



CREATING HEALTHY ACADEMIC HABITS

WEBINAR 7 – CULTIVATING POSITIVE SELF-TALK

FACILITATED BY: ASHLEY HARWOOD, LMSW (COUNSELING & WELLNESS SERVICES)



HABITS THAT WE'LL COVER IN THIS WEBINAR SERIES:

- Time Management
- Goal Setting
- Self Care
- Mindfulness
- Stress Reduction
- Combating Perfectionism
- Cultivating Positive Self-Talk (This week!)

WHAT IS SELF-TALK?

- Each time an event happens in our lives, the information about it enters our minds. We then interpret that information, forming beliefs about what the event means, how it is going to affect us, or why it happened. We cannot always control the events that happen, but we can control how we think about them. Some say that the major differences between success and failure is the way we talk to ourselves.
- Negative self-talk hurts us and most of the time we do not notice we are doing it. Fortunately, it is possible to turn this negative habit into a positive one!

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK (EXAMPLES)

- *“I shouldn’t have ate that piece of cake.”*
- *“I can’t do this presentation.”*
- *“I’m such an idiot, I’ll never pass this exam.”*
- *“I don’t want to embarrass myself or the team, so I won’t sign up to participate.”*
- **The great thing is that negative self-talk can be changed to the positive!**

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK (CONT.)

- This kind of thinking has detrimental effects on mental health. This self-critical voice directly affects self-esteem and works by emphasizing past failures, setting impossible standards of perfection, ignoring anything good that happens, and assuming others' thoughts about you are negative.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

- Positive self-talk gives us motivation to maintain healthy habits and can easily be incorporated into our daily lives. With continuous positive self-talk we can develop a healthy image of ourselves and, in turn, boost our self-confidence.
- Positive thoughts means positive emotions, behaviors, and producing a better outcome. Negative thoughts often lead to negative emotions, behaviors, and poorer outcomes.

REPLACE THE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (I)

Focus on the Solution

- Dwelling on a problem instead of a solution is the essence of negative self-talk. “I don’t know how to do this problem. I’ll never pass the exam.”
- **Instead:** Most problems have solutions. Ask yourself, “How can I make this situation better?” or think “I will work through this problem until I can understand it.”

REPLACE THE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (2)

Expect the Best

- “What if I don’t pass the exam?” “What if he doesn’t like me?” Expecting the worst creates anxiety and causes us to behave ineffectively.
- **Instead:** Ask questions that give positive outcomes. “How can I prepare for the exam?” or “How can I make a good impression?”

REPLACE THE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (3)

Could, Not should

- Words like “should” or “must” suggest rules and standards for our behavior that do not exist in reality. These words imply there is a consequence for non-compliance, which can evoke feelings of guilt. “I should go to the gym but I never have time.”
- **Instead:** Replace with the word “could” and realize that you do have choices. “I could go to the gym after class or on my lunch break.”

REPLACE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (4)

Realistic Thinking

- We distort reality by thinking only in extremes and this makes our efforts either total failures or complete successes, with nothing in between. “I’ll never pass this exam because I always draw a blank.”
- **Instead:** Be realistic. Replace those exaggerated words with ones that more accurately reflect reality and give yourself options. “I haven’t actually ever failed an exam. I’m going to relax and I’ll do fine.”

REPLACE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (5)

Take it in Stride

- Every bad thing that happens is a horrible disaster. “I missed the bus and today’s class is the most important.”
- **Instead:** Be realistic and stop scaring yourself. Bad things do happen, yet most are not necessarily tragedies or disasters, but rather inconveniences and mistakes. “I can always talk to my professor afterwards and get any information I missed.”

REPLACE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (6)

Positive Labels

- Negative labels lower our self-esteem.
- **Instead:** Remember that people's faults or shortcomings do not define them.

REPLACE NEGATIVE WITH POSITIVE (7)

Take Responsibility

- We sometimes resort to assigning guilt instead of solving a problem. “That person took my study spot and now I can’t concentrate.” Blaming others can make us feel vindicated in a wrong-doing and allow us to avoid responsibility.
- **Instead:** Focus on what you can do to find a solution to the problem and take responsibility. “The campus is big with plenty of other study spots available.”

BECOME AWARE OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK (I)

When you are aware of your own negative self-talk you can stop doing it. Here are some ways to stop:

Positive Affirmations

- Every morning when you look in the mirror say something positive in your head or out loud (e.g., “I’m going to have a great day today” or “I’m beautiful”). It may sound silly but it does work.
- Write these affirmations on your mirror or on a sticky note so you have them right in front of you.
- Eventually these positive thoughts will become habitual and your self-image will be healthier.

BECOME AWARE OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK (2)

One-Day Test

- Carry an index card. On one side write “positive” and on the other side “negative.”
- During the day, each time you find yourself doing positive self-talk, make a mark on the “positive” side.
- Each time you berate yourself or use negative labels, make a mark on the negative side.
- At the end of the day, tally up the marks to see how well your self-talk is going. If it is mostly positive, you are on your way to a positive future.
- If it is mostly negative, use this experience to create new thought patterns for the future and actively work to angle your self-talk towards the positive side.

BECOME AWARE OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK (3)

Ask Yourself a Question

- When you notice yourself thinking negatively, instead of trying to stop yourself from thinking a negative thought, try to direct your thoughts.
- The way to direct your thinking is by asking yourself a question. Ask a positive question like “What is my goal?” or “How can I make myself stronger to better deal with this?”
- A question gets your mind going in a new direction and focuses your attention on something more positive.
- Once you decide on a question to ask yourself, keep asking it. Ponder it and let it run through your thoughts to bring you into a new, positive state of mind.

BECOME AWARE OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK (4)

Notice Three Wonderful Things

- At the end of the day, think back to your experience and note three positive experiences.
- Write them down focusing on the sensation, image, thoughts, emotions, and meaning attached.

STRESS, ATTITUDE & CONCENTRATION

- Improving your attitude can reduce stress.
- Understand your sources of stress and manage it strategically!

Intended Outcomes of Positive Self-Talk Strategies

- Short-term: Increased knowledge, mental health, self-image & self-esteem
- Long-term: Decreased levels of anxiety & depression, increased strategy use in daily life.

HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM

- People with healthy self-esteem see themselves in an accurate way, value their own strengths and contributions, and accept their limitations. They see themselves as unique individuals who are deserving of happiness regardless of their experiences.

WHAT IS HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM?

- Healthy self-esteem refers to realistic, affirming thoughts and feelings about oneself. People with healthy self-esteem treat themselves and others with respect, take responsibility for their own behavior, and are proud of what they accomplish.
- They are able to motivate themselves, believing that they are capable of coping with life's challenges and competent to make good decisions.

CAN A PERSON HAVE TOO MUCH SELF-ESTEEM?

- Some people worry that developing strong self-esteem will ultimately result in an over-inflated sense of self, conceitedness, and bragging. Egocentric behavior, however, is typically seen as an indication of low self-esteem.
- Strong self-esteem is marked by a balanced and realistic sense of personal worth and competence. It is founded on respect for oneself and respect for others. People with healthy self-esteem avoid comparing themselves with, or judging others and look to themselves to feel good about life.
- In addition to recognizing their strengths, people with healthy self-esteem are also able to acknowledge their mistakes and limitations.

SIGNS OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM (I)

Cognitive

- Judging oneself harshly
- Expectations of negative evaluation
- Expectations of failure
- Expectations of perfection
- Blaming others for difficulties
- Doubts about self-worth

SIGNS OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM (2)

Behavioral

- Communication difficulties
- Procrastination
- Avoiding difficult situations
- Performing below potential
- Difficulty handling criticism
- Lack of goals
- Irresponsibility
- Acting arrogant, bragging
- Attempts to impress others
- Reluctance to take risks
- Using violence to solve problems
- Substance dependency

SIGNS OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM (3)

Emotional

- Depressed mood
- Feelings of anxiety
- Feelings of helplessness
- Lack of respect for others
- Difficulty showing caring
- Difficulty trusting oneself
- Feelings of contempt
- Difficulty managing anger

HOW TO DEVELOP BETTER SELF-ESTEEM (I)

- **Some people struggle to feel good about themselves in general. Others find that they value certain aspects of themselves (e.g., feeling confident about athletic abilities) while also having negative feelings about other aspects (e.g., feeling socially unskilled).**

HOW TO DEVELOP BETTER SELF-ESTEEM (2)

- Remember that it is natural to feel good about some aspects of your self and less positive about other areas.
- Recognize that developing and maintaining healthy self-esteem is a life-long process. It is your job to help yourself feel good about you over the course of your life. Assuming responsibility for yourself and how you feel is key to maintaining a strong sense of self worth.
- Think about your thinking. Are your self-appraisals realistic and accurate or overly negative and exaggerated?
- Learn to recognize negative predictions (“He’ll think I’m stupid.”), harsh self-criticisms (“I’m so boring.”), perfectionist self-statements (“I have to get this right.”) and beliefs about helplessness (“It won’t matter if I try.”).

HOW TO DEVELOP BETTER SELF-ESTEEM (3)

- Challenge negative self-talk. When you notice negative self-statements, try asking yourself questions such as: “Is this always true?”, “What are the odds of that really happening?”, “Could there be another possibility?”, “Is there another explanation?”, “Is this helpful?”, and “Would I talk to a friend this way?”.
- Generate positive self-statements that are encouraging and believable to you (e.g., “I’m not the strongest player on the team and probably never will be. But I give lots of effort during games and practices. I know I can get better over time.”). Reciting empty, overly positive affirmations is unlikely to be effective.
- Challenge avoidance behavior. Avoiding anxiety-provoking situations robs you of the opportunity to see that you can cope with challenges.
- Seek meaningful accomplishments. Taking risks, working hard, finding out what you are good at, and learning that you can bounce back from failures will help you feel proud of yourself.

HOW TO DEVELOP BETTER SELF-ESTEEM (4)

- Develop relationships with people who are affirming. Learn to share time with others, have fun, and communicate in a direct and respectful way. Learn to give and accept support.
- Live by your values and take responsibility for your actions. Acting with integrity will help you feel good about who you are.
- Respect and care for your belongings and space.
- Take care of your physical health. Eat well, exercise regularly, and get enough rest. Avoid excessive use of caffeine. Seek professional help if you have problems with substance dependency.
- Read about ways to build self-esteem.
- Give yourself credit for taking charge and helping yourself grow. Be patient, too. Lasting change usually takes time.

REMINDER TO: UTILIZE CUNY SPH COUNSELING & WELLNESS SERVICES OR MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- **SPH Counseling & Wellness:**

- Free counseling support for students living in NY state. We can offer referrals for students out of state.
- <https://sph.cuny.edu/students/student-services/student-wellness/counseling-and-wellness-services/>

- **Mental Health Resources:**

- For free 24/7 support or referrals there is CUNY Crisis, NYC WELL or the national 988 mental health hotline (info below)
 - **Crisis Text Line:** Text **CUNY** to 741741 for crisis counseling
 - NYC WELL: Text WELL to 65173; Chat: <https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>; Call 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355)
 - 988: Text to 988; Chat: <https://988lifeline.org/chat/>; Call 988
- For outside providers:
 - Search providers through your health insurance website
 - Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/>
 - Open Path Collective: <https://openpathcollective.org/>
 - Telehealth clinics: Mindful Care <https://www.mindful.care> and Lifestance Health <https://lifestance.com/>

REMINDER TO: PRACTICE POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS 😊

- *“I can make a positive difference in the world”*
- *“I don’t have to be perfect to be successful”*
- *“I am full of potential”*
- *“Making mistakes is normal and part of being human”*
- *“My opinion matters”*
- *“I will make today a great day”*
- *“Every day is a new opportunity to learn and grow”*