**Do Psychological Pushups Daily to Have Flexibility at the Ready**

In Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), we encourage the daily practice of rational thinking. REBT theorizes that human nature has two competing instincts. One instinct is to think in rigid, dogmatic, and extreme ways, which leads to disturbed emotional reactions, self-defeating behavior, and ineffective interpersonal responses. The other instinct is to think in flexible, non-extreme, scientific ways, leading to healthy, self-helping emotional reactions and effective interpersonal responses. **There is an internal tension between these two inclinations within all of us.** When we encounter a negative state of affairs, the rigid, dogmatic, and extreme ways of thinking which lead to disturbed emotional reactions and self-defeating behavior are more likely to occur. It is human nature to have this inner struggle and for the self-defeating side to often win out.

REBT trains you to strengthen your propensity to think in flexible and non-extreme, scientific ways, leading to healthy, self-helping emotional reactions, constructive behavior in the face of adversity, and effective interpersonal responses. When people face a negative state of affairs of significant importance, thinking in flexible and healthy ways that promote an effective response may be pretty challenging to do. Furthermore, when we face multiple stressors simultaneously, are sleep deprived, hungry, or ill, thinking in flexible and non-extreme ways is more challenging than it otherwise is. **Finally, we acknowledge that humans are likely to have practiced rigid and extreme thinking when facing adversity more often than they have practiced flexible, healthy, and practical thinking.**We, humans, have the odds stacked against us! Our self-defeating instincts are easier to practice and implement than the more effective, elegant, and scientific way of thinking that REBT prescribes.

Despite these admissions, REBT maintains a realistic and reasonably optimistic stance toward human development. Despite the previous acknowledgments that it is hard, and we are well practiced at self-defeating thinking and behaviors, I believe we can do better with the proper training in rational, flexible, and non-extreme thinking. **I often say in therapy that hard does not mean impossible.** I tell my patients that once they have come up with more flexible, healthier ways to think, which will lead to the kind of effective responses they wish to emit, they need to practice and strengthen this thinking. To this end, I prescribe what I call psychological pushups.

Psychological pushups are a way of helping people remember the need for daily training in healthy attitudes in advance of facing adversity. **The Stoics thought that people could have at the ready philosophical attitudes and use them at a moment's notice when faced with adversity.** These attitudes would be like having a weapon a person could quickly use when facing danger. You also can think of the psychological pushups I am prescribing as physical training an athlete does to strengthen muscles to enhance functioning when strained in competition.

There are two ways to do psychological pushups.**I suggest people do them in the morning at least once a day and perhaps a second time later in the day.**This training only takes a few minutes to do.

**How to Do Psychological Pushups**

Take one healthy idea you wish to have at the ready for later in the day when you encounter adversity. Here are some generic examples:

* ***I want to do perfectly well, but I do not have to do so. If I do not exhibit the desired level of performance, I can choose to accept myself unconditionally and learn from my subpar performance. I can then practice the routine again and again until I achieve mastery.***
* ***I wish you would love and approve of me, but sadly this is not how the world works much of the time. You do not have to love and approve of me. When you do not love and approve of me, I can choose to accept myself unconditionally and decide on what I wish to do. I can continue to attempt to win you over. Alternatively, I can accept that winning you over is highly unlikely and find someone else's love and approval to enrich my life.***
* ***I wish the conditions of my life were easy, comfortable, predictable, and secure, but unfortunately, this does not have to be the case. When the circumstances of my life are not as I desire them to be, that is bad, sometimes even very bad, but not awful, or something I cannot transcend. With the proper mindset, I can still have some degree of pleasure, satisfaction, happiness, or meaning even when life is challenging, uncomfortable, or uncertain.***
* ***When I am tempted to do something that might undermine achieving a long-term goal, I will be very uncomfortable resisting that urge. Still, it will not be impossible nor unbearable for me to resist the urge. I can stand the discomfort of this internal tension. I will resist the urge and do the better thing because the goal I have in mind requires me to do so, and that goal is worth achieving. When I am unsuccessful at resisting an urge and then defeat myself, I will not rate or down the whole of me, my personhood. I will acknowledge that I require more training to resist temptation and recommit myself to doing so because the long-term goal is worth it.***

Next, **write the attitude down on a card to determine the best languag**e before taking the next step.

Then, with a strong and committed tone of voice, read the attitude **three times slowly into your mobile phone's digital voice recorder.** Then briefly pause as this is one set of pushups. Then go on to the next attitude your wish to strengthen. With a strong and committed tone of voice, read that attitude three times slowly into your mobile phone's digital voice recorder. At this point, you have completed two sets of pushups. Then do this with the next attitude on your list for the day. Don't overtrain in a given day. I would use no more than four attitudes so that you can do this exercise slowly and concentrate on what you are saying without rushing the process of making the recording.

**Now listen to the recording you just made.** If you had four attitudes, the continuous recording would be of you speaking each attitude three times for a total of twelve attitudes.

I prefer you use a digital recorder to process these attitudes through your mind by both saying them aloud and then listening to having said them aloud. **However, if you want, you can just read each statement aloud three times in succession without the digital recorder.**Still, I recommend using the voice recorder, so you also hear yourself say these attitudes aloud.

**As you go about your day and encounter adversity, look for an opportunity to use these attitudes to produce a healthy response that allows you to experience a healthy negative emotion and a practical and creative behavioral response.**This combination of a healthy negative emotion and an effective and innovative behavioral response will give you the best chance of changing what you can about the negative situation you are facing. The healthy negative feeling and its behavioral response will also enable you to still have some pleasure or happiness during your day despite coming up against a particularly negative situation. Remember that when you encounter adversity and draw upon the attitudes you have practiced, you will deepen your conviction in those attitudes and improve your confidence in your ability to respond to adversity effectively.

I do my psychological pushups daily, varying the content I am training on. On other days, I reuse previously rehearsed content, but I still read the attitudes into the voice recorder and then listen to myself firmly saying the healthy attitudes. **Do your pushups every day during the first half of the day, and you too will have healthy attitudes at the ready for when the hand of fate places adversity in your path later in the day.**You can determine your emotional destiny by training in advance for misfortune. Train daily and see for yourself. You just might surprise yourself with the results you receive! Please write to me and let me know how it goes.