

Techniques for Disputing Irrational Beliefs (DIBS)

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If you want to increase your rationality and reduce your self-defeating irrational beliefs, you can spend at least ten minutes every day asking yourself the following questions and carefully thinking through (not merely parroting!) the healthy answers. Write down each question and your answers to it on a piece of paper; or else record the questions and your answers on a tape recorder.

1. WHAT SELF-DEFEATING IRRATIONAL BELIEF DO I WANT TO DISPUTE AND SURRENDER?

ILLUSTRATIVE ANSWER: I must receive love from someone for whom I really care.

2. CAN I RATIONALLY SUPPORT THIS BELIEF?

ILLUSTRATIVE ANSWER: No.

3. WHAT EVIDENCE EXISTS OF THE FALSENESS OF THIS BELIEF?

ILLUSTRATIVE ANSWER: Many indications exist that the belief that I must receive love from someone for whom I really care is false:

- a) No law of the universe exists that says that someone I care for must love me (although I would find it nice if that person did!).
- b) If I do not receive love from one person, I can still get it from others and find happiness that way.
- c) If no one I care for ever cares for me, which is very unlikely, I can still find enjoyment in friendships, in work, in books, and in other things.
- d) If someone I deeply care for rejects me, that will be most unfortunate; but I will hardly die!
- e) Even though I have not had much luck in winning great love in the past, that hardly proves that I must gain it now.
- f) No evidence exists for any absolute must. Consequently, no proof exists that I must always have anything, including love.
- g) Many people exist in the world who never get the kind of love they crave and who still lead happy lives.
- h) At times during my life I know that I have remained unloved and happy; so I most probably can feel happy again under unloving conditions.
- i) If I get rejected by someone for whom I truly care, that may mean that I possess some poor, unlovable traits. But that hardly means that I am a rotten, worthless, totally unlovable individual.
- j) Even if I had such poor traits that no one could ever love me, I would still not have to down myself as a lowly, bad individual.

4. DOES ANY EVIDENCE EXIST OF THE TRUTH OF THIS BELIEF?

ILLUSTRATIVE ANSWER: No, not really. Considerable evidence exists that if I love someone dearly and never am loved in return that I will then find myself disadvantaged, inconvenienced, frustrated, and deprived. I certainly would prefer, therefore, not to get rejected. But no amount of inconvenience amounts to a horror. I can still stand frustration and loneliness. They hardly make the world awful. Nor does rejection make me a turd! Clearly, then, no evidence exists that I must receive love from someone for whom I really care.

5. WHAT ARE THE WORST THINGS THAT COULD ACTUALLY HAPPEN TO ME IF I DON'T GET WHAT I THINK I MUST (OR DO GET WHAT I THINK I MUST NOT GET)?

ILLUSTRATIVE ANSWER: If I don't get the love I think I must receive:

- a) I would get deprived of various possible pleasures and conveniences.
- b) I would feel inconvenienced by having to keep looking for love elsewhere.
- c) I might never gain the love I want, and thereby continue indefinitely to feel deprived and disadvantaged.
- d) Other people might down me and consider me pretty worthless for getting rejected—and that would be annoying and unpleasant.

- e) I might settle for pleasures other than and worse than those I could receive in a good love relationship; and I would find that distinctly undesirable.
 - f) I might remain alone much of the time; which again would be unpleasant.
 - g) Various other kinds of misfortunes and deprivations might occur in my life—none of which I need define as awful, terrible, or unbearable.
6. WHAT GOOD THINGS COULD I MAKE HAPPEN IF I DON'T GET WHAT I THINK I MUST (OR DO GET WHAT I THINK I MUST NOT GET)?
- a) If the person I truly care for does not return my love, I could devote more time and energy to winning someone else's love—and probably find someone better for me.
 - b) I could devote myself to other enjoyable pursuits that have little to do with loving or relating, such as work or artistic endeavors.
 - c) I could find it challenging and enjoyable to teach myself to live happily without love.
 - d) I could work at achieving a philosophy of fully accepting myself even when I do not get the love I crave.

You can take any one of your major irrational beliefs—your shoulds, oughts, or musts—and spend at least ten minutes every day, often for a period of several weeks, actively and vigorously disputing this belief. To help keep yourself devoting this amount of time to the DIBS method of rational disputing, you may use operant conditioning or self-management methods (originated by B.F. Skinner, David Premack, Marvin Goldfried, and other psychologists). Select some activity that you highly enjoy that you tend to do every day—such as reading, eating, television viewing, exercising, or social contact with friends. Use this activity as a reinforcer or reward by ONLY allowing yourself to engage in it AFTER you have practiced Disputing Irrational Beliefs (DIBS) for at least ten minutes that day. Otherwise, no reward!

In addition, you may penalize yourself every single day you do NOT use DIBS for at least ten minutes. How? By making yourself perform some activity you find distinctly unpleasant—such as eating something obnoxious, contributing to a cause you hate, getting up a half-hour earlier in the morning, or spending an hour conversing with someone you find boring. You can also arrange with some person or group to monitor you and help you actually carry out the penalties and lack of rewards you set for yourself. You may of course steadily use DIBS without any self-reinforcement, since it becomes reinforcing in its own right after awhile. But you may find it more effective at times if you use it along with rewards and penalties that you execute immediately after you practice or avoid practicing this rational emotive behavior method.

Summary of Questions to Ask Yourself in DIBS

1. WHAT SELF-DEFEATING IRRATIONAL BELIEF DO I WANT TO DISPUTE AND SURRENDER?
2. CAN I RATIONALLY SUPPORT THIS BELIEF?
3. WHAT EVIDENCE EXISTS OF THE FALSENESS OF THIS BELIEF?
4. DOES ANY EVIDENCE EXIST OF THE TRUTH OF THIS BELIEF?
5. WHAT ARE THE WORST THINGS THAT COULD ACTUALLY HAPPEN TO ME IF I DON'T GET WHAT I THINK I MUST (OR DO GET WHAT I THINK I MUST NOT GET)?
6. WHAT GOOD THINGS COULD I MAKE HAPPEN IF I DON'T GET WHAT I THINK I MUST (OR DO GET WHAT I THINK I MUST NOT GET)?

Disputing (D) your dysfunctional or irrational Beliefs (iBs) is one of the most effective of REBT techniques. But it is still often ineffective, because you can easily and very strongly hold on to an iB (such as, "I absolutely must be loved by so-and-so, and it's awful and I am an inadequate person when he/she does not love me!"). When you question and challenge this iB you often can come up with an Effective New Philosophy (E) that is accurate but weak: "I guess that there is no reason why so-and-so must love me, because there are other people who will love me when so-and-so does not. I can therefore be reasonably happy without his/her love." Believing this almost Effective New Philosophy, and believing it lightly, you can still easily and forcefully believe, "Even though it is not awful and terrible when so-and-so does not love me, it really is! No matter what, I still need his/her affection!"

Weak, or even moderately strong, Disputing will therefore often not work very well to help you truly disbelieve some of your powerful and long-held iB's; while vigorous, persistent Disputing is more likely to work.

One way to do highly powerful, vigorous Disputing is to use a tape recorder and to state one of your strong irrational Beliefs into it, such as, "If I fail this job interview I am about to have, that will prove that I'll never get a good job and that I might as

well apply only for low-level positions!”

Figure out several Disputes to this iB and strongly present them on this same tape. For example: “Even if I do poorly on this inter-view, that will only show that I failed this time, but will never show that I’ll always fail and can never do well in other inter-views. Maybe they’ll still hire me for the job. But if they don’t, I can learn by my mistakes, can do better in other inter-views, and can finally get the kind of job that I want.”

Listen to your Disputing on tape. Let other people, including your therapist or members of your therapy group, listen to it. Do it over in a more forceful and vigorous manner and let them listen to it again, to see if you are disputing more forcefully, until they agree that you are getting better at doing it. Keep listening to it until you see that you are able to con-vince yourself and others that you are becoming more powerful and more con-vinc-ing.