



Negative self - talk and ways of managing it

What is Self-Talk?

As we go about our daily lives we are constantly thinking about and interpreting the situations we find ourselves in. It is as though we have an internal voice inside our head that determines how we perceive every situation. We call this inner voice our 'self-talk', and it includes our conscious thoughts as well as our unconscious assumptions or beliefs.

Much of our self-talk is reasonable (e.g. 'I'd better do some preparation for that meeting tomorrow', or 'I'm really looking forward to Friday night'). However, some of our self-talk is negative, unrealistic or self-defeating (e.g. 'I'm going to fail for sure', or 'I'm no good at presentations - I'm hopeless').

Negative Self-Talk

Negative self-talk often causes us to feel bad, and to experience upsetting emotions such as hurt, anger, frustration, depression or anxiety. It can also make us *behave in a self-defeating way*. For instance, thoughts such as 'I'm going to fail for sure' may discourage you from being proactive and putting in the preparation for important task; or impairing your preparation because your anxiety levels are so high that you cannot perform with confidence.

The way you interpret events has a huge impact on the way you feel and behave. This, put simply, is the core psychological principle underpinning Cognitive Behavioural Coaching.

The ABC of Self-Talk

The relationship between your thoughts, feelings and behaviours can best be explained by looking at the A-B-C of your self-talk:

A is for Activating Situation

The Activating situation refers to the situation itself, or the things that happened when you began to feel bad, such as being at an event with a whole lot of people you don't know, being overloaded with work, or making a mistake that you imagine everybody knows about and is judging you for.

When you identify the activating situation, it's important to stick to the facts, for example: 'I have an important meeting today, I need to read the papers and prepare some thoughts in advance.', rather than 'I have an important meeting today, I'm going to look stupid again because I never have anything useful to say, everybody else is always so on the ball.'



B is for Beliefs

Beliefs comprise our self-talk (thoughts) and *assumptions* that we make about a situation. Identifying our self-talk can sometimes be tricky. This is because it is so automatic that often we are not even aware of what is going on in our mind. When something happens and we suddenly feel upset, we assume that it is the situation itself that has made us feel this way. However it is not the situation (activating situation) but the way we perceive it (Beliefs) that makes us feel the way we do.

Our thoughts largely determine the way we feel, for example, your thoughts might be 'I've become really fat...I must look so ugly...no wonder people look at me with like that'. Your feelings resulting from these thoughts might be sadness and frustration or fear, anxiety and guilt.

C is for Consequences

Thinking negatively about situations makes you feel bad and it can also cause you to behave in an unhelpful way.

Changing deeply engrained thoughts feeling and behaviours requires hard work and reinforcement. It is like learning a new language- it takes repetition to build up a new vocabulary. Similarly changing habits requires repetition and it can be uncomfortable.

Your coach may suggest at least two approaches to support you in managing negative thoughts that are causing you distress.

1. Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC)

The CBC coach establishes a working alliance with clients who agree that this approach may help them achieve goals which have so far alluded them. It is a practical methodology with strong psychological foundations and an equally sound evidence base, drawing as it does from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. It involves a process called reframing and concentrates on finding positives thoughts to replace the negative ones

2. Mindfulness

This approach concentrates on acceptance. Letting the thought flow in and flow out of your mind. You accept them and then let them go without allowing them to hijack you and control your feeling and behaviour.

Get in touch if you feel either of these approaches would work for you.

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