

SELF-TALK: A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

Self-talk refers to the way you talk to yourself inside your mind. And though your mind is a part of you, you are not your mind. While your mind is a wonderful tool it is not to be in charge. You are. The mind left to its own preferences will often go back to painful memories and a habit of being overly critical of yourself and others. This can create painful feelings, deepen depression and anxiety, contribute to low self-esteem, and stimulate stress and burnout.

Fortunately, the mind can also be a powerful ally. Simply, the mind should not be allowed to run wild. It is a tool you need to learn to use and to control. Take charge of your mind and focus on the present, or on positive possibilities for the future, or on pleasant memories from the past. Think thoughts that lift you. Every day you can choose to focus on the people and the situations in your life that make you grateful.

Pay attention to what you might be telling yourself. The following are common patterns of negative self-talk, their impact on you, and followed by positive thoughts that you can use to counter these patterns.

Worrier deepens anxiety by scaring us or fretting about “What if. . .” and expecting bad things to happen. **Try saying to the worrier in you:** “I can do this. I made it through before;” or “Whatever happens, I’ll face it and work it out.”

Critic lowers your self-esteem with phrases such as, “That was stupid,” or “You’re such a disappointment.” **Try saying to your critic:** “I am learning and can overcome my issues;” or “I need encouragement, not put-downs; I can change.”

Victim deepens depression with phrases such as, “There is something defective about me,” or “I’ll never recover or get better.” **Try saying:** “I may have challenges but I can recover; I can heal;” or “Everyone can heal if they really want to, including me.”

Perfectionist stimulates stress and burnout with phrases such as, “I should. . .,” or “I have to. . .,” or “I must. . .” **Try saying to your perfectionist:** “I am willing to go forward with my life and better myself no matter what my parents think;” or “I am learning to value myself and I am letting go of the need to constantly prove my worth. There are others who accept me and support me.”

These negative types are from *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne, Ph.D.

You can also set positive intentions, distract your mind with positive music, engage in positive conversation, read a good book, or practice gratitude.

If you change your thoughts, you will change your feelings. Positive thoughts can soothe, encourage, and inspire.

Positive Self-Talk Statements

Listen to your self-talk. Replace any negative thoughts by writing down positive ways you can talk to yourself. When writing your own positive self-talk, use positive words and avoid negative ones. Use present-tense statements. Use the “I” to start the statement. Have some belief in your statement; if it is too far away for you to believe—even a little—you won’t use it. Then, practice, practice, practice. The following are positive statements you can use to help design your own positive self-talk.

I am a survivor on a healing journey.

I declare my intention to heal myself in body, mind, and spirit.

When I feel overwhelmed, I can BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT, and calm myself.

I know that my feelings make sense. If I feel upset, it could mean I feel hurt or scared.

I am learning what soothes me and can reach for those things when I am upset.

More and more I can accept my feelings, soften around them, and breathe.

If my mind is running old painful tapes, I can focus my mind on more positive memories or interesting possibilities for the future.

I am learning to listen to my body and sense what it needs.

It is impossible to control other people and situations. I CAN control myself and how I express my feelings.

It is OK to be uncertain or insecure at times. I can let go of trying to control everything or everybody.

It’s nice to have other people’s approval, but even without it, I can still love and accept myself.

People put erasers on pencils for a reason. It is OK to make mistakes. I learn and grow from mistakes.

When I am angry, I may need to cry. Tears are healthier and work better than anger.

I am responsible for my feelings and I am learning to express them in healthy ways.

I look forward to the time when I will accept my strength.

I celebrate my ability to survive and my courage to heal in spite of my experiences.

I know that when I appreciate my body, respect it, and take care of it, I will heal.

I know that there is a part of me deep inside that can never be diminished or destroyed.

I know that developing new habits takes practice and I support myself every time I succeed.

I know that there is a time when I will accept my sorrow, release my anger, and forgive myself.

I know that I can find comfort in Nature, especially by the water.

I can invite loved ones—past, present, and future—to lend me their support and acceptance.