



Positive Self-Talk: A Tool for Stress Management

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Shh..... Do you hear that? Listen closely. It's the sound of your own voice inside your head. If you ever take the time to listen, you may become familiar with why it exists. Any decision you make can be traced back to the steps you thought about and contemplated with in your own mind.

This internal thought process is called Self-talk, which is just that, us talking to ourselves. Self-talk has a great deal of power over how we feel and what we do. It's your brain's way of creating meaning in an event. This internal conversation works overtime and can actually lead us into feeling stressed out. Since this is the opposite of how most of us want to feel let me explain how self-talk influences the way we think, feel and act.

Events, the things that happen all day long, are neutral. They have absolutely no meaning on their own. But, when an event occurs our mind immediately looks to assign meaning to it. We begin to talk to ourselves about what we think it means. What we decide is based on our life experiences, how you are feeling, and even what you had for breakfast that day. Many factors affect the thoughts that go into the interpretations we make.

These thoughts then influence the feelings we have about the event. The feelings we have then determine how we behave. If it all seems a little too confusing let me provide you with an example. You come into work and say "hi" to a co-worker and the greeting is not returned. You may feel angry, rejected or insulted which comes **not** from the co-worker's lack of response, but from what *you think* it means.

In this situation you are assuming the lack of reply reflects negative feelings about you. It is entirely possible that the lack of response has to do with many other factors and nothing to do with you at all. Challenge your thoughts. Think of other possible explanations. Possibly the coworker had a fight with their spouse, or an ill child, or simply hasn't had a chance to have their morning cup of coffee. Again, interpretations, assumptions and thoughts about an event determine feelings and ultimately mood. Change the thought, you will change the mood.

Although many of us naturally criticize ourselves in our self talk, it can be very damaging. Negative self-talk increases our perception of stress, limits potential, and shades experiences. Replacing them with positive thoughts reduces stress and empowers us to think differently.

So, how can you begin to change your negative thoughts into positive ones? You can start by recognizing your internal dialogue. Ask yourself, "Would I say this to a person I love?" Or, "Of all the possible reasons for something to happen, how likely is this the cause?" Additionally, "Is this thought helping me to handle this situation?"

There are also exercises you can do to become more aware of your own negative self-talk. They include things like journal writing, where you record the negative messages you catch yourself saying. Also, an exercise named Look at the Clock where you set an alarm to ring at set intervals. When it sounds you stop what you are doing and listen to the internal thought running through your mind at that time. For those who want quick results, there is one called Rubber-Band Snap. This includes wearing a rubber-band around your wrist and snapping it every time a negative thought enters your mind. The pain you experience becomes associated with the negative thought and therefore makes you want to stop quickly.

Once you are aware of your negative self talk you can begin replacing it with positive messages. There are several ways this can be done. For starters, try simply substituting the message with milder or even positive wording. You can also change self-limiting statements like, "I can't do this" to questions such as "how can this be done?". Lastly, try giving your negative message a voice by telling the thought to a trusted person. Sometimes just hearing it out loud is enough for us to know it is irrational.

In conclusion, by engaging in these activities we can limit the amount of stress we experience in our daily lives. Use these simple steps to begin feeling capable, empowered and happy with the person you are.