

SELF-COUNSELLING TOOLS

SELF-TALK & JOURNALING

When undergoing a stressful life event or a personal transition, vulnerability to negative self-talk increases. The key is to recognize flawed self-talk and replace the errors with more rational and appropriate thinking. Here are some examples of flawed thinking. **See if you can interrupt your thoughts if they go in these directions.**

- **All-or-nothing thinking**- seeing things in black-or-white categories. If a situation is anything less than perfect, you see it as a total failure. Use of always or never is a clue. An extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking is **labelling/name calling** - instead of saying, *I made a mistake*, attaching a negative label to yourself, *I'm a loser*.
- **Filtering out the positive**- rejecting positive experiences, insisting they do not count, or dwelling only on criticism and ignoring praise. If you do a good job, you tell yourself that anyone could have done as well or that it was luck.
- **Jumping to conclusions**- interpreting things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion. For example, **mind-reading**, where you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and **fortune-telling**, where you assume and predict that things will turn out badly.
- **Should statements**- telling yourself that things should be the way you hoped or expected them to be. Many people try to motivate themselves with shoulds and **should nots**, as if they had to be punished before they could be expected to do anything.



How Do I Use My Self-Talk

Positive self-talk can have a powerful impact on your emotional well-being and motivation. It is like **self-coaching**. It can help you control your moods, repeat your successes, minimize feelings of discouragement, and give you the confidence to use your talents to the fullest.

Remember your positive traits/skills and refer to them in situations where your thoughts are negative. For example, if you are interviewing for a job or promotion, review your previous successes in your mind - *I have done this before and I did alright. Even if I do not get the job I can still do a good interview.* Correct your flawed self-talk by constructing challenging arguments to your erroneous assumptions and beliefs - *I'm not stupid after all I have done well on many tests, jobs, and skills.*

Flawed self-talk often occurs when you are feeling down on yourself or depressed, when you are least able to be rational and objective. At these times, adopt the perspective of someone on your side, a best friend or a counsellor. Using that perspective, come up with accurate self-talk that puts you in a new and positive direction.

**The real power of self-talk lies in how it changes behaviour.
The ultimate purpose of examining your self-talk is to change actions that are self-defeating.
While thinking correctly does alter negative moods, lasting change comes only with behaviour.**

To find behaviour that goes with your self-talk, it is useful to think of goals and steps to reach them. For example, without wallowing in negative self-pity *I'm such a fat pig* nor without unrealistic goals *I can look like those models*, you can frame the problem positively and have a clear feasible goal. *I am beautiful just the way I am. I would like to weigh less. If I stick to an exercise and meal plan, I can lose ten pounds within two months.*

Self-talk is not just wishful thinking. It is an effective, common sense method of nurturing, drawing out and using your own talents, skills, and attributes. And whether you succeed or not at a particular goal, effective self-talk can help you feel good as you adjust and prepare for the next challenge.

Journaling or Therapeutic Writing

Research has shown that journal writing about difficulties or obstacles in your life can help you work through emotional or psychological pain more quickly. Individuals who express their feelings and difficulties on paper are better able to confront their negative feelings and adopt a more positive attitude. Not only can the process of journal writing be very therapeutic in itself, it is also helpful in combination with counselling.

How To Start Journaling

- **Forget about the rules of writing.** There are no mistakes. You can write ungrammatically, misspell, exaggerate, curse, pray or brag.
- **Write about your present situation.** Focus on a feeling, an image or a description. *What are you feeling, thinking or experiencing? What do you want? What do you fear? What is changing?*
- **Write spontaneously without judging yourself.** Say whatever you need to say without criticizing or censoring. The depth and openness with which you can express yourself will allow emotional release.
- **Enhance your journal.** Include photographs, clippings, quotes, poetry, drawings or whatever gives meaning to your life at the time.

Journaling Suggestions For Dealing With Difficult Emotions

- **Loss & grief** Expressing the depth of your sadness can be difficult. By writing down your thoughts, images and feelings you acknowledge the importance of the person (or experience) over which you are grieving. Writing a letter to or dialoguing with the person in your journal can also be helpful.
- **Fear & anger** Rehearsing an encounter in your journal can prepare you for a difficult situation. After writing down and exploring the potentially difficult encounter, creatively brainstorm some possible outcomes or solutions. You can subtly reprogram your response so that a new behaviour (for example, an assertive one) will be more within your reach when necessary.
- **Low self esteem** Decrease stress and improve your self-esteem by taking the time to enjoy your writing. You can make simple lists to acknowledge - *what you have done (instead of a **To Do** list), accomplishments and successes in your life, people you care about or those who care about you, qualities you admire in someone you respect and want to develop in yourself, and goals/dreams of the future.*

Many counsellors encourage journal writing as a way to acknowledge the process, movement or journey of our lives. Experiment with this form of self counsel to decide what works for you.

For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com