



Dr. Tracy's Counseling Services

20 years of experience

Q: Other people seem to have more self-confidence than I do. How do I feel better about myself?

A: One of the best ways to improve your self-esteem is to change how you talk to yourself. Think about your own soundtrack in your head and what it most often sounds like. Is it condemning, encouraging or neutral? You can test, challenge and change your self-talk.

Correcting your self-talk means changing the unhelpful aspects of your own inner voices. Doing this enables you to feel better about yourself and helps you to respond to situations in a more positive way. Learning to dispute negative thoughts takes time and practice. You may need to have other people give you feedback as well. You may call yourself names or refer to yourself as an "idiot" when you make simple mistakes and not even realize it.

There are certain kinds of self-talk that you should watch out for, such as self-limiting talk. When we are self-limiting we may say things like, "I'm getting so fat" or "I know I am going to fail the test." Self-limiting talk creates a self-fulfilling prophecy because we stop looking for solutions and assume defeat. Instead of looking at our options, we tell ourselves that we can't handle daily challenges.

Another type of self-talk is jumping to conclusions. When we experience an uncomfortable situation, we make interpretations rather than simply stating the facts. For example, we'll say "When I talked to my boss today, I made a fool out of myself" or "If I go to the gym, everyone will stare at me." We assume the worst in situations and can make up our own facts that may be based in fiction.

Some of our thoughts are planted by external sources such as our parents. Sometimes, these well-meaning voices have clear expectations of us that have become a part of our own self-talk. One sign of this form of negative self-talk is when we begin to hear ourselves say, "You really shouldn't..." or "You ought to...". When we act out others' thoughts, we may be acting in guilt rather than desire.

Understanding our own self-talk can change our attitudes about ourselves and others. We have control over our own attitudes and our responses to circumstances. Working with a counselor is a useful option to change your self-talk and improve your self-esteem.

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The goal of counseling is to increase the zest and enthusiasm for living and to strengthen a person's ability to make healthy choices.

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