**The Different Types of “Shoulds” in REBT**

To use REBT, one needs to have an accurate understanding of its theory of emotional disturbance. REBT theory rests on the idea that rigid attitudes lie at the core of emotional disturbance and generate extreme attitudes which also are associated with emotional disturbance. REBT does not take aim at words in the English language but does take aim at rigid attitudes.

English speakers express rigid attitudes with different words. These words include ***should, must, ought, have to, and need to.*** What makes using REBT difficult is that the patient needs to learn to recognize when they are holding a rigid attitude or merely expressing a nonrigid attitude using a word capable of expressing a rigid attitude. Focusing on one's use of words often is not sufficient to make you aware of your attitude's rigidity. The best way to determine if your attitude is rigid or not is to examine the emotional and behavioral reactions generated by the attitude. If you are experiencing one of the eight self-defeating emotions or exhibiting self-defeating behavior, then the chances are that you hold an unspoken attitude that has a rigid quality to it.

Below are six examples of attitudes that include the word should. The first example is the one REBT targets for change because it will lead to emotional disturbance. The other five will not lead to self-defeating emotions and behaviors.

1. **Using *Should* to express an absolutistic attitude.**

***You (absolutely) should not betray a friend.*** Note in common usage, we may be thinking in an absolutistic way but may not include the word "absolutely" in our attitude. The rigidity is present in our stance whether or not we include the word absolutely. The usage of the word should, in this way, will lead to emotional disturbance when this demand is not met.

1. **Using *Should* to express conditional reasoning.**

***If you want to live a long and healthy life, you should not smoke.*** This is an example of conditional reasoning using the word should and it is consistent with reality. It is an expression of an observable relationship between the aimed for condition, a long and healthy life, and a behavior, smoking. There is no problem with conditional reasoning when it is realistic and is supported by observable data. The usage of the word should, in this way, will not lead to emotional disturbance.

1. **Using *Should* to make a recommendation.**

***I have finished watching the final season of Downton Abbey. Given that we are in a lockdown due to Covid, you should add this show to your TV watchlist. I think you would greatly enjoy it.***This is an example of how the word should, can be used to express a recommendation you are making to another person. The usage of the word should, in this way, will not lead to emotional disturbance.

1. **Using *Should* to express probability.**

***Given my experience with computer viruses, this antivirus software should safeguard your computer from viruses and malware.***Here the speaker is making a statement of probability using the word should. The usage of the word should, in this way, will not lead to emotional disturbance.

1. **Using *Should* to express an ideal.**

***People should work together as members of a team, but sadly they often do not.*** Here the speak is making a statement of an ideal scenario. The usage of the word should, in this way, will not lead to emotional disturbance.

1. **Using *Should* to express a personal preference.**

***People preferably should not make spontaneous utterances during movies as I find it distracting.***Here, the speaker states how they prefer others to behave while watching a movie to not interfere with the speaker hearing the film's critical dialogue. The usage of the word should, in this way, will not lead to emotional disturbance.

As you can see, the English language allows the speaker to use the word should to make different types of statements. Emotional disturbance follows from rigid and absolutistic use of the word should. In using REBT to have healthy emotional reactions, you need to monitor your use of the word should, and you preferably should stop yourself when you see that it is being used to express a rigid attitude. When you recognize that you are using this word to express a rigid mindset, attempt to challenge it, and then transform it into a preferential statement. Doing so should serve you well!

**Absolute should:** You (absolutely) should maintain your health.

**Preferential attitude:** You preferentially should maintain your health, but it is your life and neglect your health if you wish.