

REDUCING YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Negative emotions you experience after a situation feel automatic, but in reality they are a response to negative self-talk, which you have control over. Learn how to reduce your negative self-talk.



Self-talk is what our thoughts tell us about ourselves and the situations we are in. In some cases this can be negative. For example, people with anxiety tend to practice **negative self-talk**. So how can we take negative self-talk and turn it into **positive or neutral** self-talk? In order to help reduce it, you need to **recognize, question, and replace** negative self-talk. Identifying the type of negative self-talk you are engaging in can help you to consider your thoughts more clearly.

RECOGNIZING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Identifying the Types

There are different types of negative self-talk and thinking that can perpetuate anxiety, low self-esteem, and other mental health challenges that people face each day.

Overgeneralizing

Thoughts which focus on one bad experience and assume it means only bad things will happen.

Mindreading

Thoughts where you assume you know what others are thinking without reasonable supporting evidence.

Filtering

Thoughts that exaggerate the negative parts of you or your day without acknowledging the positives.

Polarizing

Thinking which only sees things as good or bad and does not recognize the middle ground.

Emotional Reasoning

Thoughts which use emotions to drive decision-making rather than logic.

"Shoulds"

Thoughts that include what you feel you "should" do. They can become negative when used unreasonably.

QUESTIONING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Now that you have learned to identify various types of negative self-talk, let's start to question these beliefs. Begin by asking yourself where they come from and if they make objective sense. Remember, in-the-moment it can be hard to see the errors in your thinking because you are responding so quickly to your current situation. **When you write down your thoughts and analyze them later, it can be easier to understand how some thoughts can be incorrect.** It can be difficult to disagree with ourselves. Most of us have years of experience using negative self-talk, so it may take more work to notice how our negative thinking is not logical. When you consider your thoughts, see if any of them follow the thinking patterns of negative self-talk we discussed above. Recognizing this may help you see flaws in your thinking. For example, you could notice you are having mindreading thoughts and remind yourself you do not always know what others are thinking.



Other Questions to Ask Yourself:

- What is this thought based on?
- Is there evidence to support this?
- Would I conclude this about a friend?
- Will this matter in one year?

REPLACING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK



The goal is to replace negative self-talk so that when you encounter a difficult situation, you respond in a calm and collected way instead of getting upset. For example, let's say you failed a midterm exam. Your initial thought may be, "I will never pass this exam! I am a failure!" However, after going through the process of recognizing, questioning, and replacing, you may have a counterstatement that looks something like, "I am doing well in my other classes. I also still have time to raise my grade in this class. This was a learning opportunity, and I know I need to study harder." In the attached worksheet, you will begin by writing down your negative self-talk. You will identify the type and begin questioning where these ideas came from. As you ask yourself various

questions about these beliefs, you can use your answers to form counterstatements. **These statements can recognize a worry, while also reassuring yourself that you can handle the situation.** Some suggest thinking about what you would say to a friend that is coming to you with the same worry. Write a first-person statement in the present-tense to counter the thought. It is important that you write a statement that you believe. You may be tempted to write something overly positive, but if you don't believe what you are saying, it's unlikely you will be able use it to replace your more negative self-talk.

WORKSHEET: REDUCING YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

In this worksheet you will recognize, identify, question, and replace the ways in which you negatively self-talk.

EXAMPLES

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK	TYPE(S)	QUESTIONS	COUNTERSTATEMENT
<i>I have to give a speech and I always mess up. I am bad at public speaking!</i>	<i>Overgeneralizing, Polarizing</i>	<i>What is this thought based on? Would I conclude this about a friend?</i>	<i>I am more prepared for this presentation than I have been in the past. I will continue to improve. I am ready for this.</i>
<i>My friend hasn't texted me back. What if she is mad?</i>	<i>Mindreading, Polarizing</i>	<i>Is being mad the only reason a person may not respond?</i>	<i>I'm anxious for my friend to respond, but she might be busy. I will move onto my next task and check back.</i>

