

On and off throughout the day, there's an internal voice narrating what's going on, how you're feeling, and vocalizing an opinion about what you're doing.

This is called self-talk; it's normal, all of us experience it. Self-talk is an internal dialogue that stems from subconscious thoughts and beliefs, as well as the various conversations and criticisms you've experienced in your lifetime.

As small children, this voice hasn't really developed yet. The older we become, and the more self-aware we grow to be, the clearer this voice cuts through our thoughts. We start remembering the ways people talk to us; we start consciously absorbing the world around us; we begin to form an opinion of ourselves through those experiences.

All of these developments play a role in the formation of the voice behind our self-talk.

In this article, we're going to carefully unpack this box called negative self-talk, and take a closer look at how we can begin conquering this tormentor in our minds.

What is negative self-talk?

The easiest way to understand negative self-talk is to think of it as trash-talking yourself, on autopilot. It isn't helpful or constructive, and most of the time, it's exaggerating and not fully telling the truth (or spreading outright lies).

Most of us aren't entirely sure when our inner voice mutated into an inner critic, it's just something we live with on a daily basis. You may not even consciously remember a time when you weren't living with this voice.

It might have started off small, like picking out little things you disliked about your appearance in the mirror. Before you knew what had happened, this voice was ruling your life with its incessant self-bullying and negative commentary and all you found yourself doing was... listening.

By now, you might be so used to living with feeling negatively about yourself that you don't even realize how often this voice is influencing you, let alone how damaging it is.

It's absolutely possible to change these thought patterns, but you have to commit to the process. It starts with self-awareness.

1. Practice self-awareness with your thoughts

The first step to overcoming negative self-talk is to become aware of when it happens, identifying which areas in your life lead this voice to be especially loud or critical.

Maybe this voice berates you most aggressively at work, but tends to only mumble when you're home; or maybe it's the opposite. Start paying attention to the various negative thoughts you have throughout the day, taking note of any patterns.

Another way to begin fostering this self-awareness is to take a few minutes at the end of each day to reflect on your thought processes that occurred throughout the day.

Eventually, you will be able to catch yourself in the moment of speaking badly to yourself, stop it right then, and reframe the rest of your remaining thought pattern.

2. Put your thoughts in perspective

When you have a cruel, unhealthy, or otherwise harmful thought, pause for a moment.

Take a step back from the thought and ask yourself:

- Is this thought representing the facts, or is it an inaccurate emotional reaction?
- Am I exaggerating the situation, or assuming there is no positive alternative?
- Will this thought be helpful in the long-run, or just tearing me down in the present?
- Am I assuming I am powerless to improve my situation?
- If someone I love said this about themselves, what would I say to them?

Not everything that voice says is true, but if we hear something enough, we'll start to believe it is. It's why it's important to pause and put these thoughts into perspective.

3. Reframe with positive truths

If you've recognized that what this voice is saying isn't true, it's time to reframe those auto-produced negative thoughts with consciously constructed truthful thoughts.

Come up with an alternative thought to the one your inner voice generated; a thought that is positive, and rooted in fact. Repeat it to yourself a dozen times, or write it 50 times on a piece of paper, or write it on a sticky note and put it up on your mirror.

Once is not enough. It's taken years for the voice of your self-talk to develop the tone that it has, and it will also take time to rewire those negative thought patterns.

4. Practice positive self-talk daily

This might feel a little weird at first, but we're confident that you can handle it.

Push through any awkwardness you feel, and simply begin speaking more kindly to yourself. If you stumbled over a few words during a presentation and find yourself mercilessly berating your idiocy afterwards, stop the spiraling thought pattern.

Take a deep breath. Take another. Imagine yourself letting go of any disappointments. The presentation is over; you can't change anything now. If there are ways to improve in the future, recognize them; you don't have to rip yourself apart with criticism. Pat yourself on the back for finishing your presentation. You did it. Well done.

Reach out for additional support

Affirmations, positive self-talk, these phrases are mentioned often and explained rarely. It seems everyone is talking about the importance of practicing these habits, but when you're actually ready to start, you can't seem to find any concrete guidance.

That's what we're here for. Whether you're ready to enroll in one of our mental health programs or not, our [REDACTED] is ready to support you in whatever ways we can. From your initial questions over the phone to your first in-office visit and beyond, we'll be with you every step of the way.

[REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to get started.