

## Self-Talk

Self-talk, or the act of talking to ourselves, either silently or aloud, is a constant, common, and often unnoticed part of our lives. Self-talk is significant because our thoughts cause feelings and trigger behavior. It also has substantial impacts on our self-esteem, attitude, focus, interpretation of events, expectations, and how we connect our actions to consequences.<sup>1</sup> Negative self-talk, or the “inner critic,” can increase stress, depression, and the likelihood for behaving in ways that are not kind or helpful to ourselves. It also impedes our ability to handle stressful situations and lowers self-esteem and motivation.<sup>2</sup> Thankfully, there are small practices you can do to cultivate a practice of positive self-talk. Positive self-talk improves emotion and behavior regulation, self-esteem, focus, and performance on tasks. It also reduces depression.<sup>3,4</sup>

## Cultivating Positive Self-Talk

Here are some tips on cultivating positive self-talk for young people:

### Model positive self-talk

Speak kindly about your actions and efforts in front of participants. Avoid unkind remarks about your appearance or mistakes you make.

### Tune into the ways in which your children and youth talk about themselves.

Really listen in for opportunities to help reframe negative self-talk, especially when young people are frustrated or struggling

### Encourage children or youth to reframe negative statements into positive ones.

Example: “I only did well on the test because I was lucky.”

Response: “Lucky? I bet there’s more than just luck that went into you doing well on that test. What are some things you did that helped you do well?”

### Activity Suggestion<sup>3</sup>

Provide each participant with an outline of a six-petaled flower. Ask them to write one positive thing about themselves on each petal. Positive items could include accomplishments, talents, or attributes. Encourage them to identify specific things they like about themselves. Ask follow-up questions if participants are using vague language or platitudes like “I’m a good student.” Ask, “What makes you a good student?”

Or, you can give each participant a rock on which to write one positive thing about themselves. Then, in addition to identifying positives about themselves, they can keep the rock as a reminder and self-esteem booster, which can be especially useful when feeling down.

### Tips in Action!

[Watch](#) more on cultivating positive self-talk from Pacific Ballroom Dance.

Want more two-minute tips?

<https://cultivatelearning.uw.edu/expanded-learning-opportunities/>

There you will find the latest tips, and an archive of past tips.

<sup>1</sup> Smith, S. (1993). Positive self-talk. *Nursing* 23(3), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Kross, E., Bruehlman-Senecal, E., Park, J., Burson, A., Dougherty, A., Shablack, H., & Ayduk, O. (2014). Self-talk as a regulatory mechanism: How you do it matters. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(2), 304-324. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035173>

<sup>3</sup> Tod, D., Hardy, J., & Oliver, E. (2011). Effects of self-talk: A systematic review. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 33(5), 666-687.

<sup>4</sup> Burnett, P.C. (1994). Self-talk in upper elementary school children: Its relationship with irrational beliefs, self-esteem, and depression. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 12, 181-188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02354595>

<sup>5</sup> Knowles, R. (1981). [Dealing with feelings: Positive self-talk](#). *The American Journal of Nursing*, 81(3), 535-535.