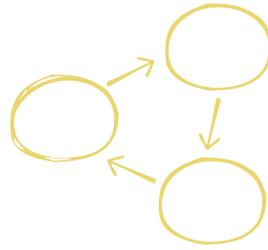


Self-Talk Strategies



Self-talk is all of the constant chatter inside your head, which is sometimes helpful and sometimes not. What we think has an effect on how we feel, which then affects what we do. When self-talk is negative — “What if I fail this test and don’t pass the class? I’ll never get into college and get the job I want.” — it causes negative feelings, like anxiety. It can affect you physically, too, including tight muscles, stomach ache or headache, or make you lose sleep. It can also take away your focus and concentration, causing you to not do as well on tests or physical competitions, which may feed right back into the negative self-talk — you show yourself that, “I really can’t do this.”

Just as negative self-talk can decrease your chances of success, positive self-talk can improve them. If you engage in negative self-talk, there are steps you can follow to take charge of your thinking and use it to maximize your performance. First you need to stop the thought, and then replace it with something positive.

Remember:

Self-talk is a habit and habits are hard to break, so don’t become discouraged if it doesn’t work right away. Try to be supportive of yourself and treat yourself like you would a friend who is trying to change a habit.



Thought Stopping involves three steps:

- 1. Identify the negative thought.** Pay attention to your thoughts and try to notice when you are starting in a negative direction. It’s natural to have some negative thoughts, but you want to keep yourself from falling into a black hole of negative self-talk.
- 2. Stop the thought.** Decide on a signal to use to tell yourself to stop, such as imagining a stop sign, hearing a buzzer, or shaking your head “NO.” Choose the image that works best for you. Any time you realize you are having a negative thought, use your stop signal immediately.
- 3. Practice.** As with any skill, to become effective, you must practice. To begin with, imagine yourself in a situation where you would usually engage in negative self-talk and practice thought stopping in your imagination. Continue doing this with different scenarios until the process becomes automatic.



Thought Replacement

Thought Replacement provides something that is more productive to think when you've stopped the negative comments in your head. Think of alternative thoughts that are positive and realistic. What might you say to encourage a friend in a similar situation? What might a coach say to you? To help figure this out, write down some of the negative thoughts you say to yourself. Beside each one, write down at least one positive and realistic thing you could say.

For example:



Negative Thought

- “If I make that presentation in front of the class, everyone will think I'm stupid and boring. I'll forget everything and stutter, then they'll all laugh at me.”

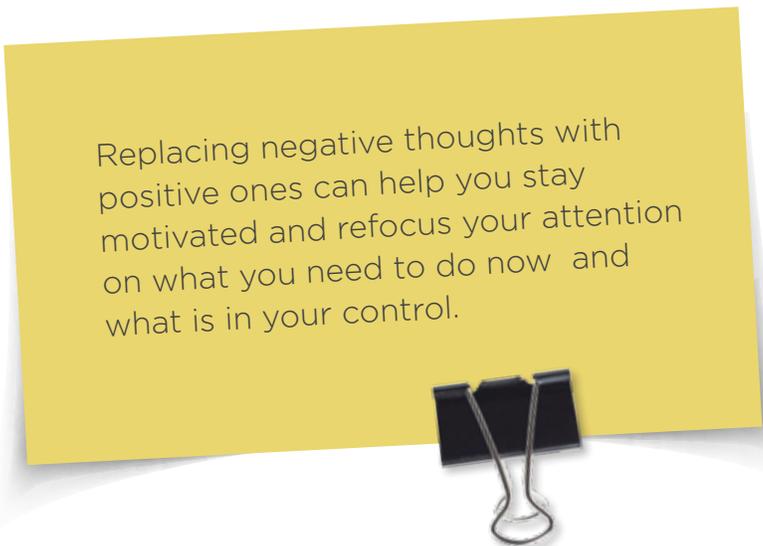
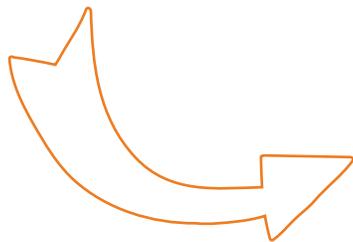
- “I'm lousy at math.”



Alternative Positive, Realistic Thought

- “I know the material and I'll have my notes, if I need them. I'll do some deep breathing beforehand to calm myself and do the best I can.”

- “I've improved in a lot of areas through hard work. If I keep at it, I can get better in this class, too.”



Replacing negative thoughts with positive ones can help you stay motivated and refocus your attention on what you need to do now and what is in your control.