

SELF-TALK

How to switch from negative to positive self-talk? First tune into your negative self-talk. Most of us experience negative self-talk at some point in our lives. Some estimates even indicate that 70-80% of our daily thoughts are negative. Unfortunately these negative thoughts have a large impact on our health, happiness and success.

Negative self-talk can:

- Make us less healthy. We may get sick more often and take longer to recover.
- Make it more difficult to succeed at a job, school, sports, etc.
- Lower our quality of life and relationships.
- Make it harder to start new relationships and maintain old ones.

So where do these thoughts come from?

Negative thoughts can come from a combination of experiences such as criticism from others, mental and emotional abuse, past failures and disappointments, betrayals, trauma, physical and sexual abuse, or comparing ourselves to others (E.g. co-workers, parents, peers, celebrities, models,

or saints). This can make us feel like we don't measure up or aren't enough.

The good news is that as soon as we are aware of our negative self-talk and have the intention to change it, a lot of the work is already done.

Tune into your own “frequency” of negative self-talk:

- Do you call yourself names? (E.g. Stupid, geek, loser)
- Do you put yourself down? (E.g. I'll never get it; I'm always going to mess up.)
- Do you second-guess others' feelings towards you? (E.g. People just pretend to like me.)
- Do you predict negative outcomes? (E.g. I'm going to fail my test and mess up my future.)
- Do you awfulize? (E.g. I spilled my coffee, my life sucks.)
- Do you catastrophize? (E.g. I lost my phone; I won't be able to call anyone ever again. This is the worst day ever.)
- Do you generalize that if one experience

was bad than all experiences must be bad? (E.g. My first girlfriend cheated on me; all girls are the same.)

- Do you think in extremes/All-or-Nothing? (E.g. If this paper isn't perfect then it's a complete failure.)
- Do you automatically assume that others think negatively about you? (E.g. He thinks I'm stupid; he must hate me.)

Thought stopping. Imagine that thoughts are connected to you by cords and when you think of a particular thought the cord gets stronger and the thought gets bigger.

In order to stop a particular thought you must stop “feeding” it and cut it off. We can do this by thought stopping. Next time you have an unwanted thought, picture yourself cutting the cord to the thought. You can also visualize a stop sign or internally say STOP.

“Like food is to the body, self-talk is to the mind. Don't let any junk thoughts repeat in your head.” ~ Maddy Malhotra

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Thought swapping. Once you have noticed and stopped a thought, there are several things you can do. Use whichever combination of techniques works best for you.

Substitute the negative thought for the opposite positive thought (E.g. “I can’t do this.” becomes “I can do this!”)

If you are thinking you will never succeed at something, think about a time when you did succeed at something in the past. Then tell yourself: “I succeeded at (past success) so I can certainly succeed at this now”.

Substitute negative thoughts with positive affirmations and quotes (E.g. “I believe in my ability to think positively and be happy.”; “I have the power to change myself.”)

“Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you’ll start having positive results.” ~ Willie Nelson

Validity testing. Question and challenge the validity of your negative thoughts. You can do this in your head or you can write it out in a thought record.

1. investigate the circumstances around the thought. Check if you are hungry or tired. Remember you are not alone and try to relate your thought to one of the common “cognitive distortions”.
2. List the evidence for and against the negative thought, then try to create a more balanced thought and perspective.

Goal-directed thinking.

Ask yourself:

- Will this way of thinking help me to reach my goals?
- What can I do to help solve this challenge?
- Is there something I can learn from this situation that will help me in the future?

Engage yourself.

Do a mindful moment meditation. Drop into your body, focus on your breath. Become mindful in your current activity or start a new

one (E.g. Listen to music, paint, do a sensory walk, play a game or sport, or write a gratitude list). Hang out with people who think positively and try to stay away from negative environments.

Negative self-talk may seem like it becomes more intense when we first start noticing it. This is very common. Notice what arises and keep going.

At first, you might only remember to pay attention and use the thought changing techniques once in a while. Don’t fret, it gets easier. Hang in there and you will start to see your world change!

“You’re off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting, So... get on your way!” ~ Dr. Seuss

Adapted from “Pathways to Recovery: A Strengths Recovery Workbook” (2002) by Ridgway, McDiarmid, Davidson, Bayes et al.