



# FACULTY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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## *Self-Care: Putting Yourself Back in Charge*

Here it comes again. It's getting close to the end of the year, when many of us remember those important work-life balance resolutions we made for 2011. As the year began, we were determined to take better care of ourselves physically, because we know it also makes us mentally healthier, and helps us in our everyday stressful lives. It's likely, though, that many of those important self-care resolutions somehow got lost back in March.

There are always a host of reasons we don't follow through with what we know is best for us, our families, friends and colleagues. We can get upset with ourselves for failing. It's frustrating enough not to complete our goals. But we cause ourselves extra misery if we don't respond to that failure in a healthy way. If we let our negative messages to ourselves prevail, they can lead to anxiety or depression or bubble up into anger or hostility.

### **Intent vs. Action**

"We all have a list in our heads of the things we should do to take care of ourselves—rest, exercise, eat healthy foods, reduce stress,



### **Changing Perceptions**

Our success or failure at self-care affects others, too. In order to effectively relate to and serve colleagues, pa-

tients, students and our families, we must find ways to take care of ourselves. The expression "You can't give what you don't have" can apply to our physical and mental stamina. Yet getting beyond the barriers so we do have something to give can be a real challenge for even the smartest, most accomplished professional.

go on vacation," says one busy and successful health-care professional. "But we often fail to act on what we know we should do for ourselves." She was reminded of this at her annual check-up visit to her doctor.

"My doctor was very upset with me," she recalls. "You know what you should be doing," she told me. And I do know. I shouldn't be skipping breakfast or lunch, or eating dinner at 8 o'clock at night, working such long hours on too little sleep, and going without exercise."

The hurdle is that we have to deliberately choose to take that step. We have to tell ourselves, "I matter, and I am important enough to make myself a priority. I am going to be charge of my health and wellbeing." Self care is about making that leap from awareness to action. It's a choice in our minds.

It's not just today's stressful environment that stands in the way. The first-century philosopher Epicurus identified the problem when he observed that "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them."

**What Blocks Our Path**

One framework for understanding how our thoughts influence our behavior is Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT),

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## *The Rational Approach to Self-Acceptance and Self-Care*

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a form of psychotherapy and a philosophy created in the 1950s by Albert Ellis, Ph.D. We want to be happy, REBT recognizes. But when our goals are blocked, we can respond in ways that are unhealthy and unhelpful. According to the REBT Network, the goal of REBT is to help people change their irrational beliefs to rational beliefs. Ellis believed the principles of REBT can be self-therapeutic.

The REBT framework assumes that humans have both innate rational (self- and social-helping and constructive) and irrational (self- and social-defeating and unhelpful) tendencies. It claims that people, to a large degree, consciously and unconsciously construct emotional difficulties, such

as self-blame, self-pity, anger, depression and anxiety.

### **Learning Acceptance**

REBT holds that mental wellness and mental health, to a large degree, result from an adequate amount of self-helping and flexible ways of thinking, emoting and behaving. REBT teaches that unconditional self-acceptance, other-acceptance and life-acceptance are effective philosophies of life for achieving mental wellness and mental health.

REBT helps people see the ways they often needlessly upset themselves, teaches them how to change this mode of thinking, and then how to empower themselves to lead happier and more fulfilling lives. Its goal is to help people suffer

less and enjoy life more—and it begins within our own brains.

### **It Takes Practice**

Turning thoughts of acceptance into actions takes continual work and practice. Using REBT and other cognitive behavior therapies helps us understand how we should respond to life events with less demanding, more flexible beliefs.

Those who take action when they recognize they are behaving, thinking and feeling in self-defeating ways can see the benefits of REBT. It empowers its users, reminds them that they are in control, reminds them that they are responsible for their actions, thoughts and feelings—and that they control their emotional destinies.

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Learning and practicing the principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy may be useful to help us get past self-defeating thoughts and empower us to enjoy life more.

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### **Your Faculty Assistance Program: A Caring, Confidential Resource**

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### **Resources:**

- *The Feeling Good Handbook* by David D. Burns, Plume (Penguin Putnam Inc.), Revised edition, 1999.
- *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy*, by Albert Ellis and Debbie Joffe Ellis, American Psychological Association, 3rd edition, 2011.
- *How to Make Yourself Happy and Remarkably Less Disturbable*, by Albert Ellis, Impact Publishers, 1999.
- [www.REBTNetwork.org](http://www.REBTNetwork.org)
- [www.fammed.wisc.edu/aware-medicine/self](http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/aware-medicine/self)

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## **Leaving a Legacy: Practical Steps to Take Now**

“People from all walks of life can make a difference in the lives that follow,” notes the Leave A Legacy® public awareness campaign. Its goal: to inspire people to make a charitable bequest, regardless of the size of the gift. Leave A Legacy does not solicit gifts for any particular organization, rather, it offers general information about making charita-

ble gifts through a will or estate plan.

Leave a Legacy offers these tips that can get you started on leaving the legacy you intend:

- Make sure you have an up-to-date will or living trust that reflects your charitable objectives.
- Contact a financial advisor (financial planner, lawyer or

accountant) for help in establishing a charitable gift.

- Think beyond cash—you can leave stocks, real estate, insurance policies and personal property to charitable organizations.
- Designate a charity as beneficiary of your life insurance, pension plan or IRA.

*Source: [www.leavealegacy.org](http://www.leavealegacy.org)*