Effects of negative self-talk



"I'm not working hard enough".
"I'll never get anywhere".
"I'm not as smart as they are".
"I look so ugly today".

Do any of these phrases sound familiar? Unfortunately, for most of us negative self-talk is something we are used to hearing, and it can be very detrimental to our mental health and general well-being. Let's examine negative self-talk: how it is defined and ways to defeat it.

What is negative self-talk?

Sometimes referred to as the "inner critic", negative self-talk is the little voice in your head that tells you that you are not good enough and it has a million different ways to say it. Since it is a part of your own consciousness, it knows your weak spots better than anybody else and will attack you where it hurts the most. Everyone's negative self-talk is unique to them. When negative self-talk gets out of hand and takes over, it can lead to depression and anxiety.

How to overcome negative self-talk

Since negative self-talk is a part of our inner-monologue, it is easy for it to fly under the radar of your conscious mind and go unnoticed. This means that the first step towards eradicating this kind of thinking is identifying it. Like weeds in a garden of flowers, when you can begin to recognize your thoughts as negative self-talk, you can begin to weed it out. One way to begin to notice it is to give your mean inner critic a name or personify it as a nasty villain. Whether it's "the nag" or "the meanie" or "the monster", any silly name will do in helping you reduce your inner critic's power over you.

Negative self-talk often falls into categories; here are some types of negative self-talk:

- **Catastrophizing:** Playing over worst-case scenarios and "what-ifs" in your mind, and anticipating them instead of positive or neutral outcomes.
- **Blaming:** Making yourself responsible for problems or putting all the responsibility on others.
- **Polarizing:** Seeing things in black or white, if something is not perfect it's terrible.
- **Filtering:** Focusing only on the negative parts of any situation and ignoring the positives.
- **Never and always:** If you make a mistake, you are *always* messing up or you *never* do things right.

When you are feeling upset about a situation, examine your thoughts about it and see if you are engaging in any of the above patterns.

Fostering positive self-talk

Positive self-talk can improve your confidence and make you feel happier overall. To begin to plant seeds of healthier, happier self-talk, start by replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk. This does not mean lying to yourself if you are not feeling good about something – putting a false positive spin on something won't make you feel better about it. Instead, focus on what you did well and action plans to improve.

Here are some examples of negative self-talk and how to replace them with more positive self-talk.

Negative: *I totally bombed that presentation, I'm such a failure*

Positive: *I did an okay job but I didn't live up to my potential. Next time I'll prepare a bit more and rehearse before presenting.*

Negative: *If I don't do a good job on that report I'm going to get fired.*

Positive: *It is important to me that I do a good job. I will work hard and ask for help if I need it.*

Negative: *I always make mistakes.*

Positive: *I am human and sometimes I make mistakes. I am doing my best.*

It may be helpful to write down your negative thoughts and then write out more positive, action-oriented versions. When you're putting yourself down, ask yourself, "what would my best friend/sister/partner say?" They would definitely not talk about you as harshly as you are talking about yourself, so start by stepping out of your own head for a minute and speaking more kindly about yourself.

Identifying and replacing negative self-talk can only benefit you. If you need more help in noticing these patterns of thinking or if you feel stuck in endless negativity, talk to a counsellor to get help in ending negative self-talk.