

Self-talk: What Is It and How Does It Affect Your Life?

Our thoughts create our reality. They influence our feelings and perceptions about what's going on in our lives. They determine what we notice in the world around us and what we attract into our lives.

By expecting the negative, we filter our experiences and interpret events in a way that meets these expectations. We see only the negative side of each situation. We pay more attention to the negative comments from others, to the decisions we made that weren't the best and to the plans that didn't work out.

Similarly, if we expect personal satisfaction, happiness and success, that is what we will attract and perceive around us. We will notice the positive opportunity that comes from losing our job or a relationship ending. We will focus on the positive feedback from our employer rather than only on the behaviours that we need to change.

Our thoughts determine how we feel, what we do, how we relate to others and all of our personal experiences. Most of these thoughts are habitual and strengthened by repeated patterns of thinking. We tend to assume they are accurate, seldom stopping to question their validity and the impact they are having on our lives. This continuous inner dialogue is called "self-talk". Our self-talk can be positive, supportive and self-enhancing or it can be negative, critical and self-defeating. The positive self-talk, we want to encourage and enhance. It is our "inner cheerleader". Our negative self-talk, our "inner critic", is the part we want to eliminate or minimize.

Write down all the self-talk that is going through your head right now. Just use stream of consciousness and write for five minutes without editing it or judging it. Now read it over. What is the theme or pattern that you see? Is your self-talk more positive or negative? Is there a theme running through your negative self-talk?

We talk to ourselves all day long. However, we may not always be aware of our self-talk or what we are actually saying. By neglecting to notice our negative self-talk we may be permitting a continual flow of worry and self-criticism to play in our minds and to steadily erode our self-esteem. We may also be missing out on the potential benefits of using positive self-talk to make positive changes in our lives.