

"No individual—not even Freud himself—has had a greater impact on modern psychotherapy."—*Psychology Today*

anger

how to live with
and without it

albert**ellis**, Ph.D.

AND ARTHUR LANGE, Ed.D.

With a New Foreword by
Raymond A. DiGiuseppe, Ph.D.

ALSO BY DR. ALBERT ELLIS

How to Control Your Anger Before It Controls You

How to Control Your Anxiety Before It Controls You

How to Stop Destroying Your Relationships

How to Keep People From Pushing Your Buttons

*How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself
Miserable About Anything—Yes, Anything!*

The Albert Ellis Reader

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Anger

How to Live With and Without It

Revised and Updated

Albert Ellis, Ph.D.



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For Janet L. Wolfe
With love

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Foreword

Whenever I give a talk on Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and discuss Dr. Albert Ellis's theory of emotional disturbance—namely, that it is not things, people, or events that make us disturbed, but rather our *beliefs* about things, people, or events that create our emotional and behavioral disturbance—I tell the audience that there's good and bad news to this idea.

Let's get the bad news out of the way . . . We have to face it: it feels really good to blame other people for our problems, to say, "My boss/spouse/child/customer service representative made me so angry!" That's because it feels good not to take responsibility for our emotional reactions. However, if we subscribe to the theory espoused by AI (who credits it to the Greek philosopher Epictetus), we can't blame others for our reactions. Ultimately, we are responsible for how we react emotionally and behaviorally. Well, that's no fun.

Now for the good news . . . I don't know about you, but I haven't been successful at controlling many of life's events or the people in my life. That's good news? Yes, because even though so much of life is out of our control, if we go along with Epictetus and AI, we can at least control how we respond.

So what's behind anger? If you have ever seen someone who was angry, you've definitely seen some type of demand or expectation being placed by that person on him- or herself, or on others, or on world conditions; the same was true for anyone who saw you when you were angry. Frustration intolerance in the form of "I-can't-stand-it-itis" was also surely in evidence, as well as self- and other-downing. Next time you find yourself angry at something or someone, see which of these beliefs you're holding.

Anger: How to Live With and Without It was originally written in 1977, revised in 2003, and is now being relaunched in a new print edition and as an e-book. In the 2003 edition, AI wrote a postscript entitled "How to Deal With International Terrorism," which was largely a response to the September 11, 2001, terror attacks. Now, AI trained and mentored me, and I worked with him for many years; I knew he was a genius. After reading this

postscript, however, I couldn't escape an eerie feeling about him. He had deconstructed the mind-set of the terrorists, using the concepts of REBT, and he had also provided readers remarkable tools to cope with those tragic events.

Unfortunately, obnoxious and unfair behavior on the one hand and international terrorism on the other have only increased throughout the years, and neither seems to be going away anytime soon. Al's outstanding insight, experience, and foresight, evidenced in *Anger: How to Live With and Without It*, make this self-help book in its entirety, and the postscript in particular, still applicable and relevant to the world we live in today. Perhaps more important, the tools he provides to address the reader's unhealthy anger are a gift that will keep on giving no matter how the world is in the future.

Albert Ellis dedicated his life to helping people with their emotional and behavioral upsets. What would he say about how germane his comments and suggestions remain in today's unstable, unpredictable world? I envision him with that big smile, in his confident (but not cocky) tone, saying, "It's simply because REBT works!"

—Raymond A. DiGiuseppe, Ph.D.

Preface

Why another book on anger? Although numerous books tell us how to deal with anger, none of them seems to work effectively and efficiently in most situations. These books generally support one of two positions. Some advise you to assume a passive, nonresistant attitude when you think others treat you unfairly. Such an attitude may give people the impression that you very much control yourself and the situation, but it hardly helps you achieve anything else. Many people may assume that your passivity and acceptance of their “unfair” treatment means that you do not object to their treating you shabbily or unfairly. Therefore, they have no reason to stop their mistreatment. Your passivity will give others a green light, so to speak, to deal with you as they please.

On the other hand, a multitude of books advise you to openly and freely give vent to and fully express your feelings of anger and rage. They fail to indicate that when you express these feelings it will encourage others to return your resentment.

You can easily see that both of these approaches have many weak points and that neither of them succeeds in presenting an effective solution to the problem of anger.

The solution? Epictetus, a remarkably wise Stoic philosopher, pointed out some two thousand years ago that you *choose* to overreact to the obnoxious behavior of others while you could more wisely choose to react differently. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) has found that by following the age-old wisdom of many philosophers and by combining it with the most modern methods of psychotherapy, you can learn to reduce self-defeating, angry reactions and to live successfully with the feelings that you may still experience.

Can you do this by yourself? Yes, you definitely can—as Dr. Robert Harper and I particularly show in a previous book, *A Guide to Rational Living*. Here I will explain exactly how you can create your own *philosophy of anger* by consciously and unconsciously subscribing to absolutistic thinking and how, by changing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that underlie and accompany your rage, you can greatly reduce it. Through

careful attention to REBT theory and practice, you can learn effectively to deal with your anger in a remarkably short period of time.

The first edition of this book was published in 1977 and was a pioneering self-help book that explained what anger is, what harm it frequently does to people and their relationships, and how to use Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy to significantly reduce it. This edition has sold very well for twenty-five years, has been useful to many of my psychotherapy clients, and has helped to minimize the rage of hundreds of people who have enthusiastically written me about it.

A revised version of this book, *How to Control Your Anger Before It Controls You*, authored by me and Raymond Chip Tafrate, was published in 1997 and has also done very well. To my surprise, however, both the first edition *and* the revised one continue to sell many copies. Readers find the first uniquely persuasive and often use both books to help them overcome their anger. The two books, though containing some of the same material, supplement each other. So the publisher has decided to keep both of them in print and has asked me to bring *Anger: How to Live With and Without It* up to date.

I have been happy to do this, especially since many serious forms of rage have increased considerably in recent years. Thus, we now have more child abuse, wife battering, child and teenage violence (including murder) than ever before. National and international warring has led to the terrorism of September 11, 2001. Unhappily no end is in sight—nor is any easy solution. An immense reeducation of practically all children and adults throughout the world is required to stem this tremendous tide of violence.

The theory and practice of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, which is espoused in this book, is no panacea or miracle cure for personal and group violence. But it and several closely related philosophies may importantly contribute to stemming it. Read this book, help yourself by its messages of collaboration and peace, and do what you can to spread them widely to your relatives, friends, and everyone else. What better can you do for yourself and the world?

—Albert Ellis, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

Just about all published books, these days, result from collaboration between the author and several other important contributors. So with this one. First, I want to thank the many clients I have cited, though quite anonymously, in this book for their invaluable contributions. My editors at Citadel Press have been particularly helpful. Although I take full responsibility for all the ideas in the book, these and my clinical associates at the Albert Ellis Institute in New York have contributed mightily to them and to this book.

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“What disturbs people’s minds is not events but their judgments on events.”

—Epictetus

Must You Feel Angry?

You'd better face the hard reality that situations that frustrate or prevent you from attaining your goals and from enjoying what you want really do exist. But have you no choice but to feel angry at these everyday "horrors"?

Most mental health experts agree that you must feel anger. They see the newborn infant as expressing emotions comparable to anger and rage in the first hours of life. And throughout all ages of development humans confront almost daily their own feelings of anger and those of other people whom they encounter. Most authorities say you need your anger to protect yourself from the onslaughts of a hostile and aggressive world. If you do not always remain on your guard, you will stay vulnerable to others who will dominate and exploit you, jeopardize your freedom and property, and take advantage of your passivity by abusing you for their own personal gain with no regard to your welfare.

What, exactly, is anger? It is a special *combination* of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, when you are (or think you are) severely frustrated by unfortunate conditions and by people's "unfair" behavior. As Howard Kassinove and his collaborators point out and as Mark Terjesen and Raphael Rose agree, when you feel angry, you have a negative internal feeling state accompanied by thinking and perceptual distortions and deficiencies (especially misappraisals and attributions of other people's injustice). Your angry thoughts and feelings lead you to physiological arousal and tendencies to act against your "aggressors."

Many authorities on anger, including Raymond DiGiuseppe, believe that angry (and depressed) individuals "are unstable in the way they assign blame and have an unstable sense of self." Raymond Chip Tafrate and his research associates found that subjects high on trait anger were more prone to dysfunctional thinking and also experienced a greater number of physical sensations than people who were low on trait anger. Aron Siegman and Selena Snow discovered that the full-blown expression of anger is a form of emotional disturbance while the mere inner experience of anger is not.

At the same time, as I shall show throughout this book, anger is often self-protective, is a very normal human response, and has helped preserve the human race.

Your failing to fight for what you want leaves you the alternative of remaining passive when others take advantage of and prevent you from achieving your goals. Thus, most authorities today generally leave you with one of two alternatives for dealing with anger:

Feel the anger but sit on it, squelch it, deny and repress it.

Feel the anger and freely express it.

Squelching your anger doesn't get you much of anywhere, and unexpressed rage will do you more harm than candidly and freely expressed feelings. Sigmund Freud's *hydraulic theory* states that anger and other emotions have a tendency to increase in intensity—to expand under pressure like steam in a kettle—so that if you squelch your emotions, if you don't give free vent to them, you run the risk of doing some real harm to yourself. Physical harm such as stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, or other sometimes more severe psychosomatic reactions result. In addition, refraining from giving honest expression to your feelings—keeping these feelings pent up inside you—doesn't help you lose your anger. Quite the contrary. You will, in all probability, feel much worse. For your anger hasn't gone away, but stays right there in your “gut.” And now you can easily turn overly critical of yourself for not standing up for your rights with those who have caused the injustice.

Conversely, if you let yourself feel authentically angry and let others know about your feelings, you may encounter problems of quite another nature. For people will receive your free expression of anger in most instances as an outwardly aggressive or hostile action, and will probably close themselves off from you and defensively respond to you with *further* hostility.

Some therapists in the field have attempted to solve the problem with still another alternative, what they call *creative aggression* (or *constructive anger*). This differs from the above *free-expression* method in that you express yourself more controllably and hope (often against hope!) that others will willingly listen to your point of view.

In the following example I will attempt to illustrate the dynamics of the other theories and then, using the same example throughout the book, will investigate the alternatives and solutions that Rational Emotive Behavior

Therapy offers. I am confident that if you pay close attention to these principles, you will see that you can deal with problems relating to anger and other emotions effectively and efficiently by use of the REBT guidelines.

Let us say that I have promised to share an apartment with you as a roommate and to share the rent, provided you fix up and furnish the place. This seems agreeable to you. You go to a good deal of trouble and personal expense to keep your part of the bargain. At the last minute I inform you that I have made other plans and cannot, will not keep my part of the agreement. You feel extremely angry with me; not only have you gone to considerable expense to keep your agreement, but you are distinctly inconvenienced in that you must at the last minute look for another roommate.

You may at first keep your feelings of anger to yourself. But because you have those feelings, unexpressed, your underlying resentment greatly interferes with our friendship. So you see that nothing gets resolved, that your seething interferes with your other activities as well, and that this solution won't work.

You decide to confront me with your feelings, to *express* them. "Look here," you say, "I won't have you treating me like this! After all, you said you'd share the apartment with me after I had furnished it. I would never have fixed it up had you not agreed to share it with me in the first place. You've clearly done me in, and acted really rottenly. How could you have done a thing like that to a friend? I've never done anything so nasty to you, and I really don't see how you can expect anyone's friendship if you treat people so terribly."

Or instead, given the convenience of my having the capacity and willingness to play it with you, you use *creative aggression*, express your anger controllably, and "prepare" me for what will come. Receiving my permission to open up about your feelings, you go ahead to express your anger.

Although your perception of my unfairness to you may be correct, your presentation of it (either through the free-expression method or through creative aggression) *can* do more harm than good. Both approaches focus on my wrong, even if creative aggression allows for a softening of the blow. Through that focus, you can easily set the stage for additional problems with me.

By openly criticizing me for my “outrageous” behavior, you can push me to *defend* it. Then any steps I might take to treat you more fairly would be halted.

Remember also that I, like most people, may have strong self-downing tendencies. When you point out to me my “error” or my unappealing characteristics, I may carry your implications further than you even intended. Hence, from your critical remarks, no matter how well, how creatively put, I may feel guilt or self-downing, and will frequently try to make you equally self-blaming. We’d better acknowledge these very real problems as inherent in either of the two approaches that recommend expressing your anger. Nonetheless, acknowledging this still does not solve your problem: What do you *do* with your anger?

So far we have seen holding in your anger brings dubious results. Yet freely expressing it creates many other problems. Creative aggression seems a more workable solution but still shares some of the same difficulties.

Another alternative—that of *Christian forgiveness*—involves the turning of the other cheek. But in this often hostile world in which we live, this is somewhat impractical. People may feel far less intimidated by you and thus all the more tempted to take advantage of your “good nature.” You may behave beautifully, but unfortunately, that does not mean that others will respect you and treat you equally well.

After examining the above alternatives in dealing with your anger, you may see that each approach may work in a given situation, but not in *all* situations. Further, each one of these approaches has serious and destructive drawbacks. So let us look for a formula that will allow you to deal with difficult situations and get what you want without damaging your own integrity or inciting anger in others.

The following chapters will introduce methods that are free of the drawbacks of the other approaches already discussed. If you read carefully and give your full attention to the techniques presented in this book, if you take the time and trouble to think seriously about, experiment with, and test out these concepts in your own life, and if you energetically and conscientiously practice them over a period of time, I believe that you, too, will see and enjoy the changes that REBT has helped bring about in the anger problems of my clients and readers.

How You Create Your Own Anger: The ABCs of REBT

The ABCs of REBT (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy) can give you what I call an elegant approach to the problem of dealing with your anger. Not a magical formula—quite the contrary, since REBT concerns itself with seeking solutions and dealing with your problems in a realistic manner. It prefers to stick with hardheaded facts of reality—not with airy theories.

How exactly did the theory of REBT evolve? What does it have that makes it different from and often more effective than other forms of psychotherapy?

The basic principles of REBT have evolved from my own extensive clinical research and experience, further supported by numerous experiments done in this area. During my career as a psychotherapist I have had occasion to use many different techniques in treating my many clients. These years have shown me and my trainees that most of the psychoanalytic approaches are ineffective, inefficient, and fail to meet the problems of most people who seek therapy. I say this from my own personal experience. Although the field of psychotherapy includes many techniques and approaches to helping people, most of its methods are too expensive and time consuming for both clients and therapists. Naturally, emotional problems themselves have enormous costs, and if long drawn-out types of therapy show positive and lasting results, the investment seems well worth it. But alas, such therapies, according to my own observations, do not appear to work out.

I have drawn many of the important principles of REBT from the wisdom of philosophy as well as from the most modern psychological advances. Since my youth I have made the in-depth study of philosophy a hobby; and by incorporating some of its principles into my therapeutic approach, I discovered that my clients could achieve more effective results in far less time than when I used other approaches. I found that by my presenting a philosophical as well as a psychological analysis, the client

could enjoy the fruits of two sciences and benefit considerably from our efforts.

Although I'd naturally advise you to consult a competent rational therapist when you have a serious problem, you can use REBT to efficiently "therapize" yourself with little outside help. In this book I will explain how you create your own anger *philosophically*—by consciously or unconsciously subscribing to absolutistic, demand-oriented thinking. If you understand exactly how to control and operate your thinking, you will enable yourself, with the guidance of this book, to undercut and change the counterproductive and destructive aspects of your anger. REBT has designed methods in which you can dissolve your rage no matter what unjust events happen to you.

Perhaps the most distressing fault that I realized while using the usual techniques of psychotherapy was this: Upon termination of many years of therapy, clients still could not confront life's difficult situations on their own without the continued help of their therapist. I felt that after spending all that time and money my clients certainly deserved better results. Rather than continue with these methods, I began to experiment with some ideas of my own. By combining philosophy with various approaches used in therapy, I devised the fundamental principles of REBT. The results were rewarding: Instead of depending on me to give them useless interpretations, my clients now had a realistic perspective with which to think and behave. In a relatively short time they began to show more rapid and lasting progress than from previous methods.

With most of my clients, I use realistic examples to help them work through their problems. Here, for the sake of clarity, I shall mainly stick to one consistent example throughout the book; so we shall continue with the illustration already introduced in chapter 1. I have promised to share an apartment with you if you go ahead and fix it up and furnish it. We have agreed that from then on we will share the expenses. You have so far lived up to your half of the agreement, but at the last minute, without ample notice or explanation, I withdraw from my portion of the agreement. You become enraged with me.

How, by using REBT methods, can you overcome your hostility?

We begin by locating C—the *Emotional* (or *Behavioral*) *Consequence*: your anger.

Next we look for A—your *Adversity* or *Activating Event*. I failed to uphold my portion of an important agreement between us.

As we look at A and C, it may appear that A causes C. REBT theory assumes, however, that although your Adversity or Activating Event directly *contributes* to your Emotional Consequence, it does not really *cause* it. We do not always easily see the dynamics of cause and effect. Yet if we look closely at this relationship between A and C—as we will throughout this book—we will find other factors involved and find that although my withdrawing from our agreement may have inconvenienced and disappointed you greatly, my “unjust” action alone does not necessarily make you feel angry with me.

If we conclude that C directly results from A, then we would have to assume that whenever we encountered any one particular A, we would always expect a particular C. For instance, we know that water boils at one temperature and freezes at another, and we find this true for all situations involving water and temperature. Yet when people and various situations interact together, such laws of causality do not hold true. Most of us know occurrences in which we were surprised by a person’s reaction to a given situation. For instance, we have often heard of victims of brutal crimes who, instead of cooperating with the police and courts to bring their assailant to justice, have done just the opposite. They have gone so far as to actually help their assailant avoid prosecution. If we examine one hundred people, all victims of the same crime, we would surely find a large variation of responses among these people. Some would act in the above manner, others would obsess themselves with the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrator, and yet others would respond at various points between these two extremes. An Emotional and Behavioral Consequence, although affected by an Activating Event or Adversity, does not directly and exclusively result from it.

Another important point to keep in mind: We do, in fact, have choices and control over our responses to every situation, and our feelings and responses often remain much more within our control than we realize. The more aware we are of our existing alternatives, the more likely our ability to consider the situation in its proper perspective before we take action. The intermediate thought process that we carry on *between* A and C is an evaluation in which we make a decision that will determine our response. The more aware we make ourselves of this intermediate phase, the better