

GENERATING POSITIVE SELF-TALK

EAP Article Series



Do you ever talk to yourself? Most of us have an active inner dialogue that is called self-talk. This dialogue is how we think things through and arrive at important and everyday decisions. Contrary to what you may have heard, talking to yourself in this way is perfectly normal.

Self-talk can shape the way we view our lives. Positive self-talk can help us learn how to be resilient, create and maintain a positive self-image and teach us how to bounce back when things don't go our way. Conversely, negative self-talk can bring us down and keep us from achieving our potential.

Have you ever stopped to think about how you talk to yourself? Do you beat yourself up emotionally when you feel that you have failed, or do you make an effort to stay positive and affirming? Often, self-talk is a combination of positive and negative thoughts. It is important to pay attention to the way that you talk to yourself. Often, it helps to change your perspective. For example, as Thomas Edison once said, "I have not failed 10,000 times. I have successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work."

How we explain life's events to ourselves can be an opportunity to practice optimism. One of the habits of optimistic people is the tendency to view negative events as temporary and time specific. This skill helps prevent the feeling of hopelessness, because optimists know that things will get better. This way of thinking also helps to avoid generalizing negative situations to all parts of our lives.

In contrast to how we view negative events, try to see positive events as defining moments. Let yourself acknowledge these times as accomplishments achieved due to your hard work and

talents. Use positive self-talk to tie these events to your strong traits and skills. Our strengths, good character, and smart decisions influence the positive outcomes in life; luck has little to do with it.

Of course, it is impossible to avoid negative events altogether. However, by keeping them in perspective, we can learn how to appropriately react when one occurs. In times of difficulty, optimistic people are able to rely on their bank of positive memories to nourish and get them through these tough times.

Keep It Positive

Sound too simple? Although it may be difficult, remind yourself that:

- Every event has multiple consequences and outcomes
- This is only temporary
- This could be a blessing in disguise
- This is an opportunity to grow

Remember to think of each negative event as time-specific and temporary.

Attend to Your Self-Talk

Work for yourself, not against yourself. Use a constructive tone, and do not fall into a distorted negative pattern of blaming yourself for everything that doesn't go right. We don't always have control over the obstacles life puts in our path. Yet, we do have control over the internal messages we give ourselves about those obstacles, and how we choose to respond.

Focus on Solutions

Stay away from dwelling on "why me?" thoughts. Exerting too much energy on this type of thinking won't change or help things. Focus on what needs to be done and how you can move forward. These are the areas in which you have control in most situations.

Think About the Future

Change your focus from what was and cannot be, to what is and can be done now. Focus on the present and plan for the future. Remember, we can learn from the past, but we can only change how we think today.

Maintain Perspective

Be careful not to generalize or internalize a problem as a catastrophe. Try to see the big picture. Look at the event as a temporary set-back. Take one day at a time.

Develop an Attitude of Gratitude

Focus on things you're grateful for, not on the things that are going wrong or missing from your life. Count your blessings. Be thankful for the good that surrounds you, rather than being angry or resentful for the times that did not result in your favor. This keeps us upbeat, positive and forward-focused.

Maintain a Sense of Humor

It is often said that laughter is the best medicine. A good sense of humor and the ability to know when not to take life so seriously can lighten your load. Remember, it's OK to have some moments of fun, even when you're going through difficult times.

Develop a Good Support System

Keep yourself surrounded by positive people. Make your support system one that works for you — not one that allows you to focus on the negative.

As you work through the challenges that life throws your way, remember the art of positive self-talk as a powerful means for energizing yourself and keeping hope alive.

Life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% what you think about what happens to you.

For additional resources and assistance, visit www.mutualofomaha.com/eap or call an Employee Assistance Program professional at **1-800-316-2796**