



THE TOOL:

ABCs of REBT #2 (Emotional Upsets)

EFFECTIVELY USED FOR WHICH OF THE 4 POINTS?

Building Motivation Coping with Urges Problem Solving Lifestyle Balance

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED: Flipchart/Markers or Blackboard & Chalk

WHAT IT IS: A method to eliminate or greatly reduce all emotional upsets with which we destroy our happiness and sabotage our recovery.

WHEN IT IS USED: (Common question or statement that may prompt using this tool)

When members become upset regarding frustrations and failures at any point in recovery. Common questions or statements which prompt the use of this tool:

"I can't quit. I'm a failure! What's wrong with me?"

"I've been clean and sober for some time and nothing is working out."

"What's the use? I'm still miserable/angry/depressed/anxious."

EXAMPLE OF ITS USE IN A SMART RECOVERY® MEETING:

ABCs of Emotional Upsets and Disputing Irrational Beliefs

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) can contribute to our overall mental and emotional well being. Also, learning and using REBT can help us prevent everyday upsets from leading to lapse/relapse urges. Two specific techniques that we find helpful are the **ABCs** and **Disputing Irrational Beliefs**. The ABCs allow us to discover our irrational thinking which contributes to emotional upsets. Disputing helps us eliminate our irrational thinking so we can both feel better and do better. In SMART Recovery® we teach that we feel the way we think; it's not unpleasant events that disturb us, it's the way we think of them. By changing our thinking, we change how we feel. First, the ABCs:

A. "A" represents the event or adversity which we normally assume is the cause of our emotional upsets.

B. "B" represents the real cause: our beliefs, perceptions, ideas and cognitions about the real or imagined adversity, "A."

C. "C" represents the consequences of our distorted perceptions: emotional distress and self-defeating behaviors.

*When doing the ABCs, it can help to know that most irrational beliefs fall into three categories: (1) **Beliefs about yourself.** For example, I must do well or else I'm no good; (2) **Beliefs about others.** For instance, others must treat me nicely and kindly and just the way I want or else they are no good, and, (3) **Beliefs about life in general.** For instance, the world must make it easy for me to get what I want and must create circumstances so things always go my way or else it's a lousy rotten world. These three kinds of beliefs create the three main emotional upsets of (1) anxiety/guilt/shame, (2) anger/hostility/rage, and (3) depression. They also create demand-ingness, whining, condemnation and damnation of ourselves and others, and exaggeration beyond the bounds of reality.*

Unpleasant emotions are unavoidable, and can even be motivating and helpful. But we humans have the natural ability to escalate unpleasant feelings to the level of emotional upset, which easily defeats us. In REBT, we are not trying to eliminate all unpleasant emotions, just those that hinder us. Disputing allows us to eliminate irrational thinking that contributes to our disturbed emotions. Then we may remain reasonably sad or concerned so we can be more effective at dealing with difficult situations. To accomplish this we:

D. Dispute the irrational "Bs". Learn to recognize the inaccurate beliefs and distortions of reality which we use to defeat ourselves and needlessly make ourselves miserable.

E. Exchange effective, more accurate, rational self-statements for our dysfunctional beliefs.

Example: How to eliminate or greatly reduce irrational thinking and emotional upsets.

A (adversity): I have been unable to consistently control my substance use.

iB (irrational beliefs # 1 & 2): I MUST control my use! (demandingness) It's HORRIBLE that I cannot completely control my behavior! (exaggeration) I NEED the approval of my friends. (demandingness) NOBODY likes a tea-totaler. So if I, quit I'll lose ALL my friends. (exaggeration/ all-or-nothing thinking)

C (consequences, both emotional and behavioral): Anxiety, depression, and continued failure.

D (dispute): Is there any evidence that I MUST control my use? Where's the evidence it's HORRIBLE to fail at quitting? Can I prove that NOBODY likes a tea-totaler? Is there any evidence that I'll lose ALL my friends?

E (effective new philosophy): There is no evidence I must do anything well. I want to do well, but I do not have to. It's just not human to do well all the time, and I am very human. There is no evidence it's HORRIBLE to fail. It's bad, but not HORRIBLE. There's no evidence that NOBODY likes a tea-totaler and that I'll lose ALL my friends. Some people won't like me, and I may lose some friends, but probably not all of them.

E (effective new emotions and behaviors): Anxiety is eliminated or greatly reduced leaving the emotion of concern. Depression is reduced leaving sadness or regret. Failure is diminished, leaving greater success. I will look for new friends if I lose my old ones.

D (dispute): What good can happen to me if I get rid of my beliefs?

E (effective new philosophy/emotions/behaviors): If I eliminate my beliefs, I will feel better. I will accept myself better even though I am having problems. I can quit with a more realistic view of what will happen. I won't think of quitting as a HORRIBLE experience. It will be easier to quit. I can learn to accept myself even with my shortcomings. I can be reasonably happy even though I have imperfections. I will try to enjoy myself instead of trying to prove my "worth."

D (dispute): What bad things can happen if I keep my belief?

E (effective new philosophy/emotions/behaviors): If I keep my beliefs, I will feel miserable. I will stay anxious, depressed, and self-hating. There is a good chance I will continue to fail to quit. I may never eliminate my addiction. I may continue to feel worthless.

A (adversity): Anxiety about life's events such as job, family, and relationship difficulties.

iB (irrational beliefs): I MUST not be anxious. (demandingness) I CAN'T STAND it. (exaggeration) I'll NEVER get rid of it. (all-or-nothing thinking)

C (consequent emotions and behaviors): Anxiety and depression about my initial anxiety that greatly worsens my misery. I stay anxious and depressed much longer.

D (dispute): Where is the evidence I MUST not be anxious? Prove that I CAN'T STAND this stress. Where's the evidence I'll NEVER get rid of my stress?

E (effective new philosophy): There is no evidence I MUST not be anxious. I'm human, so I can easily make myself anxious. I can't prove that I CAN'T STAND my stress. I don't like it, but I am standing it right now, so I CAN stand it. It's possible that I will not get rid of my stress, but there is no evidence that I absolutely NEVER will do it.

E (effective new emotions/behaviors): Anxiety and depression about feeling anxious become more helpful emotions of concern and disappointment. New hope for change and a realization that it's possible to diminish the initial anxiety by Disputing the irrational beliefs that creates it. Renewed ability to dispute initial irrational thinking.

Acknowledgments: [Alcohol: How To Give It Up And Be Glad You Did](#) by Philip Tate; [When AA Doesn't Work for You: Rational Steps to Quitting Alcohol](#) by Albert Ellis and Emmett Velten. Thank you Team Members: Nick Rajacic, Joe Milon, Phil Tate