

Social-Emotional Learning

Responding to Negative Self-Talk

(Black text is the template, blue text is for your reference only)

Title: Responding to Negative Self-Talk

Description:

As a tutor, you may hear students say, *"I am dumb,"* or *"I can't do this."* When students start criticizing themselves, demonstrating a lack of self-belief, it can be challenging to tutor them. Learn to respond to negative self-talk in a way that increases students' self-confidence and encourages continued effort.

As a tutor, you may hear students say, *"I am dumb,"* or *"I can't do this."* When students criticize themselves, it can be challenging to tutor them. Learn to respond to negative self-talk in a way that increases student self-confidence and effort.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

- Recognize negative self-talk by students
- Apply strategies of effectively responding to a student engaging in negative self-talk

Tutor's Experience Level:

How would you describe your tutoring experience and skills?

Beginner tutor- 1 (no experience)

Expert tutor- 5

Scenario 1:

Before we get started, please answer the following questions to help assess your existing knowledge.

You meet with Eduardo, an 8th-grade student, twice per week for math tutoring. During one particular tutoring session, Eduardo brings a math assignment he needs help with involving solving two-step equations. He seems a bit nervous and unsure of himself as he presents the first math problem to you. As Eduardo begins to work the problem, you hear him whisper to himself, *"I am so stupid."*

[\[image link\]](#)



[Predict/Decide- Open Response, asking them to predict or decide what is the recommended tutor response in this situation]

1. What exactly would you say OR how exactly would you respond to Eduardo's negative self-talk to increase his self-confidence and encourage continued effort?

[Predict/Decide - MCQ]

2. Which of the following responses below do you think would best support Eduardo by effectively responding to his negative self-talk?

I would say to the student:

- A. "These problems are easy, Eduardo! You will understand them in no time. Here, let me show you how to do the first problem. Then you try the next problems from there."
- B. "I understand that you may be feeling overwhelmed, Eduardo! You are very capable of solving this problem. Let's break it down step by step together. You are smart and can do this!"
- C. "You can do anything you put your mind to. You are not dumb, Eduardo. In fact, you are very smart. All you need to do is try."
- D. "You may be right, Eduardo. Solving two-step problems may be too hard for you. First, let's try solving simpler problems. I am glad you recognized your abilities. It is important to know your limits."

[Explain- Open]

3. Why do you think the approach you selected in the previous question will best support Eduardo by increasing his self-confidence and encourage his continued effort?

[Explain- MCQ]

4. Which of the following statements aligns with the rationale you chose and explained in the previous two questions.

- A. It is important to recognize a student's feelings instead of dismissing them. Then tutors should remind the student they are capable and provide positive affirmations.
- B. Refusing to acknowledge student's negative statements by stating, "You are not dumb" or "You are smart," is an effective way to encourage students and ensure students put forth effort.
- C. By reassuring a student that they can do anything with continued effort, you are supporting students with fostering a growth mindset.
- D. Sometimes math problems may be too hard for students. It is important that tutors recognize each student's abilities and provide easier problems, when needed.

[Observe] - (Give desired, recommended response, according to research with explanation)
Research Recommendation(s), Research says...

Negative self-talk can present itself in your tutoring with students speaking to themselves in a negative manner, such as saying, *“I cannot do this,”* or saying to others, *“I am stupid.”* When hearing students engage in negative self-talk it is important to intervene by assisting students with correcting the behavior. Tutors should ensure to recognize, or validate, the student’s feelings and then reframe the situation. Then they should encourage positive self-talk by modeling and giving examples of student’s successes. Therefore, the correct or most desirable option is:

B. “I understand that you may be feeling overwhelmed, Eduardo! You are very capable of solving this problem. Let’s break it down step by step together. You are smart and can do this!”

Self-talk is very common among students, with positive self-talk associated with increases in student learning (Yaratan & Yucesoylu, 2010). Students who verbally express the belief that they can learn by saying phrases like, *“I can do this”* and *“I am smart”* demonstrate having a growth mindset. These students tend to learn more than students with a fixed mindset, often expressing a negative viewpoint. Examples of fixed mindset statements include, *“I will never understand this,” “I am dumb,”* and *“I am just not a math person”* (Dweck, 2006).

It is important that tutors respond to a student who is making negative comments about themselves in a supportive manner. There are three actions to consider when responding to a student who is engaging in negative self-talk:

1. Acknowledge a student’s feelings and validate them, such as by saying, *“I understand you may be frustrated...”* or *“I realize this is hard for you.”*
2. Remind the student of their strengths and abilities. For example, a tutor could remind a student of a time where they conquered a hard task.
3. Model positive self-talk by stating the positive affirmation related to the student’s negative comment (Robinson, 2017).

The table below displays negative examples of student self-talk commonly witnessed by tutors and the associated positive affirmation that can be stated in response from the tutor.

Negative Comment (stated by a student)	Positive Affirmation (response from a tutor)
<i>“I am not good at this.”</i>	<i>“You are not good at this... yet. Everyone learns at their own pace.”</i>
<i>“I am dumb.”</i>	<i>“You are smart and can learn hard things.”</i>
<i>“I give up.”</i>	<i>“What are some strategies you learned to tackle this problem? You have tools to solve this problem.”</i>

"Everything I do is wrong."

"I can think of many things you do right. Learning is not about getting problems "right," it is about getting better and improving."

[Explain- Open]

5. In your own words, please explain why it is important to effectively respond to students engaged in negative self-talk?

6. How much do you agree or disagree with the expert recommendation of acknowledging student's negative feelings and providing positive affirmation?

Strongly disagree-1

Somewhat disagree-2

No opinion-3

Somewhat agree-4

Strongly agree-5

7. Explain why you agree or disagree.

[Explain- Multiple Choice]

8. Which of the following positive affirmations are effective tutor responses to a student saying, "I am not as smart as my classmates."

A. "Don't be ridiculous. You are just as smart as everyone else in class. In fact, you may be even smarter! "

B. "You may be right. You are not as naturally smart as some of your classmates, however, if you work hard and put in effort you can get better. "

C. "If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. I have faith in you. Now let's get back to work on your math assignment."

D. "It's not about being as smart as your classmates, it's about being the best version of yourself. Let's work together to identify your strengths and build on them."

Research Recommendation

Tutors should respond to students engaging in negative self-talk by acknowledging and validating their feelings and not dismissing or ignoring them. They should also focus on a student's strengths and provide positive support. Therefore, the correct answer to (8) is below:

D. "It's not about being as smart as your classmates, it's about being the best version of yourself. Let's work together to identify your strengths and build on them."

Scenario 2: [Same a pre-instruction]

You volunteer at a local middle school twice per week to provide tutoring to students as part of their extended period math class. Typically, you work with students in small groups assisting them on understanding math problems specifically chosen by their teacher. One particular day, students were working in pairs solving math problems on a chalkboard. You overhear Geetika, a 5th-grade girl, say to another student, "*I am dumb and will never be able to do this.*"



[photo image]

[Predict/Decide- Open Response, asking them to predict or decide what is the recommended tutor response in this situation]

9. What exactly would you say OR how exactly would you respond to Geetika's negative self-talk to increase her self-confidence and encourage continued effort?

[Predict/Decide - MCQ]

10. Which of the following responses below do you think would best support Geetika by effectively responding to her negative self-talk?

I would say to the student:

- A. "You need to stop being so negative and pessimistic, Geetika. Your attitude is holding you back. Just keep trying and working hard. Let's see what you and your partner can do."
- B. "Geetika, I don't understand how you are having such a hard time. You need to apply yourself more. All you have to do is put in more effort and you can learn this."
- C. "Geetika, it is normal to have feelings of self-doubt, however, it is important to recognize that you have many abilities. Let's see what you and your partner come up with by working together."
- D. "You are not dumb, Geetika. In fact, you and your partner are the two smartest students in the whole class. That is why I paired you two together. I bet you will be able to complete this problem in no time. "

[Explain- Open]

11. Why do you think the approach you selected in the previous question will best support Geetika by increasing her self-confidence and encourage her continued effort?

[Explain- MCQ]

12. Which of the following statements aligns with the rationale you chose and explained in the previous two questions?

[Explain one correct (or most desired) option rationale and three incorrect (or less desired) responses being sure to capture common errors and misconceptions among tutors.]

- A. By telling a student they are very smart and comparing them to other students, tutors can get students to better recognize their abilities and understand their strengths
- B. It is important that tutors do not acknowledge a student's negative self-talk. Tutors should remind students how intelligent they are and not spend time listening to students' negative comments.
- C. Tutors should validate a student's opinions and feelings. Then they should provide positive support, focusing on a student's strengths and abilities.
- D. Sometimes, certain math problems may be too hard for students. Tutors need to be aware of problems or concepts that are too difficult for students and provide the appropriate support.

Conclusion

When witnessing a student engaged in negative self-talk, it is important to intervene by assisting students with correcting the behavior. Tutors should ensure to recognize, or validate, the student's feelings and then reframe the situation. Then they should encourage positive self-talk by modeling and giving examples of student's successes. Therefore, the correct or most desirable option is:

- C. "Geetika, it is normal to have feelings of self-doubt, however, it is important to recognize that you have many abilities. Let's see what you and your partner come up with by working together."

This module explored identifying when a student engages in negative self-talk. In addition, this lesson demonstrated how to apply strategies of effectively responding to students engaging in negative self-talk.

In summary, when students engage in negative self-talk, or say bad comments about themselves or their abilities, it is important to acknowledge a student's feelings and validate them. Tutors can respond by saying, *"I understand you may be frustrated..."* or *"I realize this is*

hard for you.” Second, tutors should remind the student of their strengths and abilities. Last, tutors should model positive self-talk by stating the positive affirmation related to the student’s negative comment. By effectively responding to students engaged in negative self-talk, you can increase a student’s self-confidence and ensure continued effort.

Further Reading:

For more information on how to effectively respond to students engaging in negative self-talk, check out the resources below:

The Power of Yet. <https://youtu.be/XLeUvZvuvAs> (Grades K-3)

How to Help Kids Shift Negative Self-Talk to Positive Self-Talk.
<https://kirstenskaboodle.com/shift-negative-self-talk-to-positive-self-talk/>

References:

Dweck, C. S. (2006). [*Mindset: The new psychology of success*](#). Random House.

Robinson, C. (2017). Growth mindset in the classroom. *Science Scope*, 41(2), 18.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1942178538/fulltextPDF/7202C7F3FAEA49DAPQ/1?accountid=9902>

Yaratan, H., & Yucesoylu, R. (2010). Self-esteem, self-concept, self-talk and significant others’ statements in fifth grade students: Differences according to gender and school type. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 3506-3518. [doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.543](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.543)

Feedback

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

The lesson was easy to understand.

Strongly disagree-1

Somewhat disagree-2

No opinion-3

Somewhat agree-4

Strongly agree-5

I’m confident I can apply what I learned.

Strongly disagree-1

Somewhat disagree-2

No opinion-3

Somewhat agree-4

Strongly agree-5

Please provide any feedback or comments related to this training module.
