

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Most of us have been taught the importance of being kind to other people. We learn that we need to think before we speak and to live by the “Golden Rule” of treating people the way we want to be treated. But, did anyone ever teach you to be kind in how you speak to *yourself*?

We all engage in self-talk, that internal dialogue you have with yourself, about yourself. Self-talk is a combination of conscious and unconscious thoughts, so we often may not even realize we’re doing it, which is why intentionally practicing *positive* self-talk is so important!

Negative self-talk has a number of harmful effects, including lowered self-esteem, poor performance on tasks, and increased anxiety. On the other hand, positive self-talk is linked to increased self-esteem, mastery of tasks, and lowered anxiety ([PositivePsychology.com](https://www.positivepsychology.com)). For example, if you are struggling with an assignment, you might think, “This isn’t this hard for anyone else, why is it for me? What’s *wrong* with me?” What if, instead of putting yourself down, you said to yourself: “This is hard and I need some help.” But how do we “do” positive self-talk? Let’s look at the steps:

NOTICE YOUR SELF-TALK

Many of us don’t really pay attention to our self-talk thoughts. Make an effort to notice your self-talk thoughts and whether they are positive or negative. Try keeping a list of all the self-talk thoughts you notice throughout the day. Sometimes our negative self-talk thoughts end up coming out of our mouths, so enlist friends to help you. Ask friends or other loved ones to point out to you each time you say something self-critical.

ANALYZE YOUR SELF-TALK THOUGHTS

Check the facts! If you have a thought like, “I can never do anything right,” stop and ask yourself: Is that really true? Think of all the things you have accomplished and done “right.” Another example might be, “No one ever wants to hang out with me.” Instead, think of times when you spent quality time with people you like. Left unchecked, negative self-talk thoughts become our beliefs about ourselves, so recognizing they are inaccurate is an important step.

IDENTIFY AND LEARN FROM YOUR SELF-TALK

In a growth mindset, we realize our thoughts are telling us something about what we need. Identify what emotion you are feeling and whether you need to attend to that emotion before you can be successful. Ask yourself, what is this thought telling me about what I need? In the earlier example about struggling with an assignment, the negative self-talk might be telling us we need to get help with our assignment from a classmate, professor, or tutor. Take this time to also think about what you might do differently to help you be more successful if faced with a similar situation.

REFRAME YOUR SELF-TALK

Using what you’ve learned in the Analyze and Identify stages, try reframing negative thoughts into positive ones. For example, “I’m so stupid at math” can become, “I am really struggling with this particular assignment and deserve to get some help with it so I can succeed.” Another simple reframe can be to add “for now” to a negative thought. “I’m so lonely all the time” becomes, “I’m so lonely all the time ... *for now*.” This helps us to understand that the negative situation is temporary and can be addressed.

ADD MORE POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Flip the balance! Now that you’re noticing and aware of all the negative things you say to yourself, intentionally add kind and praising thoughts to teach your brain that you want to be positive rather than negative. Outnumbering your negative self-talk thoughts with positive ones can help teach your unconscious brain that you like yourself and are kind to yourself, rather than not liking and criticizing yourself.

Taking the time to identify and change your patterns of self-talk is a great form of self care. As mentioned above, research shows that making this change can result in improved performance, increased self esteem, and reduced levels of anxiety. If you are finding it really difficult to challenge your negative self-talk, counseling can be a great option! And if all else fails, ask yourself: Would I speak to friend or loved one the way I’m speaking to myself right now? What might I tell a friend or loved one who was going through this? You deserve the same compassion you would give to others!

POSITIVE SELF-TALK PLANNER

MY POSITIVE QUALITIES

Start generating those positive self-talk thoughts! Use this space to make a list of positive qualities about yourself.

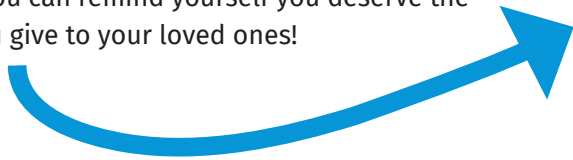
MY THOUGHT TRACKER

Use this space as a tracker to start tracking self-talk thoughts you notice throughout the day. Are they mostly positive or mostly negative?

	+	-
	+	-
	+	-
	+	-
	+	-

SELF-KINDNESS REMINDERS

Write these questions somewhere you will see them often—a sticky note on your mirror or a note on your phone—so you can remind yourself you deserve the kindness you give to your loved ones!



Would I speak to friend or loved one the way I'm speaking to myself right now?

What might I tell a friend or loved one who was going through this?

	NOTICE	ANALYZE	IDENTIFY		REFRAME
	Negative thought:	Check the facts. Is this true?	What am I feeling?	What can I learn from this?	New positive thought:
EXAMPLE	I failed that test. I'm such an idiot.	I did well on my test in a different class yesterday.	Frustrated, sad, disappointed.	I could have studied more, and I probably should have gone to office hours.	This subject is hard for me. I can do better on the next test; I just need some help.