

December, 2015

Change Your Stinkin' Thinkin': 8 Ways to Replace the Negative

By Kelley Mulhern, DC

One of my favorite questions is: "If *I* talked to you the way *you* talk to you, would you like me?" The answer from most people is a resounding "No!" Let's face it, we all have voices in our heads. Those voices can either cheer us on to greatness or put us down and make us miserable. If you're like the majority of people, your voices spend more time doing the latter than the former.

In today's world, we're bombarded with negative information, unrealistic physical ideals and fear. It's no wonder our internal voices pick up on these things and reflect them back. It's so pervasive you probably don't realize just how negative your self-talk is. Try this exercise: Sit down in a quiet place for 10-20 minutes and try to write down every negative thought that enters your head. You may be surprised to find you can't keep up!



Typically, these patterns of self-talk do *not* serve us. In fact, often, they hold us back. How can you manage or control your self-talk? There are a variety of techniques and strategies you can use. The key is to find one that resonates for you and try it. Let's discuss a few:

1. Take Control

Decide who and what you'll allow into your head. What kind of books and magazines do you read? What movies or TV shows do you watch? Consider adding positive and affirming items to the mix. (*Tip:* News programs tend to be the most negative and upsetting shows you can watch on TV / follow on the Internet, often filled with drama, pain, grief and fear. If you can't give up watching the news completely, try not to watch it right after waking or just before bed, as those are times when our minds are most fertile.) Check out [Spiritual Cinema Circle](#) for thought-provoking, inspirational movies and short films.

2. Consider the Quality of Your Relationships

Research shows we become similar to the five people with whom we spend the most time. If you have a friend who's extremely negative, perhaps you should minimize the time you spend with them. If it's a spouse or other family member who weighs you down, encourage them to be more positive. (Just keep in mind that you aren't responsible for their emotions; they are. You can't force someone to change, but you can give them encouragement, resources or guidance.)

3. Listen In

You can't fix a problem you don't understand. Listen carefully to what your self-talk is saying. Write it down. Sometimes the act of putting it out in the open is enough to take away the impact. You may even find some of your self-talk contradicts your beliefs.

For example, you might believe in a generous and abundant universe, but your self-talk whispers, "Money doesn't grow on trees" or "I can't afford that." Once you know what you're telling yourself, you can take steps to neutralize the negativity.

4. Replace All Those Negative Thoughts

Strive to stop your negative self-talk in its tracks. As soon as you recognize a familiar negative self-talk pattern, replace it with a positive, powerful and truthful statement or an affirmation. (*Note:* Simply thinking, "No" or "That's not true," isn't enough.) This process is easier if you've already listened in, written down the negative thoughts and prepared your responses. The next time that negative thought pops into your head, you'll be ready!

5. Contradict the Negative

If the negative thought is simply untrue, remind yourself of specific examples that contradict the thought. For example, if your voices are muttering that your professional abilities are lacking, remember all the times you were able to help a patient when no one else could.

6. Admit Truths

Sometimes internal criticism provides insight and opportunities for change. In those cases, take steps to turn the criticism into an untruth. For example, if you tell yourself your professional skills are poor, do what it takes to increase your skills and certainty. Or if you're hard on yourself because you're overweight, begin a healthy routine to help shed excess pounds. Once the negative thought is no longer true, its power over you diminishes greatly.

7. Cultivate Optimism

Make an effort every day to focus on something positive, encouraging or affirming. Focus on thoughts and ideas that empower and energize. Seek out stories of love, courage, bravery and hope. Find examples of your *own* strength, compassion, competence and gratitude. The more you look, the more you'll find!

8. Know Yourself

Sometimes the negative self-talk is more than you can handle alone. In those situations, professional assistance may be helpful. Don't be afraid to ask for help if the end result will be a better understanding of yourself and a better capability to turn negative thoughts into positive ones.

With a little time and effort, most negative self-talk patterns can be disrupted and shifted to serve you better. Imagine your mind as a creative, fertile garden where the tiniest seed can be nourished into fruition. This is true for "seeds" of doubt, pessimism, anger, fear, jealousy and low self-esteem. It's equally true for "seeds" of love, respect, appreciation, optimism, and certainty. You *have* a choice. What will you choose to plant in the garden of your mind?

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