistic way.” But because you have practiced thinking another way for many years, your feelings appear automatic to you whenever you get in specific situations with your wife or boss.

Thus, it is necessary for you not only to recognize that your thinking is not in your best interest, but also consistently and diligently to practice the new way of thinking. At first, you will probably continue having those same unwanted feelings, but with consistent, correct practice, you will soon diminish the frequency and intensity of those unwanted feelings. By doing this, you will then have more time and energy to concentrate on your goals and make your life as meaningful as you want.

C. *It sounds easy enough!*

T. For most people, practice is the more difficult task in the re-learning process. Most people can easily learn what is necessary for self-change, but many do not follow through and continue practicing long enough to gain the desired result. In spite of their new knowledge that will benefit them in the long run, they return to their familiar, long-practiced, self-defeating thinking and emotional habits.

C. *Some people, then, actually resist re-learning what is in their own best interest.*

T. Yes, for many people the basic concept that one’s thinking determines one’s feelings is difficult for them to accept. Over the years, a person has learned to blame others or specific situations for his emotional upset. For a person to acknowledge that he causes his own emotional upset requires a major change in that person’s thinking. For example, you stated that your wife and your boss made you angry, which is not factual. You made yourself angry because of what you thought about your wife’s and your boss’s behavior. You see, the responsibility (not blame!) shifts to you. A

person who has spent much of his life really believing that other people or situations caused his emotional misery may not find it easy to give up that belief.

- C. *Well, personally, I feel relieved to know that I (not someone else) determine the way I feel. It seems to me that I can now learn better emotional control regardless of others' actions, which actually gives me more freedom. Before, I was behaving like a robot, getting upset every time my wife or boss did something that I intensely disliked.*
- T. That's good insight!
- C. *I would like to apply this theory to my feelings of depression.*
- T. Okay, give me an example of a situation in which you frequently become depressed.
- C. *In the past three years, I have had five opportunities for a promotion in my job, but I have been passed over each time. I not only became very depressed each of those five times, but I still get depressed when I think about it.*
- T. I suspect you made yourself feel quite angry also, but we will limit this discussion to your feeling of depression.
- C. *Yes, I always got angry at first, then would become quite depressed. I know from what we have already discussed that my boss's refusal to promote me did not make me angry or depressed, that I made myself angry and depressed because of what I thought about that situation.*
- T. Good! If you learned nothing else from this theory other than that insight, you can achieve much beneficial self-change by consistently acting on that new belief. Okay, now what did you think or believe to make yourself depressed about your boss's refusal to promote you?
- C. *I thought: "This is awful; it's unfair; he should promote me. I can't stand to face my wife and friends; I'm a failure; it's like the whole world is caving in on me."*
- T. Okay, all of those statements are either exaggerations or unrealistic.
- C. *I am beginning to feel as if a cloud is coming over my head just talking about this. I am getting so nervous my hands are shaking*
- T. Okay, I would like you to take a deep breath and hold it until you start to become uncomfortable. Okay, now exhale slowly and take another deep breath, holding it as long as you comfortably can. Now, exhale again and continue this procedure for a few minutes.
- C. *I feel less nervous now.*
- T. I had you do that to demonstrate how you can give yourself temporary relief while re-learning new emotional responses. When you slow your breathing rate as you just did, your anxiety decreases. Also, you focus your attention on a particular task, thus distracting yourself from the anxiety-producing thoughts. Remember, your feelings come directly from what you think and believe. I would suggest you use the

technique whenever you begin to upset yourself. By doing this, you can calm yourself and give yourself an opportunity to challenge and question your self-defeating thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes.

- C. *It's like a technique that's used to "run interference."*
- T. Right! You have developed some long-practiced self-defeating thinking and emotional habits and the first step is to interrupt that habitual pattern. Another technique is to think STOP each time you use certain self-defeating words or phrases – words such as should, awful, terrible, horrible, worthless, must, can't, and phrases such as, "The world is caving in on me;" "There's a hole in the pit of my stomach;" or "Everything is falling apart."

When you were upsetting yourself a minute ago, you said, "A cloud is coming over my head," which obliges you to feel depressed. The reality is not "a cloud is coming over my head," but rather that you have been passed over for promotion on five occasions. The slow-breathing technique and the "think STOP" technique will aid you in interrupting the habitual pattern and give you time to question and challenge the accuracy of your thinking. Because of your well-learned, automatic emotional responses, you will at first have to force yourself to use these techniques even though you feel miserable and unmotivated to do so. Thus, when you are not feeling depressed, it is important that you continually remind yourself that you will use these or similar techniques each time you begin to get that depressed feeling. Then, it is essential that you immediately challenge and question your self-defeating thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes that caused these feelings.

- C. *So, one goal is for me to learn to be more aware of my thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes.*
- T. Yes, I have found from my own experiences I can learn new information most effectively by reading, re-reading, re-reading, etc., until I know and understand the new information thoroughly. Since the goal of our dialogue is to teach self-change, it is essential to re-read and consistently practice using the new information correctly over and over until you have developed the habits of emotional response that are in your best interest. Because you are human, however, you will always make mistakes and engage in self-defeating behavior. Most people I know have much difficulty in accepting the reality that they and others are fallible and prone to mistake-making; i.e., people get angry and upset themselves merely because they or someone else behaved fallibly.
- C. *You mean that my not getting promoted only proves my fallibility as a human?*
- T. Your not getting promoted means that you did not, or were not able to, do what was necessary to get promoted. If the reasons have to do with poor performance on your part, that only proves that because you are fallible, you may not always perform in your own best interest. If your goal is to get the promotion, first determine if the goal is realistic, given whatever knowledge you have about that situation. Then, rather than spending time punishing and blaming yourself for being fallible, use the time to determine what behaviors, performances, etc. are necessary to achieve the goal. In fact, one of the reasons for not being promoted may have been that your boss thinks you become too easily depressed and upset to handle the pressures required by the job.

C. *That's exactly what he told me! He said I had the necessary technical skills to do the job, but he did not think I could handle the pressure. I always told myself that it was his refusal to promote me that caused me to get upset and depressed, but I see that I have learned to make myself upset and depressed when I don't get my own way. It has been a vicious circle because I was doing everything necessary not to get what I wanted: i.e., upsetting, angering, and depressing myself whenever I did not get my way. I do this quite frequently in my present job, and I guess I would do it even more in a job with more responsibility.*

T. Good! Those are excellent insights and necessary for self-change. Now let's examine your specific thoughts or beliefs about not getting promoted and see if you can correct your faulty thinking.

C. *I said, "This is awful; it's unfair; he should promote me; it's like the whole world is caving in on me." From what we have discussed, "awful" is an exaggeration that serves no useful purpose and causes me to feel depressed.*

T. Good; also you might ask yourself, "What's the worst possible thing that might happen to me as a result of not getting this promotion? Is it a life or death situation?" Obviously not, but you are reacting to it as if it were life threatening. However, even if it were a life-threatening situation, it would be in your best interest to use your energies for self-protection rather than upsetting and depressing yourself needlessly.

If you think it is unfortunate and inconvenient (not awful or terrible) to be passed over for promotion, then you are likely to feel irritated (not angry) and thus motivate yourself to take some action that is in your best interest. Even if the promotion was an unobtainable goal, it would still be in your best interest not to "catastrophize" because you would then only add misery to your already unfortunate circumstances.

C. *I've been "catastrophizing" about many things for a long time. That will be difficult to stop doing.*

T. True, but it's only difficult, not impossible, and you have nothing to lose except your self-imposed misery.

C. *Okay, my second thought was, "It's unfair." You see, I was more qualified than those who were promoted. So this would be a statement of fact because it really was unfair.*

T. When you say, "It's unfair," and then upset yourself because you cannot demand fairness by others, you are denying reality. The reality is that there is never a guarantee of fairness by others. If you learn to accept that reality, then you will stop upsetting yourself when you think people are behaving unfairly. This does not mean that you merely say, "Well, since that's the way it is, there is nothing I can do about it." You could, for example, decide to do everything in your power to influence others to behave fairly toward you. Even if you are unsuccessful in influencing them to behave fairly, you have at least eliminated the emotional pain that was caused by your unrealistic demand for fairness.

- C. *Wow! It seems that each time I make myself disturbed, it's because I am not accepting reality.*
- T. Good insight! Remember, accepting reality does not mean you have to take a "what will be, will be" attitude. In fact, people who learn to use this theory correctly are assertive because assertiveness is necessary to accomplish what's in their best interest. Accepting the reality that people will treat others unfairly allows the rational, self-interested person to eliminate needless emotional pain when he perceives others treating him unfairly. He is then better prepared emotionally to make decisions and take action that is in his best interest.
- C. *So, are you saying that my getting upset never gets me what I want?*
- T. In this case, that certainly seems true, but you have to decide that for yourself. There may be times when your upsettedness does influence others to behave the way you want. You have to ask yourself if this method is worth the price you pay for getting an immediate desire satisfied. A rational, self-interested person would probably not choose to use this tactic, even if he could fake the upsettedness.
- C. *I think I have been using my upsettedness to manipulate my wife as you just described. I continue doing it because I thought it was an effective method to get my way. Although she seems tolerant of my upset behavior, she does not seem to feel as loving toward me as she once did. Is this what you mean about "the price you pay"?*
- T. That's the kind of self-appraisal necessary for you to determine if your behavior is really getting you what you want.
- C. *Before we challenge the next statement, I have a question. You continue to use the word self-interested. How do you distinguish self-interest from self-centeredness?*
- T. Earlier, I stated that many people do not consider themselves as the most important persons in their lives. I think many of these people probably confuse self-interest with self-centeredness. A self-interested person takes into account the effect his thinking and behavior has on others because it is in his best interest to do so.
- This does not mean that he always behaves according to others' expectations, but that he makes decisions based on all available information. A person who behaves self-centeredly is unrealistically demanding that the world revolve around him, that people cater to his perceived needs. A self-interested person recognizes that he may engage in self-centered behavior because he is fallible, but his goal is to reduce or eliminate this type of self-defeating behavior.
- C. *I like that explanation! Okay, I am ready to challenge my next statement: "I can't stand to face my wife and friends." From what you said before, I obviously can stand to face them because I actually do face them. By believing, "I can't stand to face them," I oblige myself to feel as if the situation is intolerable, when it is really only unfortunate that I did not get what I wanted.*
- T. Very good! Okay, you recognize the importance of changing your thinking to make it reality-based.

The statement, "I can't stand to face my wife and friends," also implies that other people's opinions of you determine your self-worth, that you are worthless because you failed to get a promotion. You seem to be making it a dire necessity that you get your wife and friend's approval.

- C. *Well, I'm sure they don't think much of someone who is a failure.*
- T. I don't know what they think, but it sounds as if you don't think much of yourself.
- C. *Well, sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.*
- T. You mean when you get others' approval, you think you are okay and when you do not get their approval, you think you are not okay. So, when you perform well or are successful, you feel good; and when you fail or are unsuccessful, you feel miserable.
- C. *That's about it.*
- T. Most people have learned to think in the way just described because when they were growing up they were "good boys" or "good girls" when they behaved in socially desirable ways and were "bad boys" and "bad girls" when they behaved in socially undesirable ways. Thus, their sense of self-worth continually fluctuated depending on whether their behavior was being socially approved or socially disapproved.
- C. *Isn't this how we learn socially appropriate behavior?*
- T. Just because a person behaves badly, it does not make him a bad person or mean that he is bad. Rather he is a human being who behaved badly or in a socially unacceptable way.
- C. *Isn't that just a play on words?*
- T. The belief that a person who behaves badly is bad or worthless is probably the single greatest cause of emotional disturbance. Literally thousands and possibly millions of people think they are worthless and make themselves feel miserable because of their failures or poor performances when, in reality, they are merely human beings that did not or could not do what was necessary to succeed or perform in the way they wished at that time.
- C. *It sounds as if you are saying they should excuse their behavior.*
- T. No, it would be in one's best interest to accept the reality that he is human and thus prone to self-defeating behavior. A rational self-interested person does not base his sense of self-worth on his actions. If he determines his actions to be self-defeating or not in his best interest, then he resolves to do what is necessary to act in his best interest without punishing himself. You see, a rational, self-interested person has no desire to excuse his behavior when it is self-defeating. The quickest way for him to get what he wants is to admit to himself his personal responsibility and use the experience to learn how not to behave self-defeatingly in the future.
- C. *Then you would say that I'm not a failure!*

- T. Most definitely! Realistically, you failed at reaching a goal you set for yourself but that certainly does not make you a failure. Mistake-making and failing are useful tools in learning, and if viewed in this manner, you can use your failing experiences to aid you in assessing your goals and determining the best means to achieve them.
- C. *So, it seems I have been basing my sense of self-worth on other people's approval or non-approval of me, feeling good when they approved and feeling miserable when they did not approve. Are you saying to forget about winning the approval of others?*
- T. It is important that you learn not to base your sense of self-worth on others' opinions or evaluations of you. If you, like most people, decide that gaining approval is a desirable goal, then you could do what is necessary to try to gain approval, recognizing the reality that gaining approval does not determine your worth as a human being and that you often will not get it. People choose to give or withhold their approval for both logical and illogical reasons.
- C. *On what do I base my sense of self-worth?*
- T. Since there is no scientific evidence to determine whether any human being is worthwhile or worthless, why not value yourself merely because you exist?
- C. *And not devalue myself when I make mistakes?*
- T. Right! Self-acceptance and acceptance of others without reservation or qualification is essential to optimum mental health. This does not imply that you condone behaviors in yourself or others that you believe are self-defeating or in conflict with your values. Rather, it means that you accept the reality that you and others are human and recognize that it serves you no useful purpose to blame, condemn, or punish yourself or others for behaving fallibly. Learning self-acceptance enables you to work most effectively at correcting your self-defeating behaviors and influencing others to behave more desirably.
- C. *Are you saying that we should not punish children?*
- T. It would depend on what your goals are. To objectively penalize a person for his mistakes may help that person learn to correct those mistakes. But when you blame or condemn yourself or others for making mistakes, you are conveying the message that you or others are bad, worthless human beings for behaving mistakenly. And the reality is that every human being will make mistakes. What are you teaching a child when you react in a blaming or condemning way toward him? You are teaching him that he should think of himself as bad and worthless. If this happens frequently, he will then learn to have a negative self-image (dislike or hate himself) and develop many other behavioral and emotional problems.
- C. *That certainly makes sense! My son's behavior in school has been getting progressively worse over the past two years and his teachers have been telling me he has a poor self-image. I can see I have been teaching him to think of himself as a bad person when he behaves badly. With my blaming attitude, I have actually been helping him to continue the bad behavior, rather than correct it.*
- T. Good insight!

- C. *I am beginning to feel guilty. I love my son very much and yet I have done him much harm.*
- T. This is a good example of how firmly established your emotional habits are. You agree with me that blame and condemnation of yourself and others is not in your best interest, but then you begin feeling guilty about mistakes you have made with your son. Guilt is a form of self-condemnation, self-blame, or self-punishment.

C. *I always thought guilt was necessary for people to learn to behave in responsible ways toward each other.*

T. Guilt is a form of self-punishment that often interferes with your behaving responsibly toward others. When experienced frequently and intensely, guilt often leads to depression / suicide or anger / homicide.

If a rational, self-interested person behaves in an irresponsible way toward another person or to himself, then the feeling of regret would be enough to motivate him not to repeat that behavior. If a person's goals are to behave responsibly, both to others and to himself, then his goals would best be served by concentrating his energies on correcting his mistakes, rather than punishing and condemning himself for being fallible.

C. *I understand what you are saying. There have been many times when I felt guilty, and then I became very angry for having to feel the pain of guilt and later felt very depressed. I can see that changing my thinking will require some commitment and work. For me, it has always seemed too difficult to change.*

T. For a person who is experiencing frequent painful emotions, the amount of work (energy) required to change is probably much less than the amount of work (energy) expended in experiencing those painful emotions.

C. *I never thought about it that way. When I get depressed, I am fatigued and do not feel like doing anything.*

T. Right! Feelings of depression, anger, guilt, worry, and anxiety have negative results for both your mind and body. Also, it is important to remember that, at first, your work at self-change may seem fruitless; but with consistent and correct practice, you will begin to make gradual improvements which will serve to encourage you to continue working. You really have nothing to lose except your self-induced emotional pain.

C. *It is unfortunate that I was not exposed to this knowledge in my early years.*

T. That's true. Fortunately, some school systems are including these concepts within their curriculum. As a nation, we are beginning to recognize the importance of emotional education as a preventive measure. It just makes good sense that if children are thinking, feeling, and behaving rationally, then their academic performance will be at its optimum.

C. *I feel excited at the thoughts of the control over my own life that I never before thought I had. I could actually revolutionize my own life and make it what I want it to be.*

- T. Yes, as long as you learn to recognize and accept the realistic limitations, the possibilities that exist for you are countless.
- C. *Have you any suggestions how I can keep myself as motivated as I am right now to do what is in my best interest?*

- T. Resolve to read our dialogue at least three times a week for the next three months. By doing this you will be consistently reinforcing yourself. Practice daily the newly learned way of thinking. Write down your thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs when you upset yourself and write down your challenges to these thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs, using Maultsby's five criteria for rational thinking. Looking at them on paper will help you to remember the next time your thinking becomes faulty. Mentally practice the rational way of thinking and behaving repeatedly so that your previous automatic emotional reaction will change to the feeling you want it to be. When doing this, be sure you are relaxed and be certain that you are visualizing the rational thoughts and behavior.

Use any technique you can to interrupt your self-defeating, automatic emotional reactions to allow yourself the opportunity to question and challenge your thinking. For example: think STOP, count to 30, or intentionally slow your breathing rate. Remember, once you begin practicing a new way of thinking, you may feel immediately better just because you feel more in control of yourself. You can use this good feeling to motivate yourself to continue practicing so that the results will prove increasingly rewarding.

Also, make assignments to yourself to practice new behaviors that are difficult for you and reward yourself immediately after your attempts, regardless of the outcome. Continue doing this until you become comfortable with the new behavior.

- C. *What about those times when something is "gnawing at the back of my mind"?*
- T. More specifically, you have an unresolved problem that you continually make yourself aware of. When this happens, concentrate solely on that for a period of time, asking yourself, "What can I do about it?" Think of all the possible options and their consequences. Then resolve the problem by making a decision and acting on that decision. In doing this you can clarify exactly what the problem is and take some action in your own best interest.

Your best decision may be to do nothing, but at least you have carefully considered the options and thus feel committed to that decision. To let the problem continue without doing anything to resolve it only encourages you to feel as if your life is not within your control.

- C. *That is very helpful!*
- T. Also, it would be useful to set specific goals for yourself in those aspects of your life that you want to change most and even announce to your friends your goals and how you plan to achieve them. You may find that in doing this they also may become interested and want to learn more about this theory. The greater the number of people within your circle of relatives and friends who are knowledgeable

of these concepts, the more reinforcing your environment becomes for rational ways of thinking.

- C. *Oh, I definitely plan to discuss what I have learned with several people. I can see that by just discussing these ideas with others, I am practicing the new ways of thinking.*
- T. Excellent! Good luck with your practice.

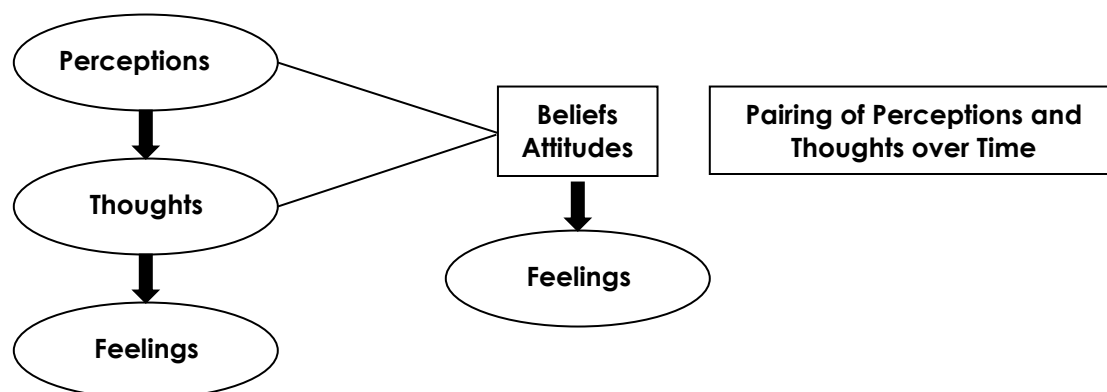
Rational Behavior Training Overview

This theory was developed by Maxie Maultsby, M.D. This theory is an elaboration of Rational-Emotive Theory as developed by Albert Ellis, Ph.D.

I. BASIC CONCEPTS

- A. "It's not the facts and events that upset man, but the view he takes of them!"
Epicetus, 2000 BC
- B. The human brain works like a camera: it makes mental images from one's outside world, from one's imagination, and from one's memory. Neocortex takes thoughts and types them as relatively positive, relatively negative, neutral, or a mixture of these. Limbic System creates an emotional response (feeling) based on Neocortex (thoughts).

C. Anatomy of Emotion



Feelings emanate from what one thinks or believes about one's perceptions. Over a period of time, a person's perceptions and thoughts become paired to form beliefs and attitudes. One now appears to respond automatically to specific stimuli, causing one to believe that the environmental stimuli are responsible for the behavioral reaction or feeling.

D. Five criteria for Rational Thinking (Operational Definition of Rational)

1. Based on objective reality
2. Life-preserving
3. Goal-producing
4. Prevents significant emotional conflict
5. Prevents significant environmental conflict

E. Concept of fallible human being:

Because there is no scientific evidence to determine whether one is worthwhile or worthless as a person, one is viewed always as a fallible human being. Performances and behaviors can be evaluated or rated without affecting one's worth as a person.

II. Goals of Training

Rational self-training

- A. Person learns how to challenge irrational thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs and to replace them with rational ones (using the 5 criteria for rational thinking)
- B. Practice is essential for self-change
- C. Goal is to help person decrease negative and self-defeating thinking so that he / she can increase self-enhancing thoughts and feelings

III. Process of Self-Change

Emotional re-education

- A. Intellectual insight (recognition of a self-defeating behavior)
- B. Cognitive dissonance (in the process of self-change, it is easier for one to continue old habits, despite new knowledge)
- C. Emotional insight (new habit of thinking has been practiced long enough to eliminate old, self-defeating habit)

IV. Other Training Strategies

- A. **Rational emotive imagery:** Use of imagery to practice (when relaxed) new ways of thinking and feeling—hastens the re-learning process
- B. **Relaxation techniques:** Used to help the person gain immediate control, so that new habits of thinking and behavior can be practiced

