Chapter 20
Rational Emotive Education as Social–Emotional Learning

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The recent report by the "From a Nation at Risk to a Nation of Hope" (2019) prepared by the Aspen Institute, National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, has, again, confirmed what most now regard not as a fad, but as common sense; namely:

> …Children require a broad array of skills, attitudes, character traits, and values to succeed in school, careers, and life. They require skills such as paying attention, setting goals, collaboration, and planning for the future. They require attitudes such as internal motivation, perseverance, and a sense of purpose. They require values such as responsibility, honesty, and integrity. They require the abilities to think critically, consider diverse views, and problem solve. And these social, emotional, and academic capacities are increasingly demanded in the American workplace, which puts a premium on the ability to work in diverse teams, grapple with difficult problems, and adjust to rapid change.

More than ever before, there is a need in schools today for evidence-based, comprehensive, developmentally based school-wide programs designed to promote social and emotional competence as well as to prevent and/or reduce behavior and emotional problems including educational under-achievement. Fortunately, there now exists an increasing number of "promising" school-based programs being implemented that focus on the social and emotional learning of children and adolescents that are designed to equip young people with an array of social and emotional capabilities seen as intrinsic to academic success, emotional well-being, and positive relationships and which lead to reductions in existing problems.

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Successful school-based social and emotional learning programs share common characteristics. Good practice has teachers with the support of psychologists and counselors teaching social and emotional skills in formal lessons as an integrated component of the curriculum. However, it is recognized that in order for students to generalize these skills, social and emotional learning experiences need to be present throughout the school day including during academic instruction and throughout the school year. Other characteristics of social emotional education programs include (a) are of longer duration, (b) synthesize a number of successful approaches, (c) incorporate a developmental model, (d) provide greater focus on the role of emotions and emotional development, (e) provide increased emphasis on generalization techniques, (f) provide ongoing training and support for implementation, and (g) utilize multiple measures and follow-ups for assessing program effectiveness.

Albert Ellis pioneered the application of rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) to the treatment of children and adolescents in the mid-1950s, and from its inception, REBT has been psycho-educational in nature. A long-time proponent of the use of REBT in schools, Ellis has always stressed the importance of a prevention curriculum designed to help young people help themselves by learning positive mental health concepts (Ellis, 1971, 1972). From 1971 to 1975, Ellis and his staff taught rational thinking as a preventive mental health program in addition to regular subjects at The Living School, a small private grade school housed in the Institute for Advanced Study in Rational Psychotherapy (now called the Albert Ellis Institute). The school prospered for several years, during which time the staff discovered that not only therapists but teachers could teach REBT principles in the classroom to improve children's emotional well-being.

Based on the effective thinking, feeling, and behaving strategies that were taught at The Living School, Knaus (1974) developed a curriculum that would educate children in the ABC's of REBT. Bedford (1974) wrote a short story emphasizing the connection between thinking, feeling, and behaving. Since then, REE-derived programs include Vernon's (1989a, 1989b) *Thinking, Feeling, Behaving* (Vernon, 1989a, 1989b, 1998c, 2006a, 2006b), *The Passport Program* (Vernon, 1998a, 1998b), and Bernard's You Can Do It! Education (youcandoiteducation.com.au) have been developed that teach children to develop critical thinking skills, differentiate between facts and assumptions, distinguish between thoughts and feelings, link thoughts and feelings, identify what leads to emotional upset, distinguish between rational and irrational beliefs, and learn to challenge irrational beliefs.

REBT in the form of its educational derivative rational emotive education (REE) has a long-standing presence in the field of school-based mental health programs and has always been used as a form of prevention, promotion, and intervention focused on young people and their problems (e.g., Knaus, 1974). Its focus has been on the elimination of the irrational beliefs of children and adolescents associated with emotional, behavioral, and achievement problems and the promotion of rational beliefs associated with social, emotional, and work competence. The research across four decades indicates that when REBT is used in schools with both clinical and non-clinical populations, it has a positive effect (e.g., DiGiuseppe, Miller, & Trexler, 1979; Gonzalez et al., 2004; Hajzler & Bernard, 1991; Mahfar, Noah, & Senin, 2019; Popa & Bochis, 2012; Steins & Haep, 2015).

As prevention, REE programs are employed in classrooms to help prevent the development of irrational beliefs and associated unhealthy emotions and behaviors. They help children of all ages recognize the self-defeating effects of irrational beliefs and the beneficial outcomes of rational beliefs. As well, when young people are equipped with emotional problem-solving skills including rational self-statements and disputing skills, they are able to diffuse potential problem situations that potentially can lead to more harmful outcomes.

As promotion, REBT-based programs are, again, being used with groups of young people with an eye to the strengthening of rational beliefs and self-management skills that help young people make the very most of their innate potential by helping them minimize unhealthy emotions, irrational beliefs, and to maximize their effort and well-being.

As intervention, REBT has a long track record and supportive research (e.g., Hajzler & Bernard, 1991) as a form of 1:1 and group interventions for young people with psychosocial and mental health problems (anxiety, low self-esteem, behavior problems). Apparently, REBT is being used more frequently with young people with internalizing than externalizing problems (Terjesen et al., 1999). When working with children who manifest internal or externalizing disorders, REBT practitioners recognize the need for multisystemic solutions encompassing the child's full ecology.

Rational-emotive education (REE) is uniquely suited for a prevention curriculum for several reasons: (a) the principles can be readily transferred into lessons that teach children the core REBT concepts; (b) it is a comprehensive approach, in that by identifying irrational beliefs that perpetuate the problem, children gain a better understanding of how to change their negative feelings and self-defeating behaviors; (c) a wide variety of cognitive behavioral methods are employed in delivering the lessons; (d) the concepts can be adapted to different age levels, ethnicities, and intelligence levels; (e) the principles emphasize helping children "get better" not just "feel better"; (f) it is a skills-oriented approach that equips children with cognitive, emotive, and behavioral strategies to apply to problems of daily living, both in the present and future.

Rational-emotive education (REE) is based on the assumption that it is possible and desirable to teach children how to help themselves cope with life more effectively. Specifically, the importance of preventing emotional disturbances by providing children with "tools" with which to cope is the basis of rational-emotive education. The core principles of REBT—that emotional problems result from faulty thinking about events rather than from the event itself and that these faulty, irrational thoughts can be disputed, resulting in more moderate, healthy feelings and productive behaviors—forms the basis of an REE program, along with the A-B-C-D-E-F paradigm and an understanding of the core irrational beliefs: self-downing, demanding, and frustration intolerance.

Unlike other emotional education programs, REE empowers recipients to take charge of their lives, first by understanding the connection between what they think, feel, and do, and then by learning that while they may not be able to change other people or the events in their lives, they can exercise control over themselves. Given the realities that many young people have to contend with, this pragmatic

approach enables them to make changes that are within their control, which at the same time, will enhance the quality of their lives.

In the following sections, several ways of implementing REE will be described, followed by examples of REE lessons and further applications.

Implementing REE

There are four basic approaches to implementing an REE program: the informal approach (teachable moment), structured emotional education lessons, learning centers, and integration into the curriculum. Each has its merits. Optimally, all four approaches will be used, in addition to REBT concepts being practiced and modeled in the environment.

The Informal Approach

The basic assumption of this approach is that teachers and parents will seize "teachable moments" to introduce and reinforce rational thinking concepts. There are numerous ways in which this can be done: with the entire class, individually, or with small groups of children.

As an example, suppose that a teacher returns a test and it is obvious that almost all the children are upset with their low scores. At this point, the teacher could introduce rational thinking in the classroom setting by asking children what the score says about them: does it make them a better or worse person? Does this bad score mean that they will always do poorly on exams? Just because they did not do well on this test, does it necessarily mean they will not do well in the course? Is getting a bad score the worst possible thing that could ever happen to them? Raising disputations of this sort helps children avoid self-downing, awfulizing, and overgeneralizing. A next step could be to ask them what they could have done, if anything, to improve their score, which could result in appropriate goal setting for the next exam.

Similarly, this approach can be used with an individual. Selina, a fourth grader, frequently got upset when learning something new. She would throw down her pencil and tear up her paper and simply not finish the task. When the teacher approached her and asked her to explain what was wrong, Selina replied, "It's too hard—I'll never learn this." The teacher introduced some disputations: had she ever tried to learn anything before and succeeded? Just because something was hard, did it mean she should give up? Although Selina responded appropriately to these questions, she remained frustrated, so the teacher drew two talking heads. On the first one, she listed Selina's irrational beliefs: "This is too hard—I'll never learn this." On the second one, she helped Selina identify rational self-talk, such as "This is hard, but I just have to work harder to learn it; I don't like learning hard things, but I can stand it if I do a little at a time." The teacher instructed Selina to keep this visual inside her desk to use as a reminder when she felt frustrated and wanted to give up. As a

homework assignment, she asked Selina to read *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 1986), a book that described how a little train chanted "I think I can, I think I can" as he tried to make it up a mountain and think about how this story applied to her situation.

The informal approach can also be used with small groups. For instance, as the teacher was walking through the hall, he noticed a group of young adolescents arguing with each other. As he approached the group, he heard all sorts of accusations being directed at one individual: "You're a horrible, selfish friend…you stole Katinka's boyfriend and we will never forgive you for it. We know you are the one who started all the rumors about us, and we are going to turn all the other girls against you so that no one in this class will ever speak to you again." The teacher wanted to diffuse the situation, so he pulled the group into an empty classroom and asked them to tell him more about the situation. As they talked, he began to challenge some of their assumptions: where was the evidence that this girl had started all the rumors? Did they know for a fact that she "stole" another's boyfriend? Did they have so much power that they could turn *everyone* against her? Forever is a long, long time—do they really believe that they will *never* speak to her again, or is it possible that they will eventually get over being so upset? These disputations seemed to help de-escalate their emotions and put the problem in better perspective, and eventually they reached a point where they could communicate more effectively about how they felt and listen to the other side of the story.

In each of these situations, if the teacher had not intervened, the problems would have compounded themselves and interfered with children's ability to concentrate in school. Furthermore, until the underlying beliefs are addressed, the problems would have perpetuated themselves. Nipping problems in the bud through this informal approach helps prevent this from occurring.

To use this approach, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the basic REBT principles and the disputation process. In addition, it is important to realize that while it might be easier to tell children how to feel or what to do to solve a problem, it is advisable that they be allowed to work things out for themselves, with proper guidance. Once they are able to dispute their irrational beliefs that will result in more moderate, healthy feelings, they are in a better position to look at alternatives and develop a plan to resolve the problem.

Structured REE Lessons

The second approach, the most structured of all, is a series of emotional education lessons that can be presented to a small group or to a total class of children. In contrast to subject-matter lessons, these lessons are typically not graded because the emphasis is on personal application of concepts. However, in this age of accountability, teachers can develop effective ways to measure whether or not the concepts have been attained, since skill acquisition is also an inherent part of the lessons.

Rational-emotive education lessons are typically experiential, with a good deal of student involvement and group interaction, which increases the likelihood that

children will be engaged in the activity. Understandings are deduced from the use of such methods as simulations, games, role-playing, art activities, bibliotherapy, guided discussions, and music and writing activities. In addition, time is spent debriefing the lesson so that, through guided questions, children master the content.

REE Concepts

REE lessons are developed around the following basic concepts: self-acceptance, feelings, beliefs, and disputing beliefs (Vernon, 2004).

1. *Self-acceptance.* REE emphasizes the importance of developing a realistic self-concept, including accepting the notion of personal weaknesses as well as strengths. Learning that who a person is should not be equated with what he or she does is also a key component, as well as understanding that people are fallible human beings who make mistakes and must accept the fact that they are not perfect.
2. *Feelings*. A critical component of REE lessons is learning the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Developing a feeling vocabulary, learning to deal with emotional overreactions, assessing the intensity of feelings, and distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy ways to express feelings are also important. Understanding that feelings can change, that the same event can result in different feelings depending on how the event is perceived, and that it is natural to have feelings are significant concepts.
3. *Beliefs.* A key component of REE is that there are two types of beliefs, rational and irrational. Irrational beliefs result in negative feelings that can lead to self-defeating behaviors. These irrational beliefs manifest themselves in the form of a basic "must" that falls into three main categories: self-demandingness, other-demandingness, and world-demandingness (Ellis, 1994). Self-demandingness refers to the idea that you must always perform well and win others' approval; and if you do not, you are incompetent, unworthy, and deserve to suffer. Other-demandingness implies that people with whom you associate must always treat you kindly, considerately, and fairly; and if they do not, they are unworthy, bad, rotten, and deserve to be punished. World-demandingness means that the conditions in which you live must be enjoyable, hassle-free, safe, and favorable; and if they are not, it is awful and horrible and unbearable. Rational beliefs are self-enhancing and result in moderate feelings that help people achieve their goals; they are realistic preferences that typically result in constructive behaviors (Dryden, 1999). The goal of the disputation process is to replace irrational beliefs with rational beliefs.
4. *Facts* vs. *Assumptions.* It is also important that children understand the difference between facts and assumptions. As concrete thinkers, children and many adolescents readily misconstrue events by failing to distinguish between a fact (she didn't sit by me) from assumptions (she's mad at me and doesn't want to be my friend). Because of their impulsive nature, it is all too common for young people to act on their assumptions and create more problems when others react to their overreaction.

5. *Disputing Beliefs.* The concept of disputing, a cornerstone of this theory, entails replacing irrational beliefs with rational beliefs in order to achieve a more sensible way of thinking, which in turn results in more moderate emotions and more self-enhancing behavior. The disputational process can take several forms: functional disputes, or questioning the practicality of the irrational beliefs (Vernon, 2004; Ellis & MacClaren, 1998); the Socratic approach, in which questioning gives clients insight into the irrationality of their thinking (Ellis & MacClaren, 1998); the didactic approach, where the differences between rational and irrational beliefs are explained (Ellis & MacClaren, 1998); empirical disputes, which help people evaluate the factual aspects of their beliefs; logical disputes, which enables people to see how illogical it is to escalate desires into demands and use of exaggeration or humor. These types of disputes can be taught directly to children in REE lessons or the concepts can be incorporated into lessons that teach children to apply the various types of disputations.

These basic concepts form the essence of the REE lessons, but it is critical that they be presented in accordance with the developmental level of the child. For example, it is appropriate to use the terms *rational* and *irrational* with older adolescents, but with younger children, the terms *sensible* and *insensible* would be easier for them to grasp. Likewise, younger children will not understand the concept of disputing unless it is presented in a very concrete manner, such as with the use of puppets in a dialogue, with one puppet being insensible and the other being sensible. Similarly, whereas adolescents can more readily understand the how irrational beliefs result in negative feelings and unproductive behaviors, younger children need to have these concepts presented in a very concrete method, such as making a paper chain to visually illustrate how insensible thoughts create negative feelings which result in poor behavioral choices.

It is also important to present the concepts in a sequential manner to assure greater mastery of the concepts. It is best to introduce these concepts in units. For example, the first unit might be self-acceptance, and all concepts pertaining to that would be introduced, followed by those relating to beliefs, and so forth. It is also advisable to have a sequential progression of lessons within the specific units so that concepts can be introduced and expanded on. For example, in a feelings unit, the distinction between healthy and unhealthy feelings precedes the more difficult concept that feelings come from thoughts. Likewise, when introducing beliefs, a first level would be to distinguish facts from beliefs before moving on to the notion of rational and irrational beliefs. In addition, the lessons should follow a similar structure, as subsequently described.

REE Lesson Plan Format

Having a well-developed lesson is essential, as is the notion of presenting the activities in developmentally appropriate formats to help children master the concepts. For example, rather than explain in a short lecture the difference between facts and assumptions, it is much more effective to engage students in identifying facts and

assumptions in a game format similar to tic-tac-toe (Vernon, 1980) or to learn that everyone makes mistakes by attempting to juggle tennis balls (Vernon, 1989a). As previously mentioned, a wide variety of methods can be incorporated into REE lessons: games, simulations, role-playing, puppetry, music and art activities, writing and worksheet activities, drama, experiments, bibliotherapy, and rational-emotive imagery, for example (Bernard, 2001, 2018; Vernon, 1980, 1989b, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c).

A lesson should contain the following:

1. *Learning objectives.* It is important to have one or two learning objectives for each lesson. For example, in a unit on beliefs for second graders, a specific objective would be to identify the negative effects of demanding. For a sixth grader, a specific objective would be to identify the connection between thoughts and actions. The objectives should be stated in behavioral terms so that they can be measured and they should be developmentally appropriate for the age level. It is preferable, in delivering a sequential curriculum that there be separate objectives for each grade level.
2. *Stimulus activity*. This is the heart and soul of the lesson, where the concepts are introduced. The stimulus activity should be engaging and can assume a variety of formats as previously described. For example, an REE lesson on tease tolerance can be developed using art—children make a radio out of a cardboard box and write rational thoughts they can use to tune out teasing around a dial on the radio (Vernon, 2002, pp. 222–224). Art can also be used to help adolescents deal with depressed feelings. They can draw around their hand and in the palm, write down the things they are depressed about, and then identify rational coping self-statements on each finger to serve as a reminder about how to cope with depression (Vernon, 2002, pp. 131–132). Experiential activities can also be very engaging. Elementary children can be divided into two groups, procrastinators and non-procrastinators. They are to pretend that they are recruiting "members" to their club, so the procrastinators make a poster of all the good things about being a procrastinator, and the non-procrastinators do the same. Discussion follows about the advantages and disadvantages of procrastination (Vernon, 2002, p. 184). Adolescents can learn how to use rational thoughts to de-escalate anger by making a paper accordion, identifying thoughts about an anger-provoking incident on one level of the accordion sheet, and then writing a rational thought to counteract the irrational thought contributing to the anger on the next level of the accordion (Vernon, 2002, p. 167).

   It is advisable to use more concrete activities with younger children and gradually introduce more abstract lessons with adolescents. However, it is also important to be experiential and to use wide array of activities to maintain interest. The stimulus activity should take no more than half of the allotted time for the lesson, leaving time for discussion.
3. *Content and personalization questions*. Because a critical part of the lesson is the personal application of concepts, it is very important to allow sufficient time for discussion. Two types of questions provide the most effective debriefing: content questions, which focus on the cognitive concepts presented in the les-

son, and personalization questions, which involve applying the concepts to the child's own life. For example, in a lesson on rational thinking, the objective was to learn how to distinguish between rational and irrational thinking. The activity, for high school students, involved a short lecturette on the difference between rational and irrational thinking, followed by a worksheet, where students were asked to identify irrational beliefs in statements such as: My parents never let me do anything—everyone else has more freedom than I do; I can't stand it if my boyfriend breaks up with me—I'll never find anyone like him again. The content questions asked students to describe the difference between rational and irrational thinking and examples of key irrational beliefs. The personalization questions asked students if they were generally rational or irrational thinkers, what they would need to do to change the way they think in order to handle situations more effectively and how they can apply what they learned to their own lives (Vernon, 1998c).

4. Using this lesson plan format provides a basic structure, but at the same time, allows for flexibility and creativity in the actual design of the activity. The inclusion of both content and personalization questions achieves the objectives of emotional education programs: to present mental health concepts and to help students personally apply these to their own lives. The primary focus is prevention, with the hope that these concepts will reduce the frequency and intensity of future problems.

Considerations in Implementing Lessons

In conducting emotional education lessons, it is vital to establish an atmosphere of trust and group cohesion because children are encouraged to look at themselves, to share with others, to apply concepts to their own lives, and to learn from classmates with regard to emotional and behavioral adjustment. Sensitivity should be exercised, listening carefully to children's responses, supporting their struggles to gain new insights, and encouraging their attempts to acquire REE concepts.

It is also important to create an atmosphere where students respect each other's expression. The facilitator of the lesson has the responsibility for seeing that this minimal rule is respected so that children will feel comfortable in sharing. At the elementary level, this may not be a problem, but as adolescence approaches, students become more self-conscious and hesitant. A non-threatening classroom atmosphere helps to assure the success of the emotional education experiences.

As previously mentioned, assigning a grade to an REE lesson is not recommended because it is difficult to evaluate personal application of concepts, which is one of the significant components of an REE lesson. However, since the objectives are measurable, quizzes or other types of evaluation can be used to determine cognitive acquisition of concepts. For example, after presenting a lesson on the difference between facts and assumptions, the teacher could have students complete a short True/False quiz, identifying which statements were facts and which were assumptions.

It is very appropriate to ask students what they learned following a lesson or to assign homework as a follow-up to the lesson to help reinforce the concepts. After

the lesson on facts and assumptions, a homework assignment for younger children could involve having them be "fact detectives," where they attempt to identify facts versus assumptions in their interactions with peers or siblings. Or, after a lesson on developing high frustration tolerance, middle-school students were asked to try something that had previously proven to be frustrating and to practice the examples of self-talk they had learned in the lesson to help them deal more effectively with their frustration.

Sample REE Lessons

There are numerous ways to introduce REE concepts. The following two lessons illustrate the lesson plan procedure. The first lesson is for elementary students to help them learn that people can feel differently about the same event based on what they think and the second is a self-acceptance activity for adolescents.

Face Your Feelings

Objective: To learn that people can feel differently about the same event.
Materials: Four paper plates per student; markers or crayons.
Stimulus Activity:

1. Ask students to draw faces on their paper plates to represent the following emotions: happy, sad, angry (mad), worried.
2. Explain that you will be reading some situations and that they are to think about how they feel when they experience a situation similar to the ones they are hearing about.
3. Read aloud each of the following situations, one at time, instructing students to respond by flipping up the face that illustrates how they would feel. Before reading another situation, note the different feelings that were portrayed and make a tally on the board.

Situations:

It is going to snow tonight.
Your younger cousins are coming to visit.
Your parents are taking you shopping after school.
Your teacher is keeping you in for recess.
You didn't get picked for the kickball game.
You are moving to a new reading group.
You might move to a different town and go to a different school.

Discussion:
Content Questions:

1. Did everyone respond to a given situation with the same feeling? If not, why do you think this happened?
2. Do you think that there is any situation in which all people would feel exactly the same? If so, what would be some examples?
3. Why do you think two people can feel differently about the same situation?

Personalization Questions:

1. Can you think of a time when you felt one way about something and your friend felt another way? (Encourage sharing of examples).
2. How do you think you should act if someone feels differently about a situation than you do?
3. What did you learn about feelings from this activity?

To the Leader:

In the discussion, emphasize that feelings vary based on what the person is thinking. Use examples to illustrate this process so that it is clear to the children.

Don't Soak It Up

Objective: To identify how to deal with criticism and put-downs which contribute to self-downing.

Materials: One sponge and a bucket of water, paper, and pencil for each student.

Stimulus Activity:

1. Introduce the activity by stating the objective of the lesson and asking for a volunteer.
2. Ask the volunteer to dip the sponge into the bucket and pull it back out. Discuss with the class what has happened to the sponge (it soaked up lots of water).
3. Next, explain that when people say negative things about us that often we "soak up" the negative words, just as in the demonstration, without examining the content of the message to see if in fact it is true. For example, if someone says that you are ugly and stupid, you need to look at the evidence, asking yourself if that is really true. If not, you don't have to "soak it up." Instead, you need to think about wringing out the sponge, getting rid of the put-downs or criticisms that aren't true.
4. Invite students to write down three recent examples of times they were absorbed by criticism or put-downs. Have them identify things they could say to themselves to avoid "soaking up" the negatives that lead to self-downing.
5. Invite students to share examples.

Discussion:

Content Questions:

1. What does the concept of "soaking it up" mean?
2. What can you do to avoid "soaking it up?"

Personalization Questions:

1. Are you someone who "soaks up the negative" often? If so, how do you feel when you do that? If not, how do you avoid soaking it up?
2. Suppose that some of the things others say about you are true—does that make you a bad person?
3. What did you learn from this lesson that you can apply to your life?

To the Leader:

Emphasize the importance of examining criticism to avoid excessive self-downing. Also stress that if some of it is true, it does not make you a bad person.

REE Learning Centers

Oftentimes elementary and middle-school teachers establish learning centers, where students work independently on activities to reinforce concepts presented in class or to introduce new ideas. REE activities can easily be incorporated into this type of format through worksheets, writing, or games. For example, Waters (1979) *Color Us Rational* stories lend themselves to a learning center activity. A copy of several of the stories can placed at the center, along with paper and pencil. After reading one or more of the stories, students are instructed to write a rational story based on one of their own experiences. Other good center activities involve having students write rational limericks or make rational bumper stickers or posters for their rooms, making up silly songs to help them deal with sad feelings, putting on rational puppet plays, or playing a game of hop scotch, where children have to identify rational self-talk to help them deal with anger or anxiety before jumping to the next space.

The teacher is limited only by his or her creativity in designing center activities. They should be engaging and able to be completed independently.

Integration into the Curriculum

Yet another approach to REE emotional education is to integrate the concepts into an existing subject-matter curriculum. When teaching literature, teachers could select and discuss stories that present characters solving problems rationally or expressing feelings in a healthy manner. Topics for themes could be related to self-awareness such as making mistakes, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and the prices and payoffs for perfection. Vocabulary and spelling lessons could include feeling-word vocabularies and definitions.

Social studies lessons could focus on personal and societal values and on a rational understanding of the concept of fairness as it applies to societal groups or to law and order, for example. Students could examine the rational and irrational practices of politicians, the difference between facts and assumptions in political campaigns, or the concept of high-frustration tolerance as it applies to political leaders.

Integration into the curriculum is less direct than a structured lesson, but it is a viable way of reinforcing rational concepts and making them an integral part of the school structure. Although it may seem awkward and forced initially, once teachers become more familiar with the REE concepts, they will find that integration becomes more natural.

You Can Do It! Education (youcandoiteducation.com.au)

I (Michael Bernard) am the Founder of You Can Do It! Education, a school-home collaborative social and emotional learning program that has been employed in 1000s of early learning centres, primary and secondary schools in Australia, and

Fig. 20.1 You Can Do It! Education's Social–Emotional Learning Framework

in schools overseas. You Can Do It! Education has a central focus on developing the attitudes and social–emotional skills for young people of all ages. Published research indicates that when schools implement our programs, students become more resilient, confident, persistent, organized, and get along better—their engagement and achievement improves as does their relationship, behavior, and wellbeing (Fig. 20.1).

Today, over 1,000,000 students have participated in You Can Do It! Education programs introduced in over 4000 primary and secondary schools throughout Australia, New Zealand, England, the United States, and soon Europe.

You Can Do It! Education (YCDI!) (e.g., Bernard, 2013; Bernard, Vernon, Terjesen, & Kurasaki, 2013) derives largely from REBT/REE (e.g., Katsikis, Kostogiannis, Kassapis, Katsiki, & Bernard, 2018), intrinsic motivation theory, cognitive-behavior therapy, and positive psychology that identifies the psychological characteristics of young people that contribute to both negative and positive emotional, behavioral, relationship, and achievement outcomes. Research supporting YCDI's central propositions and effects are reported in the literature (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012; Bernard, 2006, 2008, 2017; Bernard & Walton, 2011; Markopolous & Bernard, 2015; Yamamoto, Matsumoto, & Bernard, 2017).

On the left in the dark orange side, we see (1) Negative Attitudes and (2) Underdeveloped Character (*values and strengths*) that create (3) Social–Emotional Blockers. All three elements contribute to negative student outcomes (poor relationships, under-achievement, and poor mental health). Additionally, the framework represents three positive elements of a young person's inner world, in lighter orange: (1) Positive Attitudes and (2) Character (*values, strengths*) and (3) Social-Emotional

Skills that all contribute to positive outcomes (positive relationships, success, well-being). There are four dimensions of psychological functioning, which contribute to positive/negative outcomes; namely, (1) Attitudes, (2) Character, (3) Social–Emotional Skills, and (4) Social–Emotional Blockers.

While YCDI! is most known as teaching five social–emotional skills (confidence, persistence, organization, getting along, resilience), "Attitudes" —many of which are Ellis' rational and irrational beliefs—nourish and supports the five SELs and are recognized as central and foundational to positive and negative outcomes in young people (Fig. 20.2).

This picture of an iceberg is a metaphor for central focus of You Can Do It! Education; attitudes. Students (and all humans) are like ice-bergs—the only part of the iceberg that we can see is the smallest part that sits above the water; the only part we can see in students are their behaviors (what they do and say). Below the waterline, where we cannot see (but can only guess at) lays the students' feelings and emotions—and it is how they feel that causes them to behave as they do (both positively & negative behaviors follow this model). Below their feelings, lays their thinking or self-talk—and it is what they say to themselves in their head (what they THINK) that causes their feelings, which causes their behavior. Lastly, at the very bottom of everyone's iceberg, lays the attitudes students hold about themselves and life around them. It is these, either positive or negative attitudes that cause students to think a certain way, which causes their feelings and finally their behavior (which of course, then results in outcomes, results, consequences.)

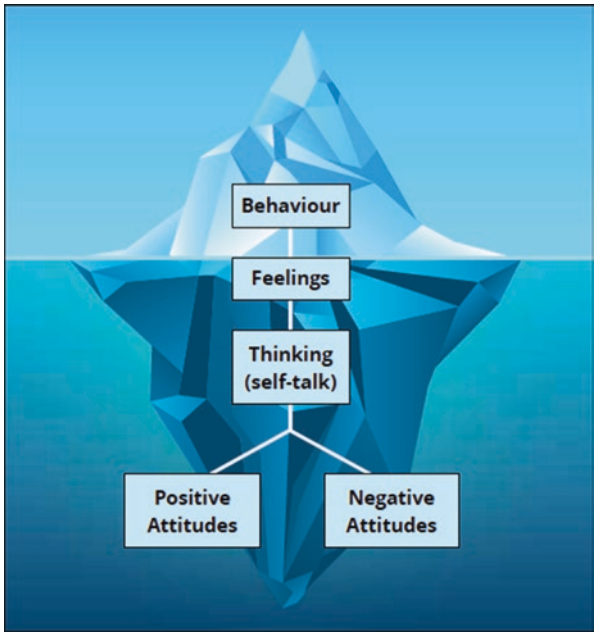


Fig. 20.2 Children are like icebergs

Teaching You Can Do It! Education

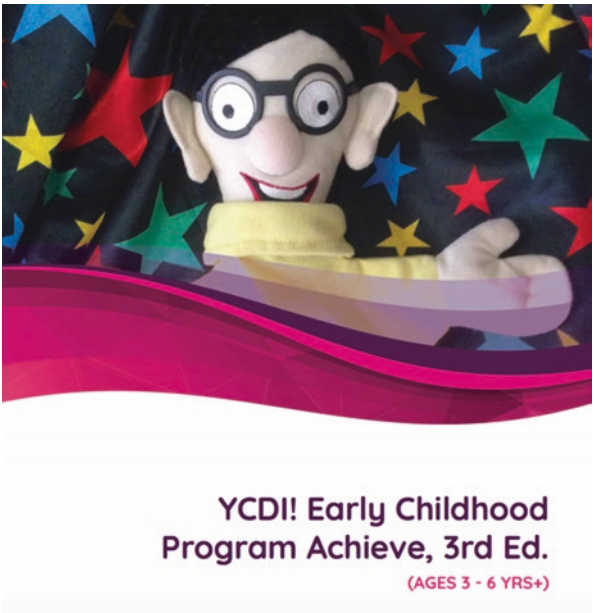
There are a number of school entry points for YCDI! These will be briefly reviewed including social–emotional learning curricula programs, integration in the classroom, school practices for building critical mass, helping children and adolescents overcome social–emotional difficulties and parent education).

Social–Emotional Learning Curricula

In 2018, four YCDI! curricula, new editions of existing programs, were released in an online, digital format. As a rule, these programs are taught by classroom teachers to intact classrooms. Lessons are timetabled to be taught once a week in 20–50 min sessions across each week of the school year. YCDI!'s SEL programs have been recognized as best-practice SEL program, by Beyond Blue/Be You, the Australian federal government's mental health initiative.

In all four programs, many lessons teach REE concepts and skills as described in the previous section of this chapter.

The YCDI! Education Early Childhood Program Achieve (Children 3–6 Years Old)



The new third edition of this extremely popular online digital program now includes specific suggestions for teaching young children 3–4 years of age. These suggestions appear within the 32 lesson plans. The program teaches the positive attitudes and social–emotional skills that develop young children's resilience, confidence, persistence, organization, and getting along. Two short animations introduce the young children to their new classmates: Ricky Resilience, Connie Confidence, Pete Persistence, Oscar Organisation, and Gabby Get Along who are also represented in five hand puppets, posters, and songs. The program includes a scope and sequence of 32 weekly lessons (8 lessons per school term) with each lesson consisting of learning intentions and success criteria. A parent education guide consisting of four parent education talks is also provided that demonstrates how parents can support SEL at home.

NEW *Program Achieve Primary (Grades 1–6)*

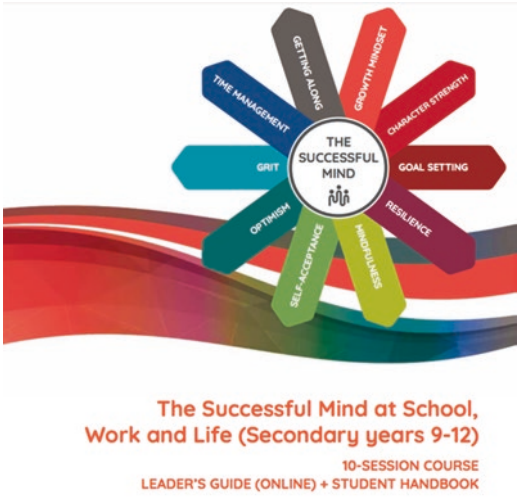
NEW Program Achieve
Primary (years 1-6)
A Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum

The NEW Program Achieve curricula (Primary) contain lessons that teach attitudes, values/character strengths and social–emotional skills for success, relationships, and well-being as well as for overcoming social–emotional blockers. A scope and sequence have been developed based on this framework covering eight lessons for each of four terms across years 1–6 (192 lessons). The 32 lessons at each year level are organized to be delivered across four terms and cover the following topics: (1). Achievement: Work Confidence (growth mindset), Persistence, Organisation, and Teamwork (2). Relationships: Values, Character Strengths, and Getting Along Skills (3). Well-being, Resilience, and Happiness (awareness, self-management, ABCs of emotions, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness) and (4). Social–Emotional Blockers: awareness and management of anger, not paying attention, procrastination, worry, feeling down. Each lesson begins with a statement of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria followed by a lesson plan that includes the following elements: (1) Engage students (2) Share learning intentions and success criteria (3) Explicit teaching (4) Student activities (5) Students demonstrate success criteria and reflect (6) Weekly goal setting challenge (7) Coaching points 4 week.

NEW *Program Achieve Primary (Grades 7–10)*

The NEW Program Achieve-Secondary is now available online providing teachers access to digital activity plans and downloadable Teacher Guides and Student Worksheets. This curriculum is designed to contain short, targeted activities delivered in 15–20 min periods during the busy timetabled secondary school day. The NEW Program Achieve-Secondary includes 32 activities to be taught to students in grades 7 and 8 and an additional 32 activities to be taught to students in years 9 and 10. The activities are organized to be delivered across four terms and cover the following topics (1) Achievement: Work Confidence (growth mindset), Persistence, Organization, and Teamwork (2) Relationships: Values, Character Strengths, and Getting Along Skills, (3) Wellbeing: Resilience and Happiness (self-awareness, self-management, ABCs, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness) (4) Social–Emotional Blockers: Anger, Not Paying Attention, Procrastination, Worry and Feeling Down (awareness and self-management) Activities take between 15 and 20 min of class time to present to students and can be offered flexibly throughout the school week in either Home Groups, personal and social development classes, or health and physical education.

The Successful Mind at School, Work, and Life (Grades 9–12)



This 10-session course is designed for upper secondary students to prepare them for their final years in school, pre-employment and part-time work experiences, and for life beyond school. A distinctive feature of this course is its suitability to be delivered in career education classes with content linked to the CORE Skills for Work framework. The online Leader's Guide contains background information and a session plan needed to conduct each of the 10 sessions: (1) Growth Mindset (2) Character Strength (3) Goal Setting (4) Resilience (5) Mindfulness (6) Self-acceptance (7) Optimism (8) GRIT (9) Time Management (10) Getting Along The Student Handbook contains a variety of content, activity worksheets students complete during each session, a variety of tips and individual action plans completed after a session.

The You Can Do It! Classroom: Integration of Social and Emotional Learning

One of the biggest lessons learned from many years of experience is that for SEL curricula to have a maximum impact on young people's achievement and emotional well-being, the DSELs and positive attitudes (rational beliefs) need to be taught and reinforced in the classroom (and school) throughout the school year.

Just as teachers introduce their students to "classroom rules" and the academic standards that constitute the objectives of the curriculum early on in the school year, it is recommend that the 5 SELs and 12 Attitudes become part of the overall purpose of the class. It is recommended that teachers integrate the 5 SELs into the classroom ethos so that their students know that it is important for them to learn

and apply them in their doing schoolwork, in their interpersonal relationships, and in managing their own emotions. One of the best practices for doing this is to display on the walls on a permanent basis examples of positive Habits of the Mind and negative Habits of the Mind and how they impact their emotions and behaviors in the classroom and refer to them on a regular basis.

The following steps can be taken by teachers to incorporate You Can Do It! Education into the ethos and practices of their classroom.

Step 1. Teach Students the Meaning of "Success" and "Well-Being"

Explain to students that "success" means doing the best you can in schoolwork and other areas of your life (art, sport, art, music, doing a job) and not feeling that you have to be the best to be a success. Explain to students that "Well-Being" means feeling happy and safe; having one or more friends; being engaged in schoolwork; and participating in school, home, and community activities. It also means that you do not feel very worried, down, or angry for long periods of time and that you do not make poor behavioral choices such as bullying or being late or absent from school or engaging in unhealthy behavior like drinking or smoking.

Step 2. Establish Students' Understanding of the Goals of You Can Do It! Education

Discuss with students how student success and well-being is *not* due to great parents, teachers, or super-intelligence although those things matter. What matters more and what has been discovered from scientific research are the different ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that people of all ages need to be successful and happy. Explain that you will not only be teaching students the academic curriculum but also a curriculum focused on teaching students the social–emotional skills they need to be all they can be and to flourish.

Step 3. Discuss the Definition of the Social–Emotional Skill Being Taught

(Example): Explain to students the following: "One of the characteristics of a successful person is Confidence. I'd like you to think about how you would define Confidence in relation to your classroom learning. Take a minute to bring to mind students you know who exhibit confidence when learning." In pairs or groups, ask students to prepare a "Y Chart" about Confidence. What does it look like (makes eye contact, puts hand up), sound like (I've been successful before, I've done hard things before, I'll have a go), feel like (motivated, enthusiastic, empowered)?

Have pairs or groups develop a definition of confidence, and then have students generate and display a class definition. Make sure that the definition includes important elements of Confidence as reflected in the definitions provided in YCDI reference material.

Step 4. Identify Examples of Behaviors to be Practiced that Reflect Use of SEL Skill Being Taught

(Example): Explain to students that one way they can increase their Confidence in classroom learning is to practice being Confident. The more they practice Confident behavior, the more Confident they will become. In pairs or small groups, have students discuss and identify examples of confident behavior in relation to their classroom and learning.

Have students generate a composite list of examples and display them in classroom. Make sure that the list includes examples of Confidence as found in YCDI reference material.

Step 5. Teach the Attitudes/Self-Talk that Support the 5 Social and Emotional Skills

(Example): Explain to students that a powerful influence over their Confidence in all situations is their thinking. You will explain that it is your "Thinking" about what "Happens" to you that determines your "Feelings" and "Behaving" including how confidently you feel and behave.

You can show students an illustration/image that shows how different ways of thinking (positive and negative) lead to differences in how Confident one feels and behaves when having a difficult assignment to do. Describe to students the positive Attitudes (ways of thinking/self-talk) that underpin the foundation of Confidence using a variety of images and definitions that can be found in YDCI resource materials. These are: Accepting Myself, Taking Risks, Being Independent, and I Can Do It. You can also contrast these with negative Habits of the Mind (ways of thinking) that hurt one's Confidence and lead to feeling anxious and down: Self Downing, Needing to Be Perfect, Needing Approval, and I Can't Do It.

Step 6. Use Behavior-specific Feedback to Acknowledge Students

When you catch a student practicing a behavior that reflects the SEL you are teaching, acknowledge the student verbally, non-verbally, or in a written comment (e.g., "You were confident." "You tried hard and did not give up. That's persistence." "Doesn't it feel good to be organized?" "You are getting along very well when working together." "You stayed calm in a difficult situation. That's resilience.").

School-Wide Practices for Building Critical Mass

In order for all students to strengthen their SELs—and this point is crucial—schools need to not only teach curricula like Program Achieve, they also need to provide students with opportunities to apply and practice what they are learning, receive

recognition for applying what they have learned, and to hear from different people in different settings (e.g., assemblies, excursions) how SELs can help them to be successful and happy.

As an example, I (Bernard) remember visiting a secondary school that was teaching YCDI! to students in four different sessions at the beginning of the day. The students were learning the language but too many—especially the challenging students—were not putting what they were learning about into action. One afternoon, I sat in on a physical education class, the PE teacher was telling students about a forthcoming state-wide football competition they were to enter, and he handed out new uniforms. However, to my surprise and disappointment, he failed to mention how the team's performance would be enhanced by team members using their keys of confidence, persistence, organization, getting along, and resilience. So, I clearly saw the need for schools to build a critical mass of SEL practices in order to reach the minds and hearts of all students.

These practices serve to establish a culture within a school, so that SEL and YCDI! becomes just "the way we do things around here" and that even if some teachers and the school principal leaves, the culture is still embedded and long-lasting in the school ground, classrooms, and staff.

Here are examples of school-wide practices.

Visual Displays and Posters YCDI! Education is very visual. Schools acquire different YCDI! posters for display, and students (as well as parents) design visual reminders.

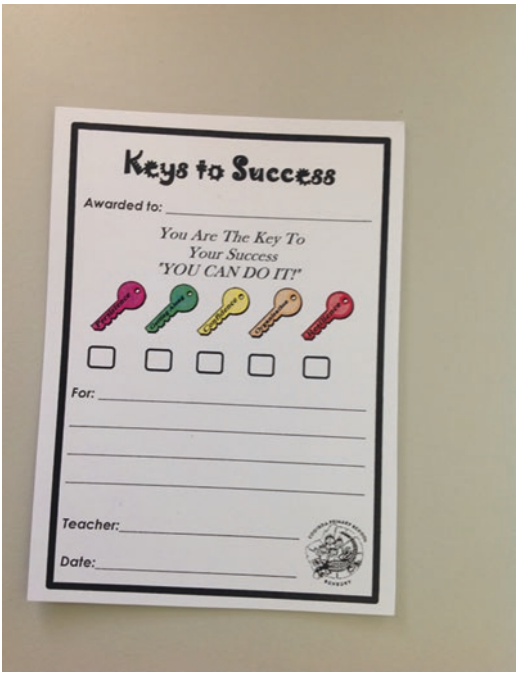

SELF DOWNING
When I do badly in my schoolwork or someone is mean to me, I think I'm hopeless.
You Can Do It!


ACCEPTING MYSELF
I accept myself no matter what. I am proud of who I am.
You Can Do It!

Excursions There is no better place to help students see the relevance and usefulness of employing different attitudes and social–emotional skills is before, during and after excursions. Excursion leaders should prime students with those SELs that will help make the excursion fun and a great success.

School Assemblies School assemblies are excellent forums for principals/head teachers and others to address the school community on one or more of the Foundations and Positive Habits of the Mind that are being stressed in your school. Guest speakers' plays and other discussion groups can address the meaning and importance of the 5 Foundations and positive Habits of the Mind to student well-being, success and relationships.

Student Recognition Awards



An excellent vehicle for bringing all students in a class/grade/year level of school "on board" is to award students recognition certificates for employing one or more of the 5 Foundations on a regular basis. Many schools present awards for achievement, citizenship, or "Student of the Month." It is recommended that awards for demonstrating characteristics consistent with the goals of YCDI be employed.

Helping Children and Adolescents Overcome Social-Emotional Difficulties

In YCDI! Education and in the Program Achieve curricula, social-emotional difficulties are referred to as 'blockers'. Social-emotional blockers can be conceived as blockers sitting in the road students take toward success and happiness. The goals of YCDI! Education in this area are three-fold: (1) helping students become aware of the existence of different blockers that everyone experiences to greater and lesser extents, (2) helping "normalize" for students the existence of blockers; meaning helping students accept their existence without thinking there is anything wrong or abnormal about them, (3) helping students develop a mindset that there are different things they can do to reduce the size of blockers – and to help themselves take the blocker off their road to success and happiness. The five blockers addressed in YCDI! include:


I am a total loser when someone doesn't like me or when I have not achieved a good result.
I am not proud of who I am.
There is little point in really trying to do better by working harder.
I am not very smart and never will be.
FEELING DOWN
You Can Do It! Education
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I have to be successful in everything important I do and that it's horrible when I'm not.
I need people to approve of what I say and do and it's awful when someone does not.
FEELING WORRIED
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When I have a problem with someone, I act without thinking first.
I should be able to do what I want. I can't stand having to follow rules.
People should always treat me fairly and in the way I treat them. When they do not, I think they are total losers.
FEELING ANGRY - MISBEHAVING
You Can Do It! Education
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It's time to have a bit of fun and bother other people.
I don't have what I need for my work and I haven't planned enough time to finish it.
I haven't set a goal for this work. I don't really care about going my personal best.
No point in trying hard. I wasn't born smart enough to do this.
I don't understand this. I must be totally stupid.
NOT PAYING ATTENTION
You Can Do It! Education
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Here are some ways YCDI! helps students overcome blockers.

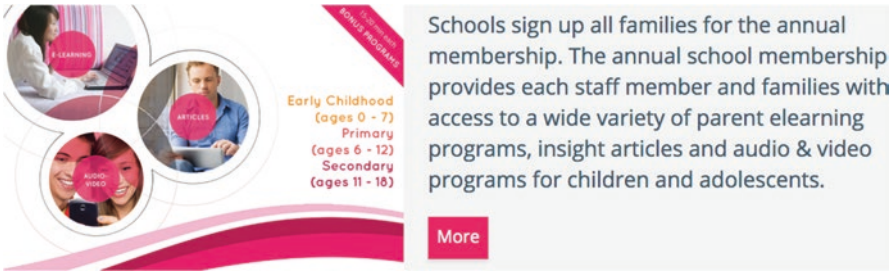
1. Normalize blockers. Indicate that everyone has one or more blockers from time to time. Having a blocker does not mean there is anything wrong with you.
2. Empower students to overcome blockers. Explain to students that throughout life (and in school), they will learn some things that can help them reduce blockers in size.
3. Employ lessons from *Program Achieve*. Lessons and activities exist at Years Levels 1–10 that explicitly teach students about the five social-emotional blockers and how they can be overcome.
4. Lessons and activities exist that explicitly teach students about Resilience and how to self-manage and stay calm when faced with difficulties and challenges using the ABCs of REBT and cognitive-restructuring negative to positive attitudes and self-talk.

In five of the lessons in Program Achieve (grades 1–6), students receive as handouts, five social-emotional lifesavers (see Worry Lifesaver below):

Parent Education

YCDI! Education has from its' inception been a school-home collaborative program recognizing the positive impacts parents can have on their children's school achievement and wellbeing. Our parent education programs have a focus on several topics related to effective parenting: (1) Stress management, (2) Parent effectiveness skills including relationship building, motivation and discipline and (3) Parents supporting their children's social–emotional skill development. This module introduces two YCDI! Education parent education programs, both based on the latest research on parent effectiveness.

One program, *Investing in Parents*, is a set of 17 parent education classes (1–1.5 h) that can be offered at your school by a school leader, counselor, teacher or parent educator during or after school on a variety of parenting topics (e.g., authoritative parenting style, parent stress management and resilience, children's social-emotional learning at home).



The other program is an on-line, digital program consisting of a variety of eLearning video-animated programs for parents, on-line articles on parenting and for older children and adolescents, inspirational and informative audio and video programs.

Conclusions

In the ideal world, approaches such as rational-emotive education and its' derivatives such as You Can Do It! Education would be routinely implemented in schools throughout the world in a systematic effort to enhance the emotional health of children. The major assumption of emotional education programs is that prevention is more effective than remediation, and that if we can teach children how to think rationally, they will approach both developmental and situational challenges in a healthier manner, which in turn will decrease the proliferation of self-defeating behaviors that far too many young people succumb to.

In order to effectively implement REE and YCDI, teachers and other school personnel must learn the theory and model it. Professionals need to continually challenge their own irrational thinking, getting rid of their demands that their job should always be easy, that their students should always behave perfectly, or that they will always be treated fairly. They must stop making overgeneralizations about student behavior or performance, avoid awfulizing about their work conditions, refrain from equating their own self-worth with their performance as a teacher; and force themselves to give up their demandingness that everything should come easily to their students. Until teachers themselves "walk the walk" and believe in the REBT principles, implementing REE and YCDI will not be as effective.

Although REE lessons appear to be an effective way to help children and adolescents approach life more successfully, rational thinking principles need to be an inherent part of every young person's experience. Adults are important models, and although it is difficult to develop a rational stance toward life when surrounded by irrationality in the world, every effort to teach rational principles, directly or indirectly, will help facilitate healthy emotional development.

Test Yourself

1. What are the common characteristics of a successful school-based social and emotional learning program?
2. In considering a student that you have worked with who has had some social-emotional difficulties, identify and consider the role of negative attitudes and under-developed character that create social-emotional blockers.
3. Positive or healthy habits of the mind are key to effective social–emotional development. In reflection of the classroom or schools where you may work with students, what creative strategies might you want to use to promote these positive habits?

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