

Self Health / Self Talk

“Stomp Your ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)”

Develop A Positive Self Talk Habit Now!

The following is a wonderful article from Elizabeth Scott, M.S. from her blog on About.com (stress.about.com/bio/Elizabeth-Scott-M-S-17577.htm)

Patterns of negative or positive self-talk often start in childhood. Usually, the self-talk habit is one that's colored our thinking for years, and can affect us in many ways, influencing the experience of stress to our lives. However, any time can be a good time to change it! Here are some ways you can stop yourself from using negative self-talk and use your mind to boost your productivity and self-esteem, and relieve stress.

Notice Your Patterns:

The first step toward change is to become more aware of the problem. You probably don't realize how often you say negative things in your head, or how much it affects your experience. The following strategies can help you become more conscious of your internal dialogue and its content.

- **Gratitude Journal Writing:** Whether you carry a journal around with you and jot down negative comments when you think them, write a general summary of your thoughts at the end of the day, or just start writing about your feelings on a certain topic and later go back to analyze it for content, journaling can be an effective tool for examining your inner process.
- **Thought-Stopping:** As you notice yourself saying something negative in your mind, you can stop your thought mid-stream by saying to yourself “Stop”. Saying this aloud will be more powerful, and having to say it aloud will make you more aware of how many times you are stopping negative thoughts, and where.
- **Rubber-Band Snap:** Another therapeutic trick is to walk around with a rubber band around your wrist; as you notice negative self-talk, pull the band away from your skin and let it snap back. It'll hurt a little, and serve as a slightly negative consequence that will both make you more aware of your thoughts, and help to stop them! (Or, if you don't want to subject yourself to walking around with a rubber band on your wrist, you'll be even more careful to limit the negative thoughts!)

Replace Negative Statements:

A good way to stop a bad habit is to replace it with something better. Once you're aware of your internal dialogue, here are some ways to change it:

- **Milder Wording:** Have you ever been to a hospital and noticed how the nurses talk about 'discomfort' instead of 'pain'? This is generally done because 'pain' is a much more powerful word, and discussing your 'pain' level can actually make your experience of it more intense than if you're discussing your 'discomfort' level. You can try this strategy in your daily life. In your self-talk, turning more powerful negative words to more neutral ones can actually help neutralize your experience. Instead of using words like 'hate' and 'angry' (as in, "I *hate* traffic! It makes me so *angry*!"), you can use words like 'don't like' and 'annoyed' ("I don't like traffic; it makes me annoyed," sounds much milder, doesn't it?)
- **Change Negative to Neutral or Positive:** As you find yourself mentally complaining about something, rethink your assumptions. Are you assuming something is a negative event when it isn't, necessarily? (For example, having your plans cancelled at the last minute can be seen as a negative, but what you do with your newly-freed schedule can be what you make of it.) The next time you find yourself stressing about something or deciding you're not up to a challenge, stop and rethink, and see if you can come up with a neutral or positive replacement.
- **Change Self-Limiting Statements to Questions:** Self-limiting statements like "I can't handle this!" or "This is impossible!" are particularly damaging because they increase your stress in a given situation *and* they stop you from searching for solutions. The next time you find yourself thinking something that limits the possibilities of a given situation, turn it into a question. Doesn't "*How* can I handle this?" or "*How* is this possible?" sound more hopeful and open up your imagination to new possibilities?

For more great Self Talk resources check out Dr. Shad Helmstetter's Self Talk Website at SelfTalkstore.com.