



What You Should Know About Negative Self-Talk

What is Negative Self-Talk? Everyone has an inner voice. It's where we talk to ourselves in our mind. If we aren't paying attention to what we're thinking about, it can develop into a critical internal voice. Negative self-talk is when you talk to yourself in your head, and repeat negative, sometimes irrational things you think about yourself or about what you think others think of you. Girls especially spend a lot of time comparing themselves to other girls at school, their older sister(s), those pictures they see in magazines and on-line, etc. Girls often become a critical judge of themselves, and they begin to evaluate themselves as lacking in some area. Over a period of time this can be quite damaging to their self-esteem and their self-worth.

What does Negative Self-Talk Look Like?

- I know I look awful today. I'm just not pretty.
- I don't have anything to wear today, my clothes are stupid
- She totally ignored me today; I am sure she hates me
- Why are they treating me like that; maybe I'm not cool enough for them
- The way I talk makes me seem so stupid; everyone will think I'm dumb
- How come I can't do that; I'm such a loser
- I never get my homework done; I'm a lost cause

Why is it important to stop Negative Self-Talk? Our bodies react to our thoughts, and our thought life has a powerful effect on our overall physical, mental and spiritual health. Research shows that we think over 50,000 times each day, and that about 80% of our self-talk is naturally self-critical and negative. This can't be good! Negative self-talk arises from irrational ideas and judgments about our situation.

As we think, therefore we are. Many think thoughts like; "they don't like me," "I'm not good at..." "I'm always late," etc. If I continually tell myself I'm not good at a sport, I'm less likely to be successful at it. If I think everyone is staring at me because I'm not pretty today, I will look for signs of this very thing happening (whether or not it truly is). When negative phrases are repeated in our heads or out loud, they become more and more powerful. Negative self-talk becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy!

Continual, unstopped negative self-talk leads to depressive states, greater levels of stress and anxiety, is are linked to lower self-confidence, worry and even hopelessness.

How can we stop Negative Self-Talk? Continual negative self-talk is a habit that can be changed, but it takes effort and focus. The best way to stop negative self-talk is to challenge the thoughts when they start, and then force yourself to think something positive. Become aware of negative thoughts – don't just let them run through your head all the time. Capture them. Consider how much of your time is spent belittling or criticizing yourself? Sometimes we need to change some of the things we watch, listen to or look at because they feed our self-negativity. These things just aren't good for us.

Challenge negative self-talk. Don't let negative thoughts go on and on without asking yourself for proof. Suppose, for example, one of your friends totally ignored you one day, and then you started a whole, long, negative scenario in your head of reasons why she would ignore you. You think. "I'm not popular enough,

she thinks I dress stupid, she thinks I'm lame, she thinks I" ...and the list goes on and on. Well, what proof is there that your friend thinks this? There could be a hundred reasons why she ignored you. Talking about it with your friend directly could totally stop a reason for negative self-talk. And you spent so much time hurting yourself with negative self-talk. It's not worth it!

Say "NO!" to negative self-talk and start practicing thinking positive things about yourself. It helps to purposely counter negative self-talk with positive self-talk. For example, "I can't do it like she can, but it's just fine. I don't have to be just like her. I'm the best 'me' there is!" Go easy on yourself. After all, you're not done growing, learning and changing yet. Treat yourself as you would a best friend. Practice being a positive person. Tell yourself things like, "I will learn to," or "I can do it." Since you are really in control of your self-talk, why not make it positive. Acknowledge the things you do well.

Here are some basic steps to reducing negative self-talk:

- 1) Choose to create positive self-talk by first recognizing when you've begun to think negatively. Then replace negative thinking with purposeful positive thinking. Stop negative self-talk in its tracks.
- 2) Practice persistence. It will take some time to reframe negative self-talk to the positive, so keep at it through discipline and purposeful, positive thinking. As you do, you will notice an overall happier feeling as you think positively more often. Every time negative self-talk rises up, take the thought captive and send it out. Don't let it take up residency in your thinking.
- 3) Listen for Absolutes because they always start negative self-talk. Absolutes include things like, "I will never, I always, etc." These can be extremely harmful and self-defeating, and will limit your success if you continue to allow them to run through your thinking.
- 4) Replace negative self-talk with positive messages. Say things like, "I might not win, but I can do my best," or "she was too busy for me today, but I think I'll send her a nice note anyway to cheer her up."
- 5) Treat yourself as you want to be treated – a modification of the Golden Rule! Be a friend to yourself, encourage yourself, be kind to yourself, through the whole process.

When you challenge negative self-talk, you will begin to break the cycle of believing every thought that comes into your head as truth. Your health will improve. Your life out-look will improve. Your psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual health will improve. Oh, it may take some effort, but stick to it. Over time, you will begin to have self-directed, rational and positive thoughts. And that's going to feel real good.