

Self-Talk

Self-Talk is a very powerful in affecting the way we feel and the way we relate to others. You may find the exploration of this topic useful when helping your child to understand their own self-talk and its impact on them.

Self-talk is basically your inner voice, that subtle running commentary going on in your mind which says things that you don't necessarily say out loud. What you say to yourself can determine how you feel about who you are and of course what your child's self-talk says, does the same for them. Imagine being able to help your child turn some of their negative self-talk into positive self-talk and what a powerful difference that might make to their well being.

Positive self-talk is the optimistic voice in your head that makes you feel good about the things that are going on in your life, eg "These clothes suit me. I look good in them", "I am totally prepared for this exam and I should do well." On the other hand, negative self-talk makes you feel negative and pessimistic about yourself and the things that are going on in your life, eg "I look terrible wearing these clothes", "I am hopeless at science, I will probably fail the exam." Most of us are in constant mental chatter and as our actions are inspired by our thoughts, it is highly likely when the self-talk is negative, then the ensuing actions or words may be negative too. If we can change the way we think, we can begin to change the actions we take and in doing so be more contented and positive.

How can negative thoughts be reframed with a positive slant?

The first step is awareness, that is, focussing on what you think about and tell yourself. Take some time each day to listen, even write down, what you are thinking.

The second step is to question your negative self-talk (and challenge your child on their negative thoughts and comments too) with questions such as:

"Is there evidence for what I am/you are thinking/saying?"

"Am I/are you keeping everything in perspective?"

"Is there a more positive way of looking at this?"

The third step is to change your self-talk, which of course is much easier said than done! Try by countering negative thoughts with positive ones. For example, if you think, "I'll never be able to do this", ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do that will help me be able to do this?" or "Why can't I? I've done difficult things before." Avoid speaking in finite language and try and look for things that might add a positive spin on a tough situation.

In some of our Social and Emotional Learning lessons in Grade 4 we have been discussing the concept of catastrophising. The students in those classes will tell you it is "making a big deal out of something small." To avoid catastrophising a situation one must do a whole lot of self-talk. These students are ten years old and learning to turn negative messages into positive ones.

Of course, much of what worries us is driven by fear and that fear creates negative thoughts. Fear is often what holds us back from success. Ask yourself what you are afraid of. What can be the worst that can happen? Take a step-by-step approach in breaking down your fears and those in your children, and see if there is any way round to looking at things more positively. When you confront your fears, you will often realise that the worst case scenario is not as bad as you think and bringing your mind back to the present from

fears around what the future might hold by saying, "What can we/I do right now?" can be helpful too as it changes the internal talk from a worry about the future to one which focusses on the present and is manageable.

Replacing negative self-talk with more positive internal chatter is not going to happen overnight. However, if you find yourself or someone in your family often struggling, unable to achieve goals and talking negatively, work through these steps, as with practice, you **can change your thoughts that** in turn change actions.

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