

Who Do You Think You Are?

"HEY YOU, YOU'RE TALKING TO YOURSELF!"

Our self-esteem is a direct result of our *self-talk*. We all engage in self-talk, which is the process of talking to ourselves about ourselves, our world, our relationships. If our self-talk is accurate and in touch with reality, we feel well and function effectively; we have a positive self-esteem. Our relationships are satisfying and enjoyable. However, if what we tell ourselves is untrue, irrational, overly critically, we have problems; we have a low self-esteem. Our problems that result may be quite diverse, including depression, anger, anxiety, difficulty concentrating and completing work, etc.

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK – WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Negative self-talk comes from a variety of sources, including positive and negative messages from your significant others such as parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and other authority figures. You took in many of these messages when you were quite young and carry them with you into adulthood.

As very young children, even as infants, we take in everything that we hear and see around us. (Kind of like a sponge!) And because we are so young, we can't necessarily determine the true intent of the messages we are getting. We may distort or misperceive the messages. We may not understand that negative messages from adults have more to do with their pain than our "badness".

So, as you soaked up these messages, they may have had a positive or negative effect on you - depending on how you interpreted (or misinterpreted) the messages. The problem occurs when you take in messages and, accurate or not, they stay stuck in your mind. Unlike a sponge, you don't always squeeze the misperceptions out. So, you may grow up believing negative things about yourself that are no longer true or were never true in the first place!

YOUR RESIDENT CRITIC AND BOOSTER

Although you may not always be consciously aware of it, you live with a resident critic. It's that critical voice inside your head that is always there, judging you and even attacking you. Your Critic can be quite harsh, blaming you when things go wrong, pushing you to impossible standards of perfection, calling you names, telling you what you "should" or "must" do. He or she takes your self-esteem and puts it through a blender.

But, accompanying that critic is your Booster, your healthy voice. He/she may be soft-spoken and you may not pay attention to it very often. But he/she is there, viewing your world realistically. Your Booster supports you, encourages you, allows you to make mistakes without telling you it is the end of the world.

"You don't have to hang out with enemies even if they are within yourself."

Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.

Developing a healthy self-esteem involves challenging your Critic, questioning the negative messages and irrational beliefs he/she constantly uses. You must develop your healthy inner voice, your Booster, so that you can replace negative messages with positive ones and replace irrational beliefs with more realistic ones.

COMMON IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

1. It is a dire necessity to be loved and approved of by my significant others.
2. I should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects.
3. Some people are bad, wicked, or vile and should (or must be) punished.
4. If things do not go (or stay) the way I very much want them to, it would be awful.
5. Unhappiness is externally caused and I cannot control it (unless I control the other person).
6. One should remain upset or worried if faced with difficulties or problems.
7. It is easier to avoid responsibility and difficulties than to face them.
8. I have a right to be dependent and people (or someone) should be strong enough to rely on (or take care of me).



9. My early childhood experiences must continue to control me and determine my emotions and behavior.
10. I should become upset over my and other peoples' problems or behavior.
11. There is invariably one right, precise, and perfect solution and it would be terrible if this perfect solution is not found.
12. The world (and especially other people) should be fair and justice (or mercy) must triumph.

HOW TO CHANGE A BELIEF

1. You recognize what the belief is and that you can change it.
2. You stop acting or thinking on the basis of the old belief.
3. You substitute a new, rational, and more personally meaningful belief for the old one.
4. You act in light of the new belief.
5. You continue to behave in the rational new way, even though it feels phony to act this new way. That will cause the new belief to become real and a part of your "natural" behavior (if you persist).