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## Student Wellness Centre

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Whether it is out loud or not, the thoughts we have are a form of self-talk. The way we talk to ourselves directly reflects our self-esteem and self-image.

## What is Self-Talk?

Each time an event happens in our lives, the information about it enters our minds. We then interpret that information, forming beliefs about what the event means, how it is going to affect us, or why it happened. We cannot always control the events that happen, but we can control how we think about them. Some say that the major differences between success and failure is the way we talk to ourselves.

Negative self-talk hurts us and most of the time we do not notice we are doing it. Fortunately, it is possible to turn this negative habit into a positive one!

### **Negative self-talk examples:**

- “I shouldn’t have ate that piece of cake,”
- “I can’t do this presentation,”

- “I’m such an idiot, I’ll never pass this exam,” and
- “I don't want to embarrass myself or the team, so I won't sign up to play.”

## **Do You Say Things like This to Yourself?**

This kind of thinking has detrimental effects on your mental health. Your self-critical voice directly affects your self-esteem and works by emphasizing past failures, setting impossible standards of perfection, ignoring anything good that happens, and assuming others’ thoughts about you are negative.

The great thing is that negative self-talk can be changed to the positive.

## **Positive Self-Talk**

Positive self-talk gives us motivation to maintain healthy habits and can easily be incorporated into our daily lives. With continuous positive self-talk we can develop a healthy image of

ourselves and, in turn, boost our self-confidence.

Positive thoughts means positive emotions, behaviors, and producing a better outcome. Negative thoughts often lead to negative emotions, behaviors, and poorer outcomes.

## Replace the Negative with the Positive

### Focus on the Solution

Dwelling on a problem instead of a solution is the essence of negative self-talk. “I don’t know how to do this problem. I’ll never pass the exam.”

***Instead:*** Most problems have solutions. Ask yourself, “How can I make this situation better?” or think “I will work through this problem until I can understand it.”

### Expect the Best

“What if I don’t pass the exam?” “What if he doesn’t like me?” Expecting the worst creates anxiety and causes us to behave ineffectively.

***Instead:*** Ask questions that give positive outcomes. “How can I prepare for the exam?” or “How can I make a good impression?”

## **Could, Not Should**

Words like “should” or “must” suggest rules and standards for our behavior that do not exist in reality. These words imply there is a consequence for non-compliance, which can evoke feelings of guilt. “I should go to the gym but I never have time.”

**Instead:** Replace with the word “could” and realize that you do have choices. “I could go to the gym after class or on my lunch break.”

## **Positive Labels**

We use negative labels to lower our self-esteem. “I’m so fat. I need to go to the gym”

Instead: Remember that people’s faults or shortcomings do not define them.

## **Realistic Thinking**

We distort reality by thinking only in extremes and this makes our efforts either total failures or complete successes, with nothing in between. “I’ll never pass this exam because I always draw a blank.”

**Instead:** Be realistic. Replace those exaggerated words with ones that more accurately reflect reality and give yourself options. “I haven’t actually ever failed an exam. I’m going to relax and I’ll do fine.”

## **Take it in Stride**

Every bad thing that happens is a horrible disaster. “I missed the bus and today’s class is the most important.”

***Instead:*** Be realistic and stop scaring yourself. Bad things do happen, yet most are not necessarily tragedies or disasters, but rather inconveniences and mistakes. “I can always talk to my professor afterwards and get any information I missed.”

## **Take Responsibility**

We sometimes resort to assigning guilt instead of solving a problem. “That person took my study spot and now I can’t concentrate.” Blaming others can make us feel vindicated in a wrongdoing and allow us to avoid responsibility.

***Instead:*** Focus on what you can do to find a solution to the problem and take responsibility. “The campus is big with plenty of other study spots available.”



## Become Aware of Negative Self-Talk

Recognizing your own negative self-talk is the first step to taking back control. Below are strategies you can use to start replacing those negative thoughts with positive ones.

### Positive Affirmations

- Every morning when you look in the mirror say something positive in your head or out loud (e.g., "I'm going to have a great day today"). It may sound silly but it can help foster positive emotions towards oneself.

- Write these affirmations on your mirror or on a sticky note so you have them right in front of you.
- Eventually these positive thoughts will become habitual and your self-image will be healthier.

## **One-Day Test**

- Carry an index card. On one side write “positive” and on the other side “negative.” During the day, mark down every time you have either a positive thought or a negative thought about yourself.
- At the end of the day, tally up the marks to see how well your self-talk is going.
- If it is mostly negative, use the experience to create new thought patterns for the future and actively work to angle your self-talk towards the positive side.
- If it is mostly positive, your hard work is paying off!

## **Ask Yourself a Question**

- When you notice yourself thinking negatively, instead of trying to stop yourself from thinking a negative thought, try to direct your thoughts.



- The way to direct your thinking is by asking yourself a question. Ask a positive question like “What is my goal?” or “How can I make myself stronger to better deal with this?”
- A question gets your mind going in a new direction and focuses your attention on something more positive.
- Once you decide on a question to ask yourself, keep asking it. Ponder it and let it run through your thoughts to bring you into a new, positive state of mind.

### **Notice Three Wonderful Things**

- At the end of the day, think back to your experience and note three positive experiences or three things you are grateful for.
- Write them down focusing on the sensation, image, thoughts, emotions, and meaning attached.

## **Stress, Attitude, and Concentration**

- Improving your attitude can reduce stress.

- Understand your sources of stress and manage it strategically!

### **Intended Outcomes of Positive Self-Talk Strategies**

- Short-term: Increased knowledge, mental health, self-image & self-esteem
- Long-term: Decreased levels of anxiety & depression, increased strategy use in daily life.

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## **Additional Resources**

Challenging Depressive thinking workbook: Access through Student Wellness Centre Webpage -> Mental Health resources.

Bell Let's Talk toolkit

Resources at Poistivepsycholgye.com -> positive self-talk.

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