

Rational Emotive Imagery

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Rational Emotive Imagery was invented in 1971 by Dr. Maxie Maultsby, Jr. and used effectively by him in his clinical work and that of his trainees. I found it to be quite useful but also found that it overlapped too much with REBT disputing because Maultsby usually had clients who did the imagery go back to their rational *coping statements*, which they had previously figured out with him, and use them to change their inappropriate negative feelings when they thought about an unfortunate Activating Event or Adversity. I therefore began to use Rational Emotive Imagery in a more emotive-evocative and less disputational way.

In Maultsby's version, you imagine an unfortunate Activating Event (A) happening in your life — and let yourself spontaneously feel very anxious or depressed at point C, a harmful Consequence of A. Then you look at your rational Beliefs (rBs) about A (e.g., "I don't *like* my failing this task, but I can *stand* it and it doesn't make me a complete *failure*") and you strongly say them to yourself, replacing your disturbance-creating irrational Beliefs. In doing this, you change your inappropriate feelings (C1) to much more appropriate feelings (C2) of disappointment, regret or frustration.

To use the REBT version of Rational Emotive Imagery (REI), proceed as follows:

1. Imagine one of the worst things that might happen to you—such as failing at an important project, getting rejected by people you really want to like you, or being in very poor health. Vividly imagine this unfortunate Activating event or Adversity (A) occurring and bringing a string of problems into your life.
2. Let yourself deeply feel the kind of unhealthy, self-defeating feeling that you often experience when the unfortunate Activating Event you are imagining actually occurs. Thus, let yourself strongly feel—at point C, your emotional Consequence—very anxious, depressed, enraged, self-hating or self-pitying. Get in touch with this dysfunctional, happiness-destroying feeling (C1) and really, really feel it. Don't prescribe the unhealthy feeling by telling yourself something like, "Now that I am imagining myself being treated badly, I should make myself feel very enraged," because you may actually spontaneously feel panicked or depressed instead of enraged. So, as you imagine this bad Activating Event happening, let yourself spontaneously feel whatever you feel and not what you think you are *supposed* to feel at point C1.
3. Once you feel unhealthily up-set (at C1) as you imagine this Adversity (A), hold this feeling for a minute or two—again, really, really *feel* it—then work on your dysfunctional feeling until you truly change it to a healthy or self-helping negative feeling (C2). Which one? Well, you can actually *prescribe* an appropriate negative feeling (C2) that will take the place of your inappropriate one (C1). Thus, if you are enraged (C1) at the image or visualization of people treating you unfairly (A), you can *prescribe* changing your rage to a healthy emotion of feeling very displeased with and sorry about their acts, instead of enraged at and damn-ing *them* for these acts (C2). If you feel panicked (C1) about your imagining you are doing poorly at an important job interview (A) you can change your panic to a feeling of real disappointment at how you are *doing* instead of horror at *you* for doing so badly (C2). You can also prescribe other healthy or self-helping negative feelings, when you vividly imagine Adversities, such as sorrow, regret, concern, frustration and sadness (C2), instead of dysfunctional feelings of depression, terror, worthlessness and fury (C1).
4. When you work at changing your feelings from self-defeating to potentially helpful negative emotions, be sure that you do *not* do so by changing the Activating Event or Adversity (A) that you are vividly imagining. Thus, when you are visualizing people treating you very unfairly and letting yourself feel unhealthily enraged and homicidal (C1)—unhealthy because they will obsess you and probably make you unable to deal adequately with this Adversity—you could instead make yourself feel only distinctly displeased with these people's behavior and *not* enraged at them (C2) by visualizing that they are not *really* treating you that unfairly or imagining that they have special "good" reasons for treating you that unfair way. This, however, is incorrect use of REI. In doing Rational Emotive Imagery, make yourself *keep* the exact Adverse image (A) that you make yourself enraged about and then work at changing your feeling to a healthy one.
5. Don't merely use distraction techniques, such as relaxation, biofeedback, or meditation methods to change your unhealthy, negative feelings to healthy ones. Thus, when you visualize people really treating you unfairly (A) and you make yourself feel enraged about this (C1), you could relax or meditate and thereby temporarily rid yourself of your rage. But by doing so you would not be changing your underlying Beliefs (Bs) or philosophy about people's unfairness—such as, "They *absolutely must not* treat me in this unfair way! I *can't stand* their acting the way that they *must not!* They are *horrible* peo-

ple for acting this way and they de-serve to be damned and punished for-ever!” (iBs).

By using cognitive distraction techniques like relaxation or meditation, you will shunt aside your people-hating philosophy (iB) — but you will not really reduce it. Almost inevitably, you will return to it the *next* time people treat you unfairly and will again enrage yourself at them. So if you want to *at first* relax and *then* go back to changing this underlying hatred-creating philosophy, fine. But don't just *stop* with distraction methods. Go on to *real* Rational Emotive Imagery.

6. To do this, really work at *chang-ing* your spontaneous disturbed Negative feeling (C1) to a prescribed healthy Negative feeling (C2)—such as sorrow, disappointment, regret, frustration, irritation or displeasure. How? By telling yourself—*strongly* and *repetitively*—a sensible rational Belief (rB) or coping statement. For example: “Yes, they really did treat me shabbily and unfairly, which I wish they wouldn't have done. But there's no reason why they *must* treat me fairly, however *preferable* that would be. Alas, that's just not their way—and may never be! Too bad! Tough! But I can hate their *behavior* without completely damning *them*. And if I refuse to upset myself un-duly about their unfairness, I can perhaps show them, without deep anger, why I think they are unfair and perhaps get them to change. But if I can't, I can't. I'll just try to stay away from people like that and give them little chance to keep treating me unfairly.”

7. If you do Rational Emotive Imagery correctly, you'll usually find it takes you only a few minutes to change your unhealthy, self-sabotaging negative feelings (C1) to healthy, self-helping ones (C2). Don't give up! Persist! Remember that you created your own destructive feelings of panic, depression, rage, self-hatred and self-pity (C1). Yes, you—with your irrational Beliefs. Therefore, you can always re-place them with healthy negative feelings (C2) that will help you deal with unfortunate Activat-

ing Events (A's) and then either change them or live a reasonably good life in spite of them. So persist until you *really feel* the healthy negative feelings you are prescribing for yourself as a substitute for your self-damaging feeling.

8. Once you have made yourself feel less disturbed about the unfortunate Activating Events (A's) that have happened to you—or that you have brought upon yourself—you can use Rational Emotive Imagery as well to work on your *secondary* feeling of disturbance. Thus, if you feel guilty and self-downing (C1) about your rage at someone (A), you can first vividly imagine yourself continuing to create fury and temper tantrums, feeling spontaneously self-hating (if that's how you really feel) about this visualization, and can hate yourself for a short while. Then change your self-talk and philosophy (B) so that you only feel the healthy negative feelings (C2) that you prescribe for yourself about your self-defeating rage (A); e.g., make yourself feel *only* sorry and disappointed (C2) and *not* self-downing (C1) as you very vividly imagine continuing to feel enraged.

9. You can fairly easily, at any given moment, use REBT to create healthy, instead of unhealthy, negative feelings about unfortunate Activating Events in your life. But to use it effectively, you usually have to repeat it many times, such as 30 days in a row, for each unhealthy negative feeling you are trying to change. So if you really work for a number of days at strongly imagining people treating you unfairly (point A) and if you forcefully work at changing your destructive feelings of rage (at point C1, Consequence) to the healthy feelings of disappointment and regret (C2, your new Consequence), you will usually find that when you thereafter imagine A, or when it actually occurs in your life, you will *much more easily and auto-matically* begin to feel the new healthy emotion (that is, C2, a new Consequence) rather than the former, unhealthy one.

10. Rational Emotive Imagery, if repetitively done, thus becomes a useful REBT tool to train yourself more thoroughly to feel healthy, instead of *unhealthy*, negative emotions when bad Activating Events enter your life. By consistently using it, you can change both your thinking and feeling habits and make yourself not only less disturbed, but eventually less *disturbable*.

11. Give yourself the homework assignment to do REBT at least once a day for several weeks to overcome a specific dysfunctional feeling. If you find yourself carrying out this assignment regularly, you can reinforce yourself with some pleasure you really enjoy—such as reading, listening to music, jogging, or eating special food. If you fail to do regular REI, you can penalize (but never damn!) yourself with something you find unpleasant—such as cleaning, ironing, talking to boring people or making a contribution to a cause you loathe. If you force yourself to do REI regularly, however—even when you find it unpleasant—you will soon find the new emotional Consequences you keep achieving by its use quite rewarding.