

Chapter 8 Managing Stress and Wellness

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Stress/Stressors

Stressors: Specific events or chronic pressures that place demands on a person or threaten the person's well-being.

Stress: The physical and psychological response to internal or external stressors.



Stress and cataclysmic events. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Southeast Asia tsunami in 2004 provided recent examples of what most people would consider extremely stressful events. But it may not be as stressful as you imagine (see text for an explanation).

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There are four types of stress

- Eustress: Good or short term stress that strengthens us and moves us forward
- Distress: Negative or harmful stress that causes us to constantly readjust or adapt. Distress often occurs when we feel we have no control over outcomes.
- Hyperstress: stress that overloads us when stressful events pile up and stretch the limits of our adaptability
- Hypostress: Underload of stress that causes us to be bored or underchallenged.

Stress: Warning Signs

How do we recognize when someone (including ourselves) is experiencing stress?



Emotional signs

- Anxiety
- Apathy
- Irritability
- Mental fatigue

Behavioral signs

- Avoidance of responsibilities and relationships
- Extreme or self-destructive behavior (e.g. cutting oneself)
- Self-neglect
- Poor judgment

Physical signs

- Frequent illness
- Exhaustion
- Overuse of medicines
- Physical ailments and complaints

Sources of Stress

- Life Events (Divorce, getting arrested/expelled, marriage)
- Daily Hassles (spilling soda, losing keys or wallet, cell phone not charged) Also see page 354, Table 8.1.
- Cognitive Appraisal

The interpretation of whether or not an event or stimulus is stressful is called the primary appraisal.

- Is that a safe falling from the sky?
- Is the car really out of gas?
- Did I leave my homework at home?

The secondary appraisal is determining whether the stressor is something you can cope with.

- I wore my hard hat vs. I left it at home
- I have 5 gallons of gas for the lawn mower vs. I have no money, no gas and no one to call
- I can email it or it's 7:00 pm and I'm on a plane to Antarctica.

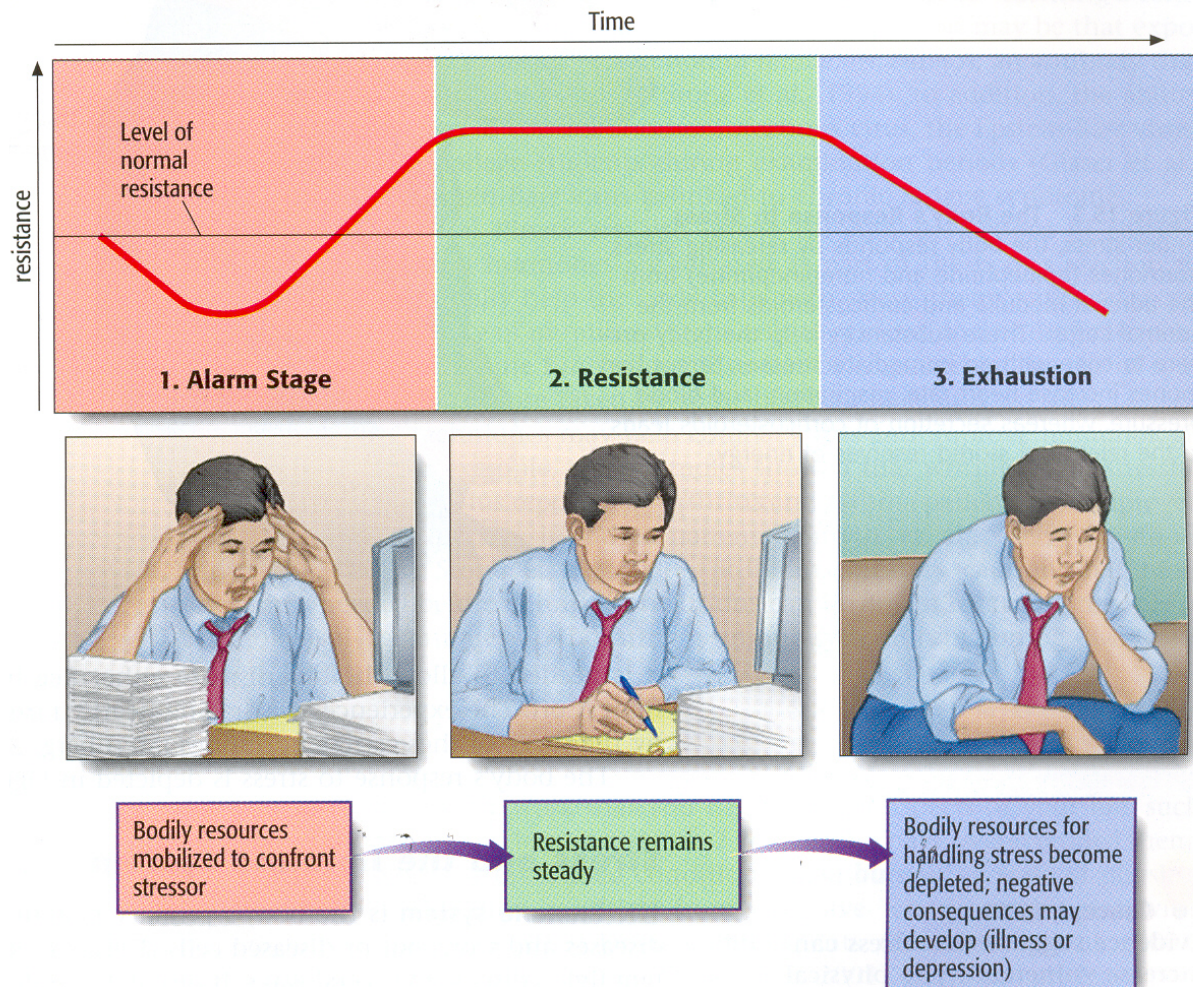
- If you believe you cannot handle it, you view the event or stressor as a threat.
- If you believe you can handle it, you view the event or stressor as a challenge.

Effects of Stress

- GAS
- Behavioral Effects of Stress (see table 8.2, page 357)

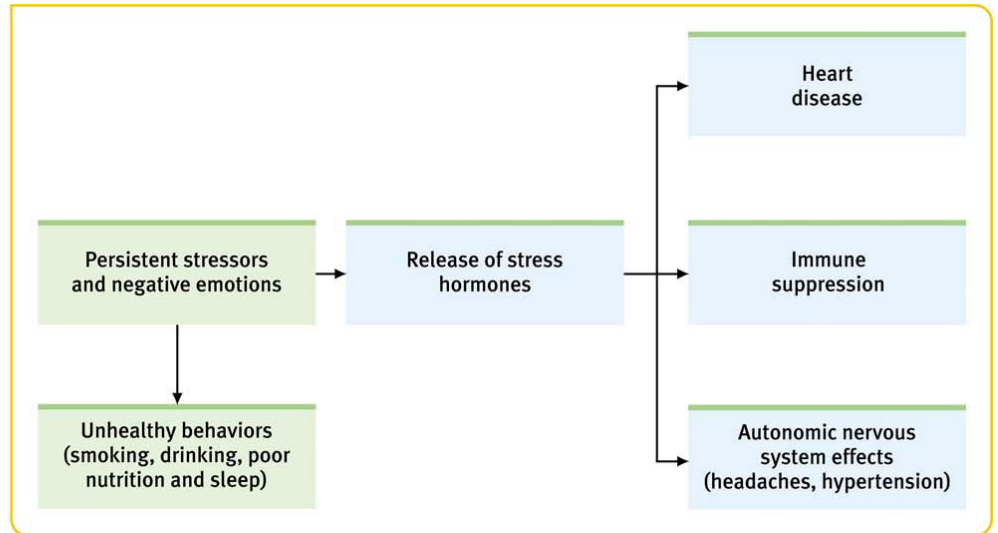
General Adaptation Syndrome

Figure 15.2 Level of Resistance During the Stages of the General Adaptation Syndrome
The body's resistance to stress first dips during the alarm stage, as the impact of the stressor takes a toll, but then increases as the body mobilizes its resources. Resistance remains steady through the resistance stage as the body attempts to cope with the stressor. But if the stressor persists, exhaustion eventually sets in as bodily reserves needed to resist stress become dangerously depleted.



Physical effects of stress

The effects of stress and health are subtle, which may make it difficult for us to perceive the effects.



Stress Effects on the Immune Response

Stressors can cause stress hormones (e.g. cortisol) to be released which damage the immune system making you more susceptible to illness.

Those who were under stress were more likely to

- Have flare-ups of herpes simplex
- Worsen periodontal disease
- Reduce the effectiveness of vaccinations
- Have wounds heal more slowly
- Suffer colds

Stress and Cardiovascular Health

The heart and circulatory system are vulnerable to stress. Chronic stress changes the body that will increase the vulnerability to disease in the future

As stress-activated arousal of the sympathetic nervous system, blood pressure goes up and stays up and slowly damages blood vessels. These damaged vessels accumulate plaque and increases the likelihood of coronary heart disease.

Type A and Stress

Type A consists of a cluster of three characteristics

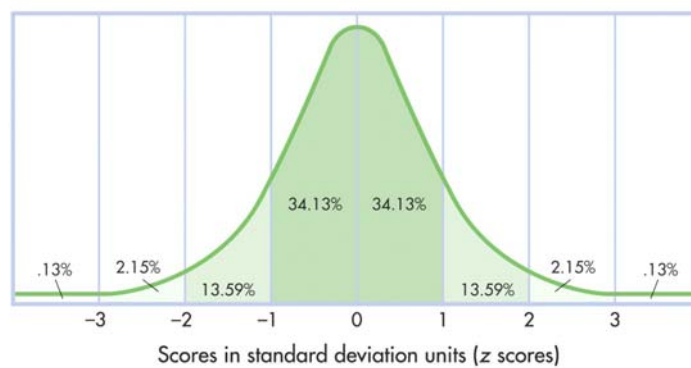
- An exaggerated sense of time urgency, often trying to do more in less time,
- intense ambition and competitiveness and
- a general sense of hostility, frequently displaying anger and irritation.

Type B

- More relaxed and laid back

Self-Evaluation: Which type do you tend to be?

| <u>Type A</u> | <u>Type B</u> |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very competitive• Always on the go• Hard driving• Demands perfection• Ambitious, wants quick promotions• Is a “workaholic”—even at play | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noncompetitive• Relaxed, in control• Easygoing• Understanding, forgiving• Confident and happy in job• Enjoys leisure and weekends |



Stress and Cardiovascular Health Type A Behavior Pattern



This basketball coach displays some Type A behaviors.

Type A personalities virtually guarantees that they will encounter many stressful situations such as time pressures of their own making and barriers that anger them.

What does the research in health psychology show with respect to differences in personality type (Type A versus Type B)?

- When 3,000 middle aged men were tracked for 8 years, those with a Type A personality were twice as likely to develop heart disease than Type B, even taking into account such risk factors as smoking, high blood pressure, and elevated levels of cholesterol.

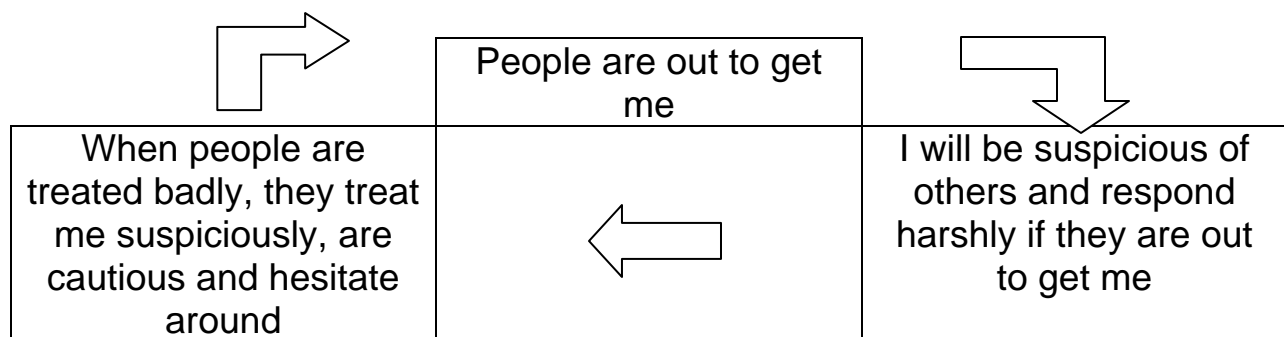
Type A people with high levels of competitiveness and ambition can foster aggressive behavior and hostility when things get in their way. However...

Researchers found that even within the Type A, there were differences. It was not the time urgency and being competitive that was a factor—it was the hostility.

Type A and Hostility

Hostility dimension: Hostility refers to the tendency to feel anger, annoyance, resentment and contempt and to hold negative beliefs about human nature in general.

- A cynical hostility marked by suspiciousness, resentment, frequent anger, distrust and antagonism seem important in the relation between personality and stress.
- Hostile people are also prone to believing that the disagreeable behavior of others is intentionally directed at them. Thus hostile people tend to be suspicious, mistrustful, cynical and pessimistic. (page 567, 568, Hockenbury)
 - Type A and Hostile personalities tend to alienate others and produce interpersonal stress and conflict which reduces the amount of social support the person has.
 - Because of their attitudes, they also create more stress in their life (a self-fulfilling prophecy, and perhaps a learned behavior). The experience more frequent and more severe, negative life events and daily hassles.



Hostility and Health

Hostile men were five times as likely to develop heart disease and seven times as likely to die by age 50 compared to non-hostile men.

Why does hostility predispose people to heart disease?

- Type A personalities tend to react more intensely to a stressor than other people do and take more time to recover.
 - They experience greater increases in blood pressure, heart rate and the production of stress related hormones.

Stress hormones elevated

Less Hostile

| Sympathetic | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Pupils dilated, dry, far vision | Eyes |
| Dry | Mouth |
| Goose bumps | Skin |
| Sweaty | Palms |
| Passages dilated | Lungs |
| Increased rate | Heart |
| Supply maximum to muscles | Blood |
| Increased activity | Adrenal glands |
| Inhibited | Digestion |

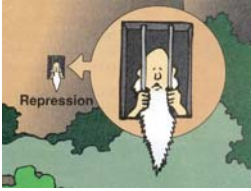





More Hostile

| Sympathetic | |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Pupils dilated, dry, far vision | Eyes |
| Dry | Mouth |
| Goose bumps | Skin |
| Sweaty | Palms |
| Passages dilated | Lungs |
| Increased rate | Heart |
| Supply maximum to muscles | Blood |
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Negative and Defensive Coping (Ego Defense Mechanisms)

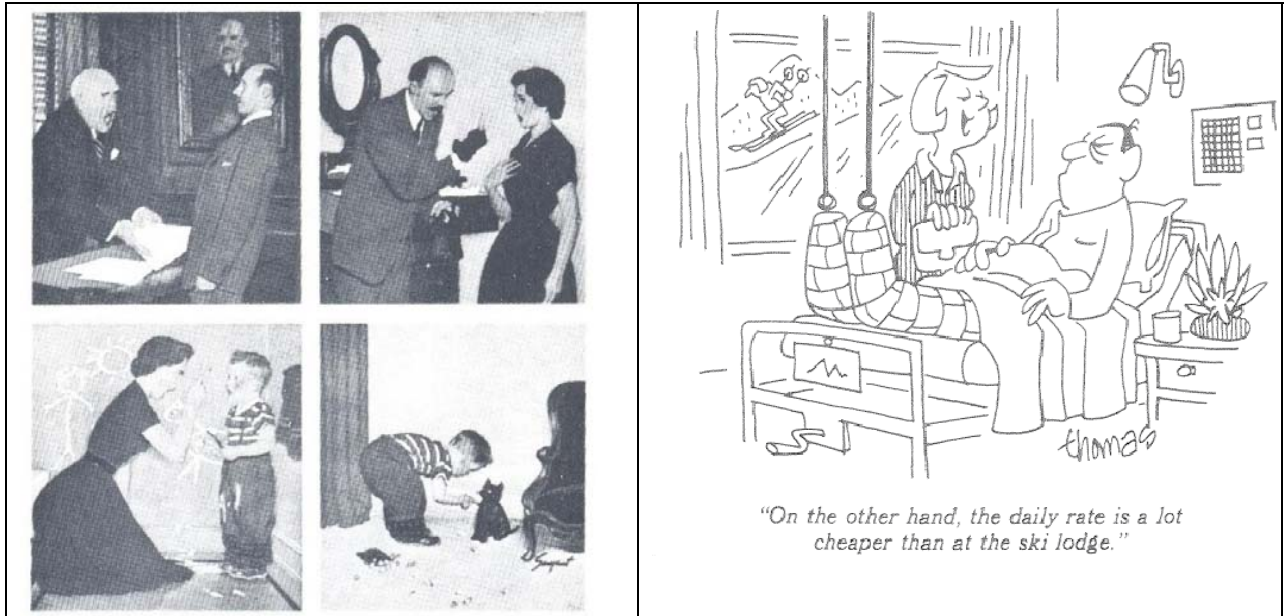
Major Ego Defense Mechanisms

| Example | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Source of anxiety | Defense mechanism to reduce anxiety | Name of the defense mechanism | How the defense mechanism works |
| A young girl was sexually abused by her uncle. | As an adult, she can't remember anything about the traumatic experience. | Repression  | The master defense mechanism; the ego pushes unacceptable impulses out of awareness, back into the unconscious mind. |
| A college student does not get into the fraternity of his choice. | He says that if he had tried harder he could have gotten in. | Rationalization  | The ego replaces a less acceptable motive with a more acceptable one. |
| A woman who fears her sexual urges | becomes a religious zealot | Reaction formation | The ego transforms an unacceptable motive into its opposite |
| A man who has a strong desire to have an extramarital affair | accuses his wife of flirting with other men. | Projection  | The ego attributes personal shortcomings, problems, and faults to others |
| Every time she and her husband have a big argument | A woman returns home to her mother | Regression  | The ego seeks the security of an earlier developmental period in the face of stress |
| A woman can't take her anger out on her boss. | so she goes home and takes it out on her husband | Displacement  | The ego shifts feelings toward an unacceptable object to another more acceptable object |
| A woman with strong sexual urges | becomes an artist who paints nudes. | Sublimation  | The ego replaces an unacceptable impulse with a socially acceptable one |

| | | | |
|--|---|--------|---|
| A team of doctors has diagnosed a man with cancer. | but he won't acknowledge that he has cancer | Denial | The ego refuses to acknowledge anxiety producing realities. |
|--|---|--------|---|

Identify the defense mechanism

- Repression
- Rationalization
- Displacement
- Sublimation
- Projection
- Reaction formation
- Denial
- Regression



Personality and Health: Hardiness

When Suzanne Kobasa looked at stress-resistant business executives who reported high levels of stressful events, and had relatively few illnesses, she identified three traits that made them hardy.

Hardiness (as defined by Suzanne Kobasa), comprises of three beliefs that makes them more resilient to psychological distress and physical illness in the face of stress.

- **Commitment**—hardy individuals are committed to their work and families. They *believe* that what they are doing is important
- **Control**—They *perceive* themselves as having control over their outcomes instead of feeling powerless to influence events (see Learned Helplessness)
- **Challenge**—They view the demands of the situation as a challenge or opportunity instead of a threat. As a result, the situation is seen as less stressful and provided an opportunity to excel.

These hardy people had relatively exceptional coping skills. In hardiness training, participants were encouraged to examine their stressors, develop action plans for dealing with stress, explore their bodily reactions to stress, and find ways to compensate for unchangeable situations without falling into self-pity.

Perceived Control over Stressful Events

Stressors challenge you to do something to eliminate or overcome the stressor. Events are more stressful when there is nothing to do—no way to deal with the challenge

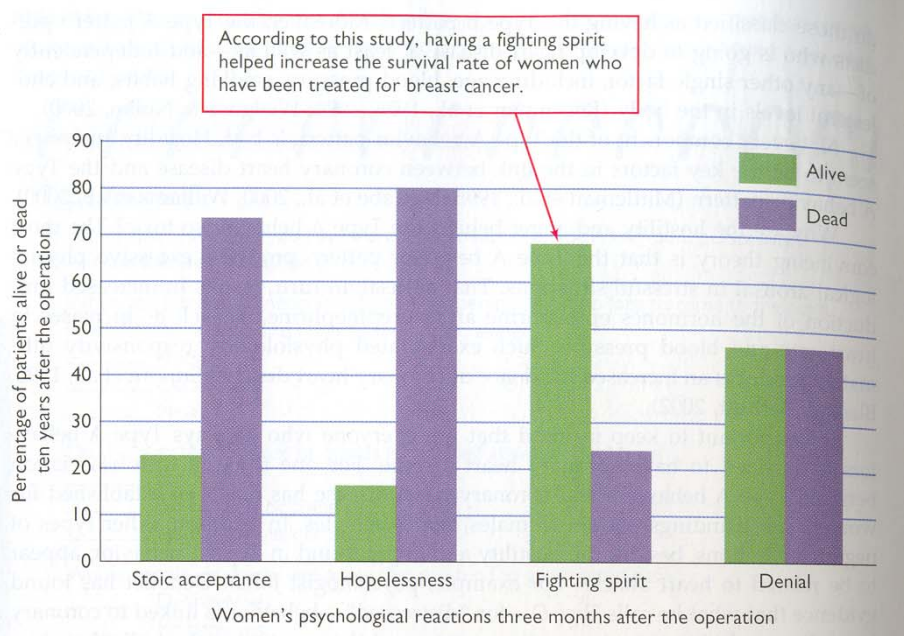
If you perceive control over stressful events, it can reduce the stress of the event.

Perceived Control over Stressful Events

Having a sense of control over a stressful situation reduces the impact of stressor and decreases the feelings of anxiety and depression.

- Your sense of control had to be realistic to be adaptive. Unrealistic perceptions of control over debilitating diseases can add to the stress. Sometimes the control needs to be refocused.
 - Well-adjusted cancer patients accepted that they could not control the disease, but they could control the consequences.

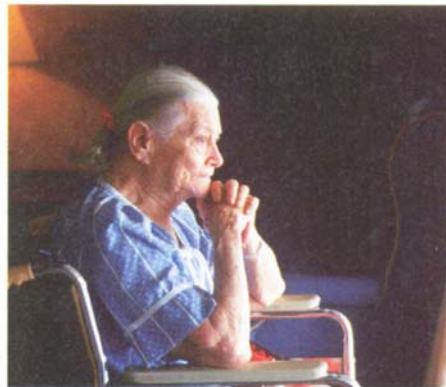
FIGURE 2 The relationship between women's psychological response to breast cancer three months after surgery and their survival ten years after the operation (Pettingale et al., 1985). What implications do these findings have for the treatment of people with cancer?



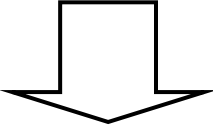
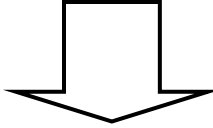
Deciding what you can control and what you can't control is hard.

Perceived Control over Stressful Events

When residents of a nursing home were involved in the decision making process (e.g. deciding daily activities, where they received visitors, when they would attend a movie screening, etc), they were more active, alert, sociable, healthier and lived longer compared to residents where the decisions were made for them.

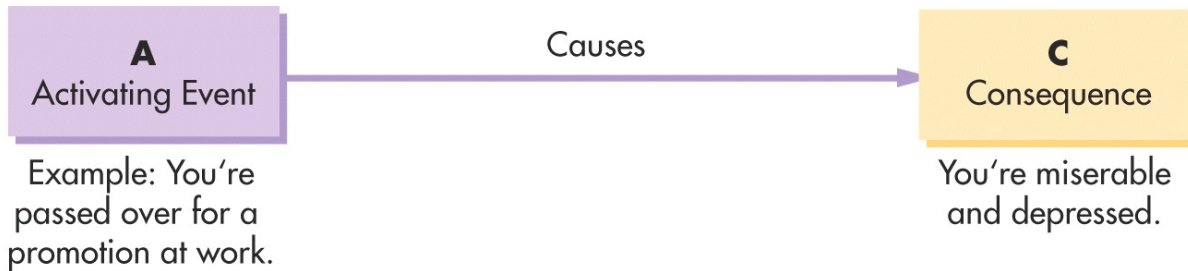


In hospitals and nursing homes, patients may learn to feel helpless because they are not given opportunities to make decisions or exert control over their own lives.

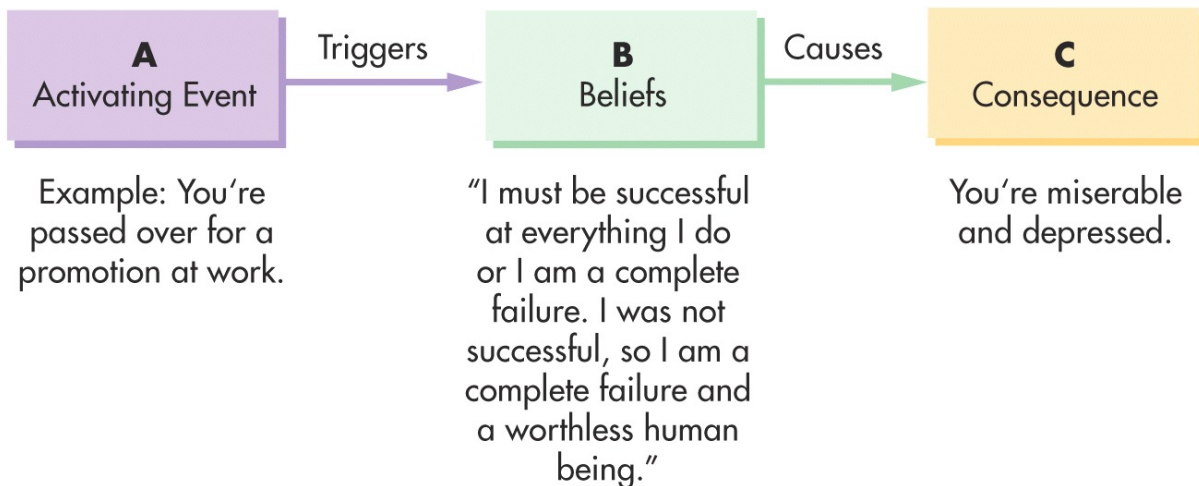
| Nursing Home “Engaged” | Nursing Home “Disengaged” |
|--|--|
| Involved in deciding <ul style="list-style-type: none">• daily activities• Where they received visitors• When they would attend movie screenings | Not involved in deciding <ul style="list-style-type: none">• daily activities• Where they received visitors• When they would attend movie screenings |
| The decisions were made with the input of the residents | These decisions were made for them |
|  |  |
| More active, alert, sociable, healthier, and lived longer lives | Less active, alert, sociable, healthier, lived shorter lives |

Irrational Self-Talk

Commonsense View



Rational-Emotive Therapy's ABC Model



Clues to irrational beliefs are:

- Should Statements
- Awfulizing Statements
- Overgeneralizations

The key step in rational-emotive therapy is to identify the core irrational beliefs that form the basis of personal distress. Many irrational beliefs we have reflect “musts” and “shoulds” that are absolutes such as “I should like everyone”. Table 15.4 illustrates other irrational beliefs we might have.

| Table | 15.4 |
|--|------|
| Irrational Beliefs | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is a dire necessity for you to be loved or approved by virtually everyone in your community.2. You must be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if you are to consider yourself worthwhile.3. Certain people are bad, wicked, or villainous, and they should be severely blamed and punished for their villainy. You should become extremely upset over other people’s wrongdoings.4. It is awful and catastrophic when things are not the way you would very much like them to be.5. Human unhappiness is externally caused, and you have little or no ability to control your bad feelings and emotions.6. It is easier to avoid than to face difficulties and responsibilities. Avoiding difficulties whenever possible is more likely to lead to happiness than facing difficulties.7. You need to rely on someone stronger than yourself.8. Your past history is an all-important determinant of your present behavior. Because something once strongly affected your life, it should indefinitely have a similar effect.9. You should become extremely upset over other people’s problems.10. There is a single perfect solution to all human problems, and it is catastrophic if this perfect solution is not found. | |
| SOURCE: Based on Ellis (1991). | |

Holding on to irrational beliefs can lead to unhealthy negative emotions, like extreme anger, despair, resentment and feelings of worthlessness. In addition, they feel that they are unable to control or cope with upsetting situations. These irrational beliefs can create problems in relationships

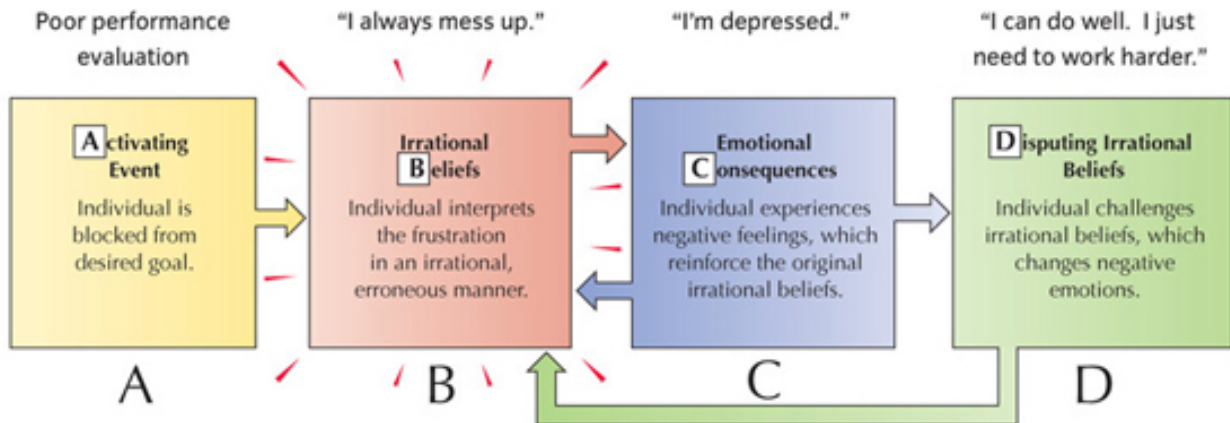
To confront these irrational beliefs, the rational-emotive therapist tends to be very direct and can be perceived as being confrontational.

- The therapist tries to use logical and reason to help the client recognize their own irrational beliefs.
- As a client in rational-emotive therapy, the client must first admit their irrational beliefs and accept the fact that these beliefs are irrational and unhealthy. If these beliefs are woven into your self-concept, it may be difficult to tease them out.

In rational-emotive therapy, responding “rationally” to unpleasant situations does not mean to ignore your feelings. It is appropriate to feel sad when rejected or happy when the situation is appropriate.

Likewise, the goal of cognitive restructuring is NOT to have a client think positively if there is no reason to think positively.

- If the person is failing exams after exam, they would be encouraged to improve their study skills
- If the person is doing poorly at work, they would be encouraged to improve their situation.



According to Albert Ellis, our emotional reactions are produced by our interpretation of an event, not by the event itself. For example, if you receive a poor performance evaluation at work, you might directly attribute your bad mood to the negative feedback. Ellis would argue that the self-talk ("I always mess up") between the event and the feeling is what upset you. Furthermore, ruminating on all the other bad things in your life maintains your negative emotional state. Ellis's therapy emphasizes disputing, or challenging, these irrational beliefs, which, in turn, causes changes in maladaptive emotions—it breaks the vicious cycle.

Disputing Irrational Beliefs (page 370)

- Monitor your emotional reactions and identify when you are making irrational beliefs or irrational self-statements. Perhaps you may need friend to spot them for you (or you spot them for a friend).
- Describe the activating event—What led you to feel angry, depressed or frustrated?
- Record your self-talk—What are you saying that led you to feel angry, depressed or frustrated? What were you thinking about? Recognizing your self-talk requires practice and will improve over time.
- Dispute your irrational beliefs. It is necessary for you to go back to your records of what you say to yourself and
 - Decide whether each statement is a rational or irrational belief
 - Explain why the belief does or does not make sense, and
 - Write some different statements that you can say to yourself to prevent you from experiencing negative emotions

Examples

| Negative self talk | Coping self-statements |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do I always mess up?• This is going to be terrible | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I'm not going to think about failing• I'm going to concentrate on being successful• I don't always mess up. |

20 Tips for Managing Stress

1. Work off stress.
2. Have fun.
3. Talk it out.
4. Give in occasionally.
5. Do something for others.
6. Have some real close friends.
7. Eat sensibly.
8. Get organized.
9. Rehearse.
10. Do it now.
11. Learn to say “no.”
12. Learn to accept what you cannot change.
13. Avoid self-medication.
14. Live a balanced life.
15. Get enough sleep and rest.
16. Write in a journal or diary.
17. Shun the “perfect” trip.
18. Develop a regular exercise program.
19. Take care of yourself.
20. Learn to relax.