



Self-Talk

Building a Healthier Inner Dialogue

**Tracy Henderson
Counseling**

The words we use, the conversations we have, the stories we tell, and the narratives we repeat—shape the way we see ourselves and the world.

The brain acts on what it's told repeatedly and strongly regardless of whether it's true or false. Positive or negative, whatever you tell yourself becomes your reality

Your self-talk is not just background noise. It **forms the foundation of your beliefs, mindset, and behavior**. What you say to yourself about your experiences directly influences how you *feel*, *act*, and *interpret the world*.

Insights

What you say to yourself about yourself especially during challenging or uncertain moments powerfully impacts your perception and experience.

- **The Brain Believes Input:** The subconscious can't tell fact from fiction. It runs on what you feed it.
- **Replace Negative Self-Talk:** Don't just stop negative thoughts replacing them with intentional, productive ones.
- **Self-Talk is Habitual Programming:** Like furnishing an apartment, old programming (hand-me-downs) must be replaced with new, purposeful thoughts

SELF-TALK



The words and language we use, the conversations we have, the stories we tell, and the narratives that we repeat to ourselves.

The sum of your self-talk influences the beliefs you hold about yourself and the world you navigate.

What you say to yourself about yourself regarding situations tremendously influences what you experience.

Why Self-Talk Matters

The *theatre of our mind* is where much of our emotional experience plays out. When left unchecked, unproductive or negative self-talk can interfere with our performance, confidence, and overall well-being.

The good news: There are **many ways to practice more helpful and productive self-talk**. There's no single "right" method different strategies work for different people, and effectiveness often comes through practice.

Seek to understand what is the most productive form of self-talk for you? Is it **Habit Changing? Attitude Building? Motivational?** Or **Situational** – on the fly in the moment?

Learn & Reflect

Read:

- [What to Say When You Talk to Yourself](#)
- [Words Can Change Your Brain](#)
- [Chatter: The Voice In Our Head](#)

Listen:

- [Befriending Your Inner Voice](#)

Try:

Identifying what inner dialogue works for you is a practice. Be open to experimenting with a variety of strategies to discover several different forms of self-talk that support you.

Distanced Self-Talk <i>Name / You</i>	Imagine Advising a Friend	Broaden Perspective	Reframe as a Challenge	Reinterpret Somatic Response
Normalize the Experience	Mental Time Travel <i>Day / Week / Year</i>	Change the View <i>Visualize from Afar</i>	Write it Down	Adopt a Neutral 3 rd Party Perspective
Lucky Charm	Perform a Ritual	Embrace a Superstition	Emotion Focus <i>Care / Support</i>	Solution Focus <i>Move Forward / Gain Closure</i>
Contact & Touch <i>Hug / Hand</i>	Board of Advisors	Be the Placebo	Exposure to Green Space	Seek Awe Inspiring Experiences

Strategies

Perspective-Shifting

- Distanced Self-Talk: Speak to yourself using your name or second/third person to gain perspective and promote self-compassion. *Example:* “Jane, you’ve done hard things before. You can break this down and get through it.”
 - Link: [Distancing Self-Talk](#)
- *Bonus:* LeBron James has been noted for using 3rd-person self-talk before high-pressure games.
 - Link: [Benefits of Self-Talk](#)



TRY: "You can deliver the speech."

Versus: *"I don't like giving speeches."*

TRY: "Mary will finish the race today."

Versus: *"I don't have the energy to finish."*

TRY: "We will do it."

Versus: *"I'm not going to make it."*

Practice distancing by using 3rd person self-talk....

Positive Affirmations

- Use encouraging statements to build confidence and reinforce your belief in yourself.
 - **Examples:**
 - "I am strong and capable."
 - "I believe in my abilities."
 - "I can overcome challenges."

Instructional Self-Talk

- Focus on specific cues or directions to stay on task or improve performance.
- *"Talk to yourself instead of listening to yourself."*
 - **Examples:**
 - "Smooth swing."
 - "Keep your head down."
 - "Focus on your posture."

Motivational Self-Talk

- Boost drive and determination with energizing words during challenges.
 - **Examples:**
 - "Keep pushing."
 - "You've got this."
 - "Give it your all."

Calm & Relaxing Self-Talk

- Use soothing language to reduce stress and manage anxiety.

- **Examples:**
 - "Stay calm."
 - "Breathe deeply."
 - "Let it go and refocus."

Process-Oriented Self-Talk

- Shift focuses on the outcome to process. This helps manage pressure and enhances presence.
 - **Examples:**
 - "One step at a time."
 - "Focus on technique."
 - "Stay in the moment."

Challenge Framing Self-Talk

- Reframe stressors as growth opportunities instead of threats.
 - **Examples:**
 - "I thrive under pressure."
 - "This is a chance to grow."
 - "I've faced hard things before—I can do this again."

Self-Encouragement

- Speak to yourself as you would to a friend, especially in tough moments.
 - **Examples:**
 - "You're doing great."
 - "Keep going."
 - "You've got this."

Adaptive Self-Talk

- Adjust your internal dialogue based on what the moment requires, stay flexible and emotionally agile.
 - **Examples:**
 - "Refocus" when distracted.
 - "Let it pass" during emotional overwhelm.
 - "Stay positive" after a mistake.

Gratitude & Appreciation Self-Talk

- Practice self-talk that fosters perspective and appreciation.
 - **Examples:**
 - "I'm grateful for this opportunity."
 - "I appreciate my resilience."

- "I'm thankful for this moment of growth."

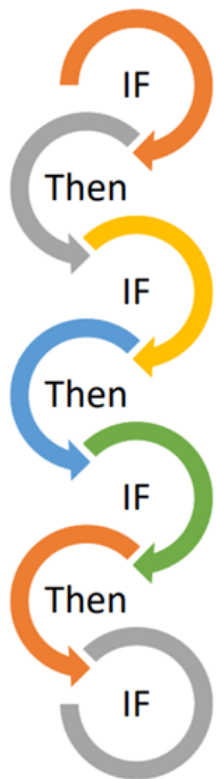
Effort & Improvement Focus

- Highlight effort and learning over outcomes to maintain resilience.
 - **Examples:**
 - "Keep improving every day."
 - "Mistakes help me grow."
 - "It's about progress, not perfection."

If Then

- The "if-then" strategy helps streamline self-talk by creating clear, pre-decided cues for effective action. By linking a specific situation ("if...") with a purposeful response ("then..."), it reduces hesitation, strengthens follow-through, and makes positive behaviors more automatic.

Strategies



Acknowledge it's a normal human experience. vs. Invalidate thoughts and beliefs exist.

Understand a negative bias exists - outwork it through effort vs. I'm a negative person

Mental filtering focuses recall on moments of success and growth experiences.

Restructure or reframe experiences into productive interpretations and understanding.

Statements of affirmation can influence how you speak to yourself.

Develop "kind" words/language about yourself as you reflect upon the day, week, etc.

Rationalizing previous experiences can be effective when used productively for growth.

Understand your explanatory style and how it influences your self-talk.

Use physical cues to focus your thoughts on how you want to show up.

Implement routine and process to provide self-talk guardrails. I.e, See & Hear

Begin a practice of daily self recognition to acknowledge "self-achievement."

Take time to express gratitude towards self and others.

Give permission to occasionally silence the self-talk by simply saying - "STOP IT!"

Quick Hits

Acknowledge the Human Experience

- Accept that everyone has unproductive or negative thoughts from time to time.
- Practice **acknowledgment** instead of invalidation.
 - *“It’s okay that I feel this—it’s part of being human.”*

Understand and Outwork the Negative Bias

- The brain has a natural **negativity bias**. That doesn’t make you a “negative person.”
- With consistent effort, you can rewire your response to focus on possibility and growth.

Use Mental Filtering for Growth

- Intentionally recall moments of **success, progress, and growth**—not just setbacks.
- Celebrating wins, no matter how small.

Reframe and Restructure Experiences

- Shift perspective by creating more **productive and compassionate interpretations** of events
 - *Instead of: “I failed.” Try: “I learned something valuable.”*

Practice Affirmations

- Speak positively to yourself with statements that support your growth.
 - *“I am learning,” “I am resilient,” “I am doing my best.”*

Use Kind Language When Reflecting

- As you reflect on your day or week, speak to yourself with **compassion**.
 - *“I handled a lot today and I’m proud of how I showed up.”*

Rationalize for Growth, Not Excuse

- Revisit previous experiences to **gain clarity or insight**, not to excuse patterns.
- Ask: *“What did I learn?”* instead of *“Why did I mess that up again?”*

Understand Your Explanatory Style

- Pay attention to how you explain events to yourself. Are you blaming, catastrophizing, or generalizing?

- Shift toward **more balanced, empowering explanations**.

Use Physical Cues to Ground Your Mindset

- Use objects or movements (e.g., bracelet, breath, posture) to **center your thoughts** on how you want to show up.

Implement Routine as a Guardrail

- Create **routines and rituals** that guide your self-talk:
 - Morning affirmations, visualization, or journaling.
- Reflective “See & Hear” practice: *What do I want to see in myself today? What do I want to hear internally?*

Practice Daily Self-Recognition

- Acknowledge at least one way you showed up for yourself each day.
 - *“I had a hard conversation.”*
 - *“I stayed calm when I wanted to react.”*

Express Gratitude—Toward Yourself and Others

- Gratitude helps shift focus from scarcity or criticism to **abundance and appreciation**.
 - *“I’m grateful for my effort.”*
 - *“I appreciate the support I received.”*

Give Yourself Permission to Say “Stop”

- When unproductive thoughts spiral, use a **mental cue** like:
 - *“Stop it.”*
 - *“This isn’t helpful right now.”*

Putting It Into Practice

- Pick 2–3 strategies that resonate.
- Try using them in real-time situations (work, conflict, stress, performance).
- Reflect weekly: *What worked? What felt authentic? What could be refined?*