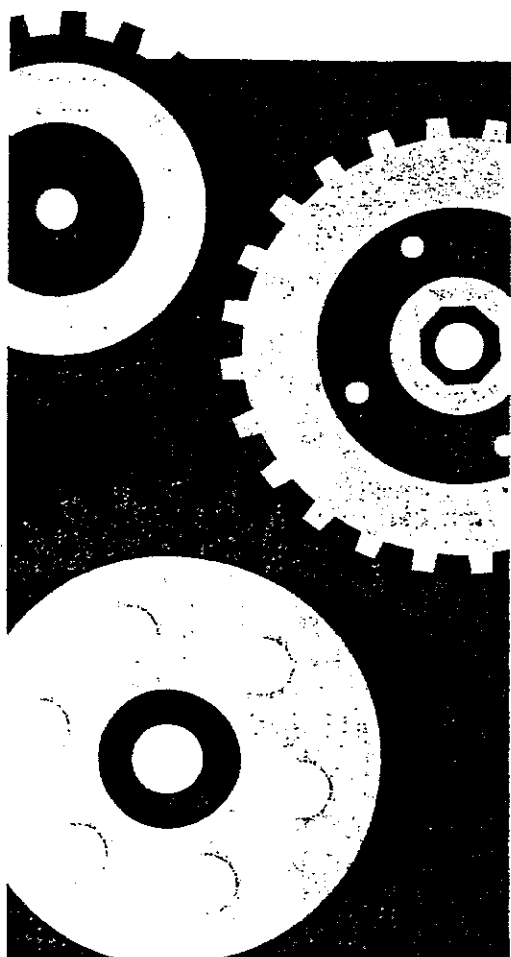


RATIONAL-EMOTIVE THERAPY

# SELF-ESTEEM



DISCOVER  
YOUR  
PERSONAL  
POWER TO  
CHANGE

RET  
THOUGHTS  
FEELINGS  
ACTIONS

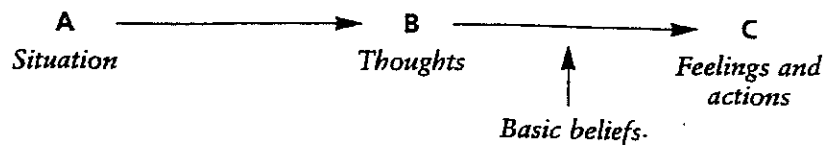
ART PERLMAN, PH.D.

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## 2 Self-Esteem

**About RET** In this workbook, you will learn how to improve your self-esteem by using Rational-Emotive Therapy (RET), an approach developed by Albert Ellis.

RET is based on the simple but profound idea that in any situation, our thoughts strongly influence our feelings and actions. As diagrammed below, our thoughts (B) in a situation (A) lead to our feelings and actions (C).



The belief we hold about our worth is one of our basic beliefs. It is also the basis of our self-esteem. RET can help improve our belief about our worth and self-esteem. As a result, we will generally feel better and act more effectively.

### *An example of self-esteem in action*



Cecily and Debra have many things in common. Each is married, has a family, and holds a job. The main difference between them involves self-esteem. Cecily's self-esteem is high: she believes she is a capable and effective person. In contrast, Debra's self-esteem is low: she believes she is a failure. Let's compare a typical day for each of them.

Cecily wakes refreshed from a good night's sleep. She is in a good mood and appreciates the sunny day. She reminds herself that she is a capable and effective person and looks forward to an interesting and productive day. After dressing quickly, she joins her husband for breakfast. They mix chit-chat with planning for the day. Cecily gets to work early and takes some time to organize her day. Having identified her priorities, she begins tackling the day's most important tasks. When her boss looks for volunteers for a difficult task, Cecily volunteers because she considers it an exciting challenge.



Debra wakes tired and irritable. She has not slept well, because she kept replaying problems from the previous day. For Debra, each new day brings problems that she might fail at. This morning, she is so busy imagining what might go wrong that she doesn't notice the sunny weather; she cannot decide what to wear. When she finally joins her husband for breakfast, her frustration comes out in sarcasm. The couple has a fight during breakfast. By the time she gets to work, Debra has a headache. At work, she puts off the most important tasks and busies herself with lesser matters that hold less potential for failure. She does not volunteer

#### 4 Self-Esteem

Next, write down Debra's *upset feelings* and Cecily's *pleasant feelings*.

Debra's upset feelings:

Cecily's pleasant feelings:

Finally, compare Debra's *self-defeating behaviors* with Cecily's *constructive behaviors*.

Debra's self-defeating behaviors:

Cecily's constructive behaviors:

#### *Identifying beliefs that lower your self-esteem*

Your beliefs affect your thoughts. If you usually think positive thoughts about yourself, chances are your self-esteem is high. If you usually have negative thoughts about yourself, your self-esteem is probably low. By paying attention to your thoughts, you can discover negative beliefs that lower your self-esteem.

In RET such thoughts are often referred to as "self-talk." Examples of self-talk in a person with high self-esteem are "I'm worthwhile," "I'm a good person," and "I'm a capable person." Examples of self-talk in a person with low self-esteem are "I'm worthless," "I'm useless," and "I'm no good." By identifying negative self-talk and replacing it with positive self-talk, you can improve your self-esteem.

## 6 *Self-Esteem*

**B:** *Thoughts about myself in the situation:*

1.

2.

3.

4.

You may find it helpful to repeat this exercise several times using a number of different situations.



### **EXERCISE 4**

This exercise will help you understand how much your beliefs affect your feelings and actions. Recall each situation you described above. Then write down the feelings you experienced and the actions you took.

*Situation 1:* **C:** *My feelings:*

1.

2.

3.

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### *Improving your self-esteem: Developing skills and interests*

Our self-concept includes everything we would include in our answer to the question *Who am I?* It includes the many roles we play, such as parent, spouse, family member, friend, worker; our characteristics and qualities, such as appearance, personality, intelligence, skills, and interests; and our values. Basically, our self-concept includes the positive and negative things we believe are most significant about us.

If our self-concept includes many likes and relatively few dislikes, we will have a high level of self-esteem. On the other hand, if our self-concept includes more dislikes than likes, our self-esteem will be low. We can increase our self-esteem by developing qualities, skills, and interests we value.



#### EXERCISE 5

First, list the characteristics and qualities you like about yourself; then, list the characteristics and qualities you dislike about yourself.

What I like about myself:

What I dislike about myself:



#### EXERCISE 6

Choose two interests or skills that you would like to develop. Be as specific as possible. For example, instead of writing "get better at sports," pick a particular sport. For each interest or skill, write a brief action plan outlining the steps you will take to develop these skills or interests.

Example:

Description: Learn about photography.

Action plan: Buy a camera or borrow one from a friend.

Check out books on photography from library.

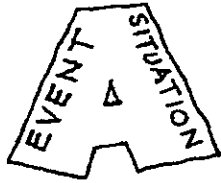
Enroll in a community education course.

Practice and experiment.

**A. Situation:**

My boss asked for volunteers to handle a difficult work assignment. I did not volunteer for the assignment.

(Then, she writes down what her thoughts are about the situation.)



**B. Thoughts (self-talk):**

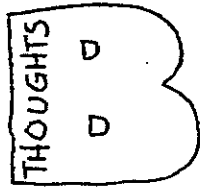
1. It was stupid of me not to volunteer for the assignment.
2. I'm incapable of handling a tough assignment.
3. I'll never have an opportunity like this again.
4. I'm a failure.

(Next, she identifies her feelings in the situation.)

**C. Feelings:**

Sadness, anger, shame.

(Finally, she challenges her four thoughts and replaces them with constructive alternatives.)



**D. Challenges:**

Original thought 1: "It was stupid of me not to volunteer for the assignment."

Challenges:

- It might have been a mistake not to volunteer for the assignment, but calling myself names will only make me feel worse.
- I didn't volunteer for the assignment because I believed I couldn't handle it successfully. If I want to tackle difficult tasks, I need to think more positively and develop the necessary skills. With practice, I'll get better at handling difficult tasks.

Original thought 2: "I'm incapable of handling a tough assignment."

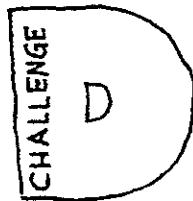
Challenges:

- In this statement, I'm calling myself incapable or incompetent. Since an incapable or incompetent person doesn't exist, I'd be better off thinking of myself as a fallible human being, a person who makes mistakes.
- If I want to handle tough assignments at work, I need to prepare myself. I'll need to learn the necessary skills and acquire the beliefs that will help me succeed.

Original thought 3: "I'll never have an opportunity like this again."

Challenges:

- There's no reason to believe that similar opportunities won't come along again. Why upset myself unnecessarily?
- I might as well assume that I'll have similar opportunities in the future. By challenging my negative thoughts, I'll be able to take advantage of these opportunities when they arise.



## 12 *Self-Esteem*

### **D: *Challenges to my thoughts:***

Once you have completed the ABC process, write down four actions you can take to improve the situation.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Changing habits of thinking, like changing other habits, requires time, patience, and, most of all, practice. Expect progress not perfection in your efforts to challenge negative beliefs about yourself. Look at disappointments as opportunities to remind yourself that as a fallible human being, you have the right to make mistakes.