Self-Talk
Counselling and Psychological Services Newsletter

Self-talk can have a great impact on your self-confidence. It can be positive or negative and have different effects on how you feel. There are a few ways you can develop better self-talk, which can be as simple as listening to what you’re saying to yourself each day. It’s a good idea to practice how to talk to yourself, because feeling good is always worth the effort.

What is self-talk? Even though you might not know it, you’re already practicing self-talk. Self-talk is basically your inner voice, the voice in your mind which says things that you don’t necessarily say out loud. Often self-talk happens without you even realising it and can be a subtle running commentary going on in the background of your mind. But what you say in your mind can determine a lot of how you feel about who you are and what you do.

What is positive and negative self-talk? Positive self-talk is the stuff that makes you feel good about yourself and the things that are going on in your life. It is like having an optimistic voice in your head that always looks on the bright side. Example – “These clothes look pretty awesome on me”, “I can totally make it through this exam”, “I don't feel great right now but things could be worse!”

Negative self-talk is the stuff that makes you feel pretty crappy about yourself and things that are going on. It can put a downer on anything, whether it is good or bad. Example- “I look stupid in these clothes”, “everyone thinks I'm an idiot”, “everything is crap and nothing is going to get better.” Negative self-talk is particularly bad as it brings you down all the time. It can impact on recovery from mental health difficulties and tends to make people pretty miserable. But being positive all the time isn’t achievable either, and isn’t helpful all the time. It may not seem natural to walk around being ‘positive’ all day. It may also prevent you from seeing situations clearly. So how can you make your self-talk work for you?

Better self-talk. There are three things you can do that can help with changing the direction of your self-talk.

1. Listen to what you’re saying to yourself- we don’t always consciously take note of that we’re saying in our minds. The first step in improving your self-talk is to actually notice what your inner voice is saying. Take some time each day to listen, and even write down, what you’re thinking.

2. Monitor your self-talk- Is your self-talk more positive or negative? Start questioning your self-talk asking things like:
   - Is there actual evidence for what I’m thinking?
   - What would I say if a friend were in a similar situation?
   - Is there a more positive way of looking at this?
   - Am I keeping everything in perspective?
   - In five years will it really matter?
   - Can I do anything to change what I’m feeling bad about?
   - Regardless of whether the thought is true or not, how is this way of thinking helping me?

3. Change your self-talk - Easier said than done, but definitely worth working on. Try by countering your negative thoughts with positive or more realistic ones. For example, if you think “I'll never be able to do this”, ask yourself “is there anything I can do that will help me be able to do this?” “Is there anyone I can ask for help with this task?” Avoid speaking in finite language or jumping to conclusions and try and look for things that might add a better spin to a tough situation.

The more you work on improving your self-talk the better you will get. It’s kind of like practicing an instrument or going to sports training, it won’t be easy to start with but will get better with time. It might not seem like much, but self-talk is a really important part of our self-esteem and confidence. By working on getting more positive, or at least, more accurate self-talk, you’re more likely to get things done and feel more in control of stuff that’s going on in your life.

If you’ve put some of these into practice (or you’re having trouble figuring out how to make them work), know that you don’t have to work through it all on your own. Counsellors can help a lot in building positive self-talk. They’re also useful if you don’t want to talk to friends or family or you’re having trouble completing everyday activities.

Check out the full schedule of CAPS workshops online:
student.unsw.edu.au/wellbeing-workshops-and-seminars

If The CAP Fits!

Extract from Reach Out: http://au.reachout.com/what-is-self-talk