

ABC's To Change Our Emotional Response

Must, Demand or Agency

There is a link between our thoughts and emotions. The scriptures teach, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so [is] he (Proverbs 23:7). We might modify this scripture to say, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so [is] he and so are his emotions.” Identify and dispute any irrational beliefs in order to create healthy emotions. Here is an example from the scriptures on choices we have regarding emotions. We have agency to choose between good and evil and we also have agency to choose between being troubled on every side or being totally distressed about it. In 2 Corinthians we can see the power of agency to choose our emotions.

[We are] troubled on every side, yet not distressed; [we are] perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; (2 Corinthians 4: 8-9)

We Choose Our Emotions

Distressed	Troubled
Despair	Perplexed
Forsaken	Persecuted
Destroyed	Cast Down

Since there is a link between our thoughts and emotions how do we change our emotions? We have to change our thoughts or beliefs about the activating event. Here are the key elements to determine if a belief is irrational or rational.

Irrational Beliefs*	Rational Beliefs*
Rigid or extreme (demands)	Flexible or non-extreme (preferences)
Inconsistent with reality	Consistent with reality
Illogical	Logical
Detrimental to the individual in pursuing his basic goals and purposes.	Helpful to the individual in pursuing his basic goals and purposes.
Irrational beliefs include shoulds, oughts musts or other demands.	Rational beliefs include preferences. It would be nice, BUT I can endure it. I would enjoy that, But I can get by without it, even though I do not like it. I prefer, But I am not going to die without it, even though it will be hard.

***Fundamentals of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Windy Dryden, p.6 & p.9**

Emotions created from irrational beliefs	Emotions created from rational beliefs
Anxiety	Concern
Depression	Sadness
Guilt	Remorse
Hurt	Remorse
Shame	Dissapointment
Unheathy Anger	Healthy Anger
Unhealthy Jealousy	Healthy Jealousy
Unhealthy envy	Healthy envy

Parable of the Prodigal Son

Let's review the parable of the prodigal son.

A certain man had two sons:

And the younger of them said to [his] Father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth [to me]. And he divided unto them [his] living.

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living (Luke 15:11-13).

The younger son spent all of his inheritance and in the words of his brother “devoured thy living with harlots” (Luke 15: 30). While the younger son was away, wasting his inheritance and losing all of it, he became a servant for another man and fed his swine. Speaking of the younger son the scriptures record:

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I will perish with hunger!

I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee (Luke 15: 17-18)

When the younger son returned, two of his family members had different emotional responses because of their belief about the incident – the return of the younger son and the welcome home party. Here is the father's response to the younger son's return.

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (Luke 15: 20)

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (Luke 15:24)

A is the activating event – Younger son returns home. Dad has a welcome home party for him.

B is the belief about the activating event – The elder son's belief that dad *should* have held a party for him because he had been righteous for many years. If dad is going to hold a party for my younger brother, he *ought* to hold one for me. It's only fair. Life *Must* be fair. He *must* have a party for me too or I cannot possibly be happy.

Here is the elder brother's response:

Now his elder son ws in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he Heard musick and dancing.

*And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.
And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*

C is the emotional consequences associated with the belief about A (the activating event).

The elder brother's emotional response was:

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. (Luke 15:25-28).

Emotional consequences generally created from irrational beliefs:

Anxiety
Depression
Guilt
Hurt
Shame
Unhealthy anger
Unhealthy jealousy
Unhealthy envy

Unhealthy anger

Thinking consequences associated with unhealthy anger

Overestimates the extent to which the other person acted deliberately
Sees malicious intent in the motives of others

Typical response associated with unhealthy anger

To attack the other physically
To attack the other verbally

The incident was the same. The younger brother returned home and dad had a welcome home party for him. However, there were two different sets of emotions generated because of how the father and the elder brother viewed the incident (Because of their beliefs about the activating event.) The father's emotions included compassion, he ran to him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. (Luke 15: 20). The elder son's emotions were filled with self-pity, resentment and anger. He would not participate in the welcome home party and stayed outside. He pouted and waited until his father came out to find him. How did the elder son respond to his father?

And he answering said to [his] father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, Thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. (Luke 15: 29-30).

The elder brother was angry because the younger brother apparently got all the attention, the welcoming home party and no such party had ever been thrown for him, even though, he was the obedient son, and lived the commandments. How did his father respond?

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found (Luke 15:31-32)

The father was happy because of his younger son's return and the elder brother was angry and miserable. The party was to celebrate the return of the younger son, not to reward him for his bad behavior. The incident will not change. The younger son has already come home, a welcome home party is in progress and that is not going to change. We cannot change the incidents that happened in our lives, but we can change our unhealthy emotions to healthy emotions if we are willing to change our view regarding the incident. If we were the older brother, how could we view our younger brother's return and the welcome home party in another way that would change our unhealthy emotions to healthy emotions? The event will not change. In other words, our younger brother has come home and the party is in progress. All we can do at this point is change our response to the event or incident. In other words, change our belief about what a party represents. If the elder son is unwilling to change his belief about what a party represents, he will continue to feel self – pity, resentment and anger. If the elder brother changes his beliefs and adopts a new set of rational beliefs about the purpose for the welcome home party, he can change his unhealthy emotions to healthy emotions.

D is for dispute. We must dispute the irrational belief we hold about **A**. We dispute it by seeing how illogical it is. We dispute it by changing our musts, shoulds, and oughts to preferences. We prefer that things go a certain way, but we do not demand it. We realize that it would be nice, if things did turn out the way we prefer, but we are not going to die if they do not. It will be hard and difficult, but we can deal with it. Here is how the elder brother could dispute his irrational demand to a flexible preference.

Life is not always fair. Life does not have to be fair in order for me to be happy. I can endure life even though it may not be fair. I would prefer that my dad hold a party for me sometime, but there is no law that says he must. A party held in the honor of a person is one way to show appreciation, but it is not the only way. I will not die if my dad does not hold a party for me. I can deal with it, even though I do not like it. It would be nice, if dad held a party for me, but I do not need to have one to be happy.

E is for the new *Emotions* created because of our change in belief about A.

Concern
Sadness
Remorse
Sorrow
Disappointment
Healthy Anger
Healthy Jealousy
Healthy Envy

Healthy Anger

Thinking consequences associated with healthy anger

Does not overestimate the extent to which the other person acted deliberately
Does not see malicious intent in the motives of others

Typical response associated with healthy anger

To assert self with the other
To request, but not demand behavioral change from the other

The incident was the same. The younger brother returned home, and a party and celebration followed. However, the father (Column 2s) and the elder brother (Column 1s) created two entirely different sets of emotions because of how each viewed the incident. Their behaviors (column 3s) were a reflection of the emotions that were created because of their beliefs about the event.

The parable of the prodigal son is a story about how two people viewed the same incident. Because of their beliefs and viewpoints regarding the incident, they each had a different set of emotions.

Likewise, we are in the same situation as the elder brother. We can either keep our beliefs rigid and demanding as the elder son did or we can change our beliefs and create for ourselves a new set of healthy emotions.

Quite often people think the link is from A to C. In other words, the activating event or incident is what caused me to feel anxiety or unhealthy anger. Thinking from A to C is irrational and unhealthy because of the unhealthy emotions that it creates. The rationale way to view it is to see that the link is from B to C. We call the B, C thinking. It is our belief about A that is the problem, not A itself.

When we change our beliefs about an activating event or incident we can change our unhealthy emotions to healthy emotions. With healthy emotions, we have more energy left to actually change our behavior and work on our own weaknesses. We are empowered with more

emotional energy to hang in during the tough times. We become new creatures in Christ because we draw on His Power!

Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away: Behold, all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

(1) Father's Belief about the Event	[Son] Was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found again.
(2) Father's Emotional Response	His Father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him (Luke 15:30)
(3) Father's Behavior	Father Killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound (Luke 15:27) and they began to be merry (Luke 15:24)
(1) Elder Son's Irrational Belief about the Event	Father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: (Luke 15:27)
(2) Elder son's Emotional response	He was angry. (Luke 15:28)
(3) Elder Son's Behavior	Would not go in [to party]: Therefore came his father out, and intreated him (Luke 15:28)

The ABC Model is a model to change human behavior designed by Dr. Albert Ellis, Ph.D

Prepared By:

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rwjeppsen@aol.com

Office 801-598-3332