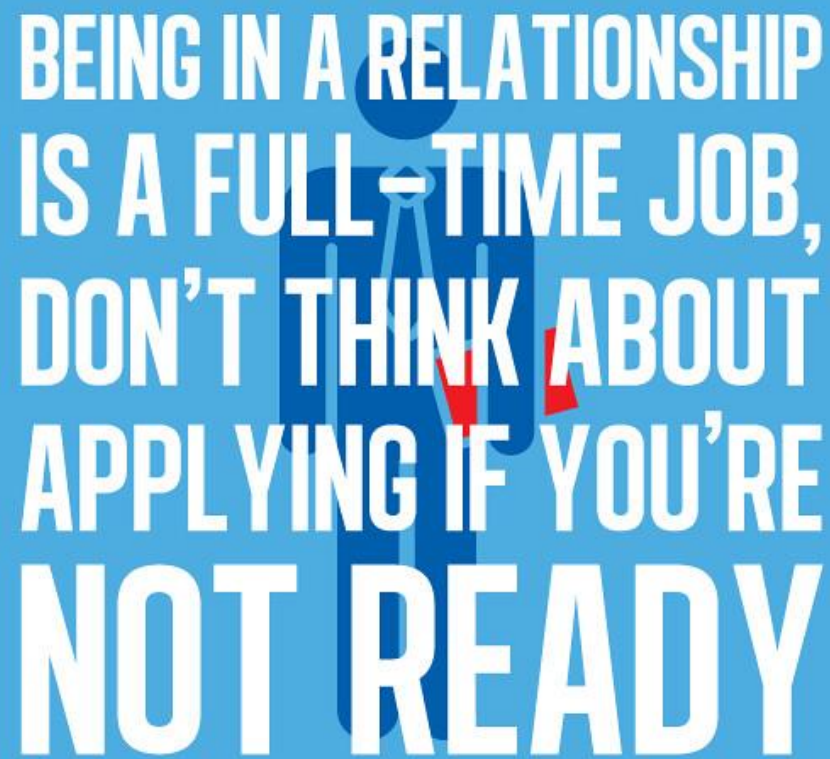




REBT for Couples: Practical Applications and Innovative Interventions

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Institute



**BEING IN A RELATIONSHIP
IS A FULL-TIME JOB,
DON'T THINK ABOUT
APPLYING IF YOU'RE
NOT READY**

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Albert Ellis on Couple Relationships

As a result of his experiences as a marital therapist, Ellis concluded that "...in most instances disturbed marriages or (premarital relationships) were a product of disturbed spouses; and that if people were truly to be helped to live happily with each other they would first have to be shown how they could live peacefully with themselves."

REBT Premises About Relationships

- The majority of individual therapy clients present with relationship issues.
- Another person's emotions, behaviors, beliefs can serve as activating events for another person's problem.
- Healthy negative emotions can motivate couples to improve the relationship.

More Premises About Relationships

- Address both the system and the individuals in the system--primary focus is on the individuals in the relationship.
- Although elements in the system are often out of the individual's control, changing the individual will most likely affect the system.

More Premises About Relationships

- Lots of issues revolve around anger; goal is to reduce clients' demands.
- Teaching communication or assertion skills or conflict resolution is ineffective if irrational beliefs haven't been disputed first.



More Premises About Relationships

- Strong predictor of relationship dysfunction is failure to resolve emotional problems.
- Ultimately need to address both practical and emotional problems in the relationship.
- Different issues emerge at different stages in the relationship.

Relationship Stages

1. Passion Prevails—romantic love stage.



Relationship Stages

Relationship Status

- Single
- In a relationship
- Married
- ✓ It's complicated
- Other

2. What Was I Thinking? Reality sets in.

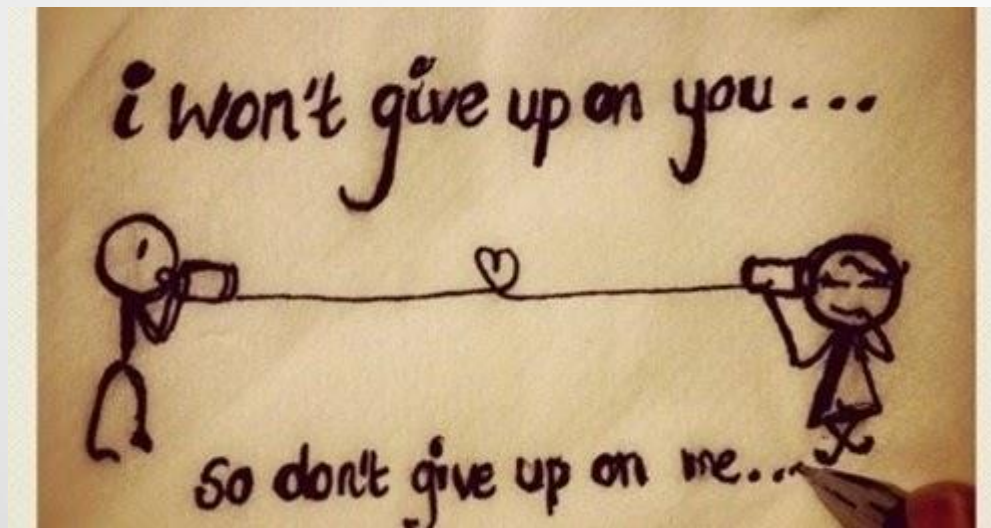
Relationship Stages

3. Everything Would Be Great If My Partner Changed.

4. That's Just the Way My Partner Is—
other acceptance.

Relationship Stages

5. Together At Last.



Source: The Divorce Remedy—Michele Weiner-Davis

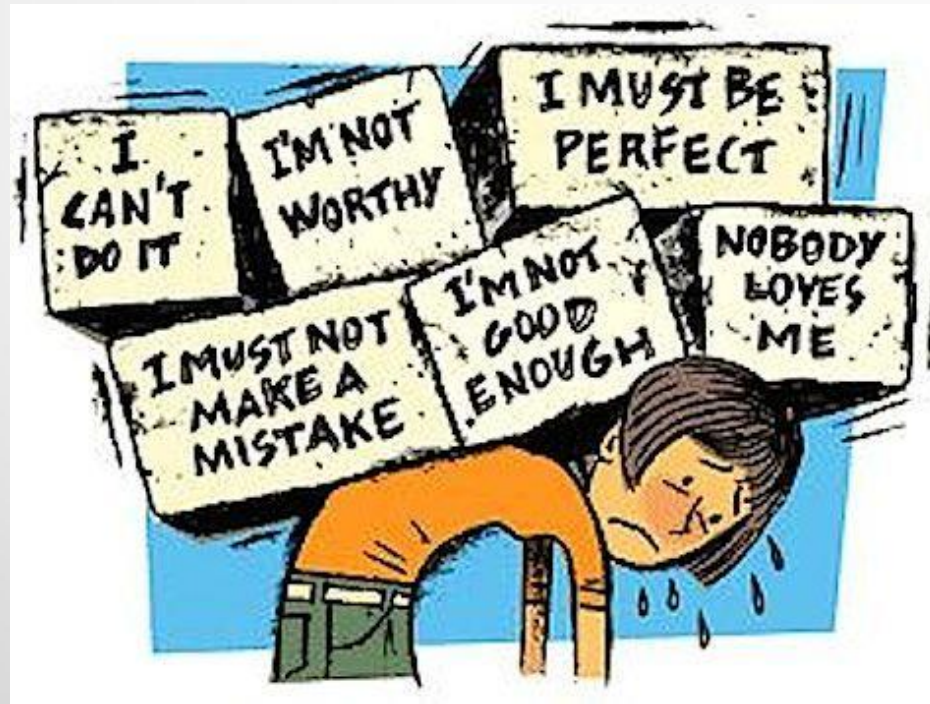
REBT Theory of Relationship Disturbance

- Disturbed feelings and behaviors are not caused by one partner's wrongdoing, but rather by the beliefs they have about the other person's actions.
- Need to comprehensively address feelings, actions and beliefs which result in anger and other unhealthy negative emotions.

Irrational Thinking Resulting in Relationship Disturbance

- Demandingness.
- Neediness.
- Frustration intolerance.
- Fear of being “hurt;” bad feelings are intolerable.
- Awfulizing.
- Self downing.

Irrational Beliefs



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Cognitive Distortions That Create Relationship Problems

- Magnification/minimization.
- Biased explanations.
- Negative labeling.
- Personalization.
- Mind reading/fortune telling.



Cognitive Distortions That Create Relationship Problems

- Tunnel vision.
- Selective abstraction.
- Arbitrary inference.
- Overgeneralization.
- Dichotomous thinking.

Barriers to Effective Relationships

- The myth of romantic love.
- All you need is love.
- Equating love with infatuation.
Game playing.



More Barriers

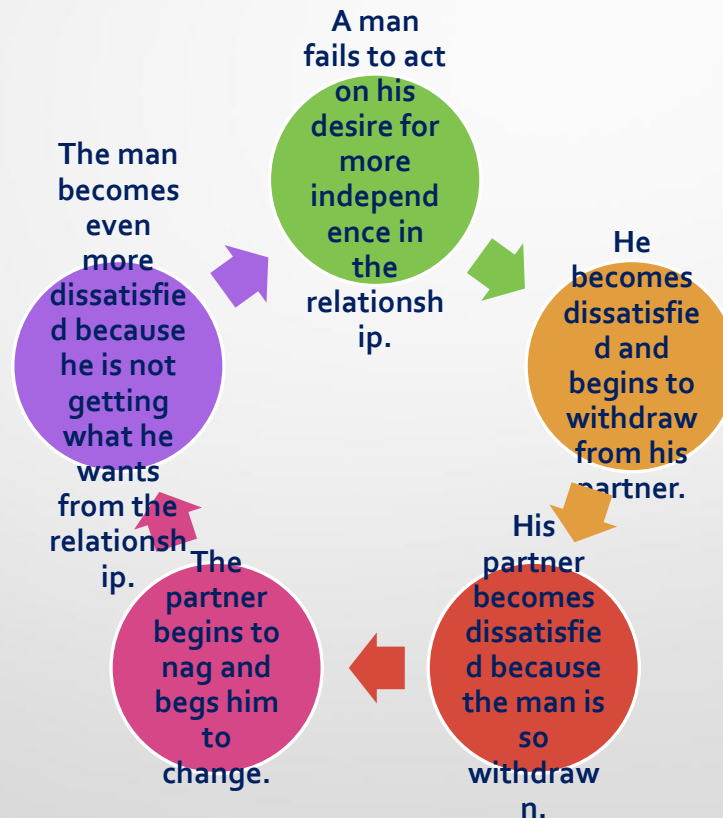
- Avoiding conflict and disagreement.
- Blaming each other for the relationship problems.
- Holding onto unrealistic expectations. that the partner will meet all their needs.
- Failing to understand that the sexes are different.



Couple Dissatisfaction/Disturbance

- According to Ellis, two major factors contribute to couple dissatisfaction: incompatibility and relationship myths.
- Incompatibility occurs when individuals don't really know their partner well or when their values or outlooks change. Can lead to relationship breakdown.

Cycle of Incompatibility Dissatisfaction



Incompatibility in Relationship Values

- Survival-security, sex, sleeping, eating.
- Love/belonging-time together, romance.
- Power-wanting recognition, respect, or needing to be in control, dominate, win.
- Freedom-degree of desired independence.
- Fun-interested in trying new things, "playing."

From William Glasser, *Staying Together*

Relationship Myths

- Changing a relationship requires two people.
- If I try harder, I can change my partner.
- My partner will be “everything” to me.
- My partner must always love me.



Relationship Myths

- My partner should meet all my needs.
- My partner will help me get over my feelings of unworthiness.
- Only a large change can transform a relationship.
- Marriage is a constant; it doesn't change.
- Love is a feeling.

Relationship Myths

- Only a large change can transform a relationship.
- Marriage is a constant; it doesn't change.
- Love is a feeling.
- My ideal soul mate is out there.
- My partner will make allowances for my bad behavior.
- Romantic love will endure throughout the relationship.

Relationship Myths

- I must always feel very excited when I am with my partner.
- My partner should know what I want without me having to say it.
- My partner should always sacrifice his or her desires for me.
- Sex must always be great; love equals good sex.

Relationships shouldn't require work.

Ineffective Attempts to Improve Relationships

- Analyze it—try to figure out what is wrong with you or your partner.
- Try to change the other person.
- Dwell on the past/not being able to look beyond past resentments.
- Try to prove that the other person is wrong.

Relationship Patterns

- A systemic approach: how each partner's irrational beliefs and behaviors contribute to conflict and how both parties maintain the problem through their interactions.
- Communication problems are seen as two-person problems.
- Conflict contains two problems: the issue and the interaction that occurs as they try to solve the issue.

Relationship Patterns

Teach couples about the predictable patterns and sequence of their relationship and the beliefs underlying their behavior:

Pursuer/Distancer
Over/Underfunctioning
Dominant/Submissive
Fight/Flight
Rapid Escalator

Changing Patterns

- Help couple identify the 3 most significant problem areas.
- Have them visualize the interactional pattern/pretend it was videotaped.
- Have them “watch” the video and focus on what they were thinking and how they responded.
- Have them identify how their responses, based on their thinking, affected the partner.

Individual Traits and Assets That Promote Couple Resilience

- Flexibility.
- A clear sense of self/self-acceptance.
- Developing other-acceptance.
- Rational thinking.
- Assertive skills.
- Independent as opposed to co-dependent.
- Commitment to the partnership.

Couple Traits and Assets That Promote Couple Resilience

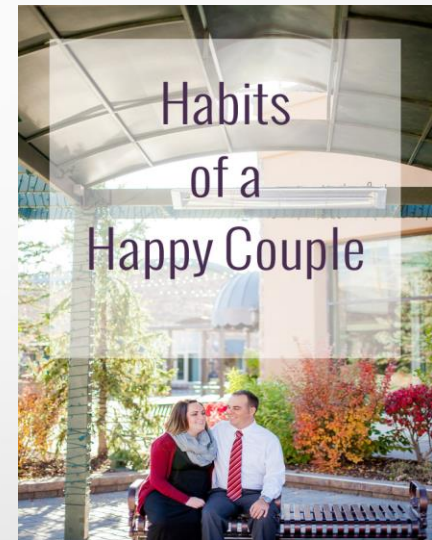
- Communication and conflict resolution skills.
- Cohesion and intimacy.
- Sharing power; working together vs. divide and conquer.
- Checking out facts; not acting on assumptions.
- Thinking rationally.
- Seeing things from the other's perspective.

Couple Traits-Liabilities

- Triangulating with children or other family members.
- Blaming the partner without taking personal responsibility.
- Having affairs.
- Staying disengaged.
- Game playing.

Characteristics of Happy Couples

- Comfortable with each other.
- Spontaneous.
- Able to count on each other.
- Able to give to the other.
- Flexible.
- Respectful and trusting of each other.



Characteristics of Happy Couples

- Allowing each other his or her space.
- Communicating feelings and experiences effectively.
- Fighting fair.
- Enjoying each other's company.
- Telling that their partner appreciates them.

Cognitive Treatment Techniques

- Dispute irrational beliefs.
- Use rational coping self-statements.
- Use psychoeducational materials—DVD's, bibliotherapy, cinamatherapy.
- Assign cognitive homework.

Cognitive Treatment Techniques

- Write advertisement for the “ideal partner” and a more realistic advertisement.
- Write rational greeting cards.* (A.V. original)

Cognitive Treatment Techniques

- Changing semantics.
- Discovering self-destructive patterns.
- Discovering games partners play.
- Reframing.
- Credit/debit lists.
- Rational reminders.

Cognitive Treatment Techniques

Develop a relationship vision, specific goals, and objectives based on the vision:

- First write statements describing the relationship you desire; rank order them.
- Examine each statement; write what you would have to think and do differently to get what you desire. Rank order them, beginning with the easiest to accomplish.
- Develop specific goals and objectives.

Cognitive Treatment Techniques

The Ribeye Model

- R=Relax.
- I=Identify the problem.
- B=Brainstorm alternatives.
- E=Evaluate possible solutions.
- Y=Yes to one solution.
- E=Evaluate outcomes and reward success.

Emotive Treatment Techniques

- Use puppets to “fight.”
- Role playing/reverse role playing.
- Record arguments/play back to identify irrational beliefs and distorted cognitions, feelings, tone of voice.
- Rational emotive imagery.



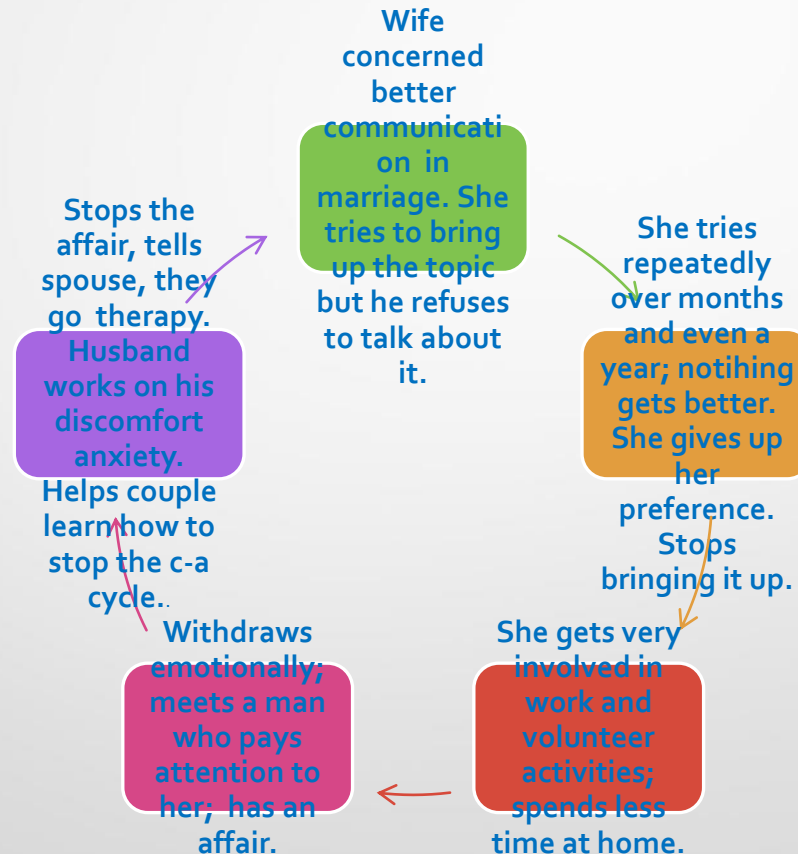
Emotive Treatment Techniques

- Forceful coping self-statements.
- Write letters to the other person.
- Journal.
- Humor.
- Re-write irrational “love slob” songs and create more rational romantic songs.
- Paradoxical homework.

Behavioral Treatment Techniques

- Skill training.
- Reinforcements and penalties.
- Assertiveness training.
- Logical consequences.
- Contracts.
- Set limits.
- Conflict resolution techniques.

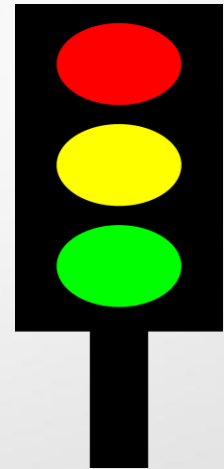
Conflict-Avoidant Cycle



Other Treatment Techniques

- Doom and Gloom Glasses*
- Red Light/Green Light lists.*
- Face the Facts.*
- Rational Relationship Celebration.*
- Practice the 7 guidelines for good relationships.

*A. Vernon originals



Other Treatment Techniques

- Use concrete analogies.
- Make deposits to the "marital bank." *
- Couple Life Line.*
- Rid of Resentments.*



*A.V. originals

Other Treatment Techniques

- Don't Soak it Up.
- Step Into Their Shoes.
- Practice ten commandments of good communication.



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10 Commandments of Good Communication

- Avoid threats.
- Describe your feelings rather than *attack* with them.
- Keep body language open and receptive.
- Use clear messages.
- Use whole messages.
- Avoid judgmental terms and loaded terms.
- Avoid global labels.
- Avoid “you” messages of blame and accusation.
- Avoid old history.
- Avoid negative comparisons.



five principles of couple's work

Andrew Christensen
*'A unified protocol
for couple therapy'*

emphasize strengths & grow positive behaviours

reasons for initial attraction to each other; assess & feedback strengths; encouragement of positive behaviour; learning from successful interactions; vulnerability behind demands & hostility

modify emotion-driven maladaptive interactions

therapists may highlight & interrupt these patterns in session; at home, 'time-outs', mental contrasting & implementation intentions can all have a part to play

shared, non-blaming dyadic, understanding

cooperatively arrived at 'reappraisal'; may involve an understanding that both partners are trying to meet valid needs but that how they're doing this is unhelpfully coloured by their pasts

develop more adaptive communication skills

helping speakers become more 'self-focused' (less blaming of others, more disclosing own emotions & vulnerability); helping listeners become more 'other focused' (body language, standing 'in the other's shoes, summarizing)

'elephants': problem- solving and intimacy

at the right time, it's likely to be important to open up about any of a variety of potentially important avoided 'elephant in the room' topics; this can allow constructive joint problem-solving & deepen understanding & closeness

note importance
of identifying &
changing couples'
key distress-
producing cause-
effect chains

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