

Albert Ellis Transcript

Therapist: OK — what problem do you want to start with?

Client: I'm a very anxious person — I have difficulty getting on subways, because I'm afraid of them, I can't sleep at night because of panic attacks, I have a lot of anxiety about being alone in a small room.

T: What are you telling yourself to make yourself panicked?

C: I feel as if I'm telling myself I am in some sort of danger.

T: What's the danger? I used to travel all the time on the subway and never got hurt once.

C: I think the danger is very much in my head. When I get on the subway, if someone looks at me funny, I feel they are out to get me.

T: You're inventing danger. Now, what is the real danger of being in the subway? Which millions of people do every day.

C: I can't get out — if something does happen, I can't get out of that subway.

T: If something happens, what will then happen? Suppose something happens — will you die? What will happen?

C: I'm more afraid that someone's going to start shooting up the place, and I'm gonna be dead. These thoughts go through my head a lot.

T: So you'll be dead! Then you'll have nothing to worry about! What can you tell yourself not to be afraid of the subway, or anything that's closed like that?

C: I think I can tell myself that my fear is irrational, because there is evidence that NY City has one of the safest subway systems in the country, and if something were to happen, the likelihood of me getting hurt is not very high.

T: It's very, very low. How do the rest of us survive? You have to prove to yourself over and over that nothing terrible happens. Nothing. And it's very, very unlikely that something will happen, statistically. Right.

C: What about when I'm in my bed at night, sleeping alone? It's a really small room, when I lie there alone at night, I have racing thoughts, and before I know it, I'm in the middle of a panic attack, and am unable to bring myself out of it.

T: Because you are telling yourself what?

C: Sometimes I feel like I'm going to die in there, and no one will find out about it.

T: How come you haven't died yet?

C: Because I'm healthy.

T: Yeah — but if you say, "I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die! How terrible!", then you'll bring on panic. And then you'll get panicked about your panic. And then you're gone. So, tell yourself, "If I die, I'll die! Screw it! I'll rest in peace!" Then you won't worry about anything. Let's give you Rational Emotive Imagery. Close your eyes and imagine the worst. You panic in the subway — you panic, panic, panic, and everybody sees that you panic and they think you're no good. So, can you imagine that?

C: Yes.

T: And how do you feel?

C: I feel as if they can see my weakness. They can see that I'm afraid.

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- T:** So, let's suppose they all see you trembling; they all see you're very afraid. Then what?
- C:** Then, they can figure out that I'm vulnerable and easy to hurt.
- T:** Suppose they figure out that you're vulnerable. Then, what are they gonna do?
- C:** I have a bizarre fear of being mugged, as well.
- T:** How many people get mugged in a crowded subway?
- C:** You have a very good way to dispute my beliefs. That is true. Not many.
- T:** What can you tell yourself to be displeased and sorry if anything happens, but not panicked? What can you tell you?
- C:** That I am over-reacting.
- T:** Right.
- C:** That I am being irrational.
- T:** Right.
- C:** That I need to realize that there is evidence against my thoughts.
- T:** Right.
- C:** My thoughts are actually wrong.
- T:** "And no matter how much I panic, people will just look down on me, but they won't do anything about my panic. Only I can control my panic and change it. They can't".
- C:** They have no control over it.
- T:** "They have no control over me and my panic. None."
- C:** Which is true.
- T:** Right. Now say that: "They have no control over me and my panic. No control".
- C:** They have no control over me and my panic and my body and myself.
- T:** And how do you feel when you say that?
- C:** Somewhat more confident.
- T:** Fine. Now keep that up. Do that every day for at least thirty days. What do you like to do that you enjoy doing for pleasure?
- C:** I like to sing.
- T:** So, only sing after you've done the Rational Emotive Imagery and changed your feelings. What do you hate to do, that you don't do because you hate it?
- C:** Making my bed.
- T:** If bedtime arrives, and you haven't done the Rational Emotive Imagery, you stay up for two hours making and unmaking the bed. What haven't we covered about this?
- C:** I do believe that if I keep altering my beliefs, the consequences will be different.
- T:** Right. It's your belief. Therefore, you can always change it. You can't change my belief or anyone else's belief, but you can always change your beliefs. Right.