**How You Speak to Yourself**

Join us for an episode where we discuss various common ways that we talk to ourselves and explore why we think this way. In this episode we will challenge those negative ways that we talk to ourselves and push you to think from a new perspective. To do just that, this episode we provide you with helpful tips and skills to help you build and maintain a positive line of communication with yourself utilizing your new-found perspective(s).

**Internal Monologue…** Everyone has one! Also known as our inner voice, internal speech, conscious, etc. on a semi-constant and conscious sometimes semi-conscious level. We think about things as a conversation with oneself and “hear” ourselves talking in our own head without actually speaking or sounds being present.

**Why do we have it?**

Thought to be partially controlled by a type of brain signal called corollary discharge. It is supposed to help us distinguish differences between various types of sensory experiences whether they are created internally or externally, and is particularly relevant to how we process hearing speech (Cherney 2020). This is why our voice sounds different to us when it is internal, versus speaking out loud, or recorded.

Helps us to organize our thoughts and/or problem solve when we cannot speak out loud. However, sometimes we get into patterns of self-criticism. This negative self-talk can influence our overall moods and/or self-esteem (Cherney 2020). Cognitive Distortions play a huge role in negative self-talk as well.

**Just keep these next couple things in mind (Wignall (2018):**

* There is a lot of overlapping that happens between different cognitive distortions, they are outlined, but they are not as cut and dry as you may think, but they give you a general pattern label to help you explain the reality of our self-talk
* Negative self-talk is not an intellectual problem… It is a habit in the way that we interact with ourselves. It is something to be understood, aware of, and corrected if necessary. And it is possible, but we have to be self-aware and regulate our thoughts so that we can catch them.

**10 Types of Cognitive Distortions and Negative Self-Talk Examples (Wignall (2018):**

1. **Mind-Reading** - Assuming that we understand what other people are thinking without any real evidence. Imagining what is going on in someone else’s head.
2. **Overgeneralization** – Habit of telling ourselves that a negative event is bound to continue happening in the future. Making predictions about the future based on one negative isolated piece of evidence from the present moment.
3. **Magnification** – Exaggerating our errors and/or flaws. Also known as catastrophizing when small events turn into disasters in our minds.
4. **Minimization** – Minimizing or dismissing our strengths and positive qualities. Mirror image of magnification. Often keeps us in a cycle of inferiority, where we never allow ourselves to benefit or be boosted by our positive qualities or accomplishments.
5. **Emotional Reasoning** – Habit of making decisions based on how we feel rather than what we value. Depression and procrastination are common results of this because we use our emotions and feelings as evidence of what we should or should not do. When we do this, we run away from discomfort rather than embracing it and running toward the things that we really value.
6. **Black & White Thinking** – The tendency to evaluate things exclusively in terms of extreme categories. Most common when we are evaluating our personal qualities and characteristics. We set expectations for ourselves that are exaggerated, we never meet them and then we feel bad about ourselves.
7. **Personalization** – Assuming excessive amounts of responsibility, especially for things that are either mostly or entirely outside of your control. An exaggerated sense of responsibility leading to excessive attempts at control, which can influence chronic stress and anxiety.
8. **Fortune Telling** – Mental habit of predicting what will happen based on little or no real evidence. “Going with” the worst-case scenario when your mind throws a negative outcome at you. Often leads to a state of hyperarousal and anxiety.
9. **Labeling** – Habit of describing ourselves or others in one extreme way, usually negatively. An inaccurate oversimplification. Name-calling.
10. **Should Statements** – Type of self-talk that we use to try and motivate ourselves by telling ourselves what we should and should not do. Setting up false expectations that can lead to chronic frustration, anxiety, and resentment.

**Justifying our negative self-talk and why they are WRONG (Winch 2019):**

1. **“I’m just being honest with myself.” –** It’s important for us to be honest with ourselves, but putting yourself down actually impairs your ability to do that and learn from the necessary lessons that you could interpret from different experiences.
2. **“It will prevent me from having an inflated ego.**” – NOT A RISK FACTOR… Because there is a huge difference between people with inflated egos (Go around thinking everyone else is an idiot) and people who are overly self-critical people (Go around thinking they are an idiot).
3. **“It will prepare me for future disappointment or hurt.**” – QUITE THE OPPOSITE… You are undercutting your confidence, supersizing your insecurities, and sabotaging your motivation and determination. You end up setting yourself to make more mistakes in the end with this mindset.
4. **“It’s an accurate reflection of who I am as a person.**” – Whatever happened… Whatever you did, is just that…. It is what you did, how you acted… Not a reflection of you, who you are, or your essence.
5. **“I deserve it.**” – If a friend was in the same situation that you are currently in, would your response to them be the same? Of course not! You deserve support and compassion just as much as any other person, loved one, friend, etc. This is called self-compassion.

**How to change your negative self-talk (Wignall 2018):**

1. **Look for specific cognitive distortions in other people’s speech** – Recognizing negative self-talk in others can sometimes make it easier to recognize these patterns in our own thinking and the way that we talk to ourselves.
2. **Change your (inner) tone of voice** – Just like how *the way* that someone says something can affect how we interpret information even more so than *what* they say. Same thing applies to the way that we talk to ourselves, so we have to be attentive of not only what we say, but the way that we say it to ourselves.
3. **Validate your feelings instead of analyzing them** – When we feel discomfort or pain from an emotion, our gut reaction is to try to start talking ourselves through them and figure out what they mean… Instead, try to take a step back and simply observe, notice, and acknowledge these feelings. When we instantly rush in to “fix” or “solve” our feelings with this self-talk, we train our brain to think of these feelings as problems. Mindfulness can help you get better at this.
4. **Be intentional, not habitual with your self-criticism** – Self-criticism is not always a bad thing, it can help us to grow and hold ourselves to a high standard. However, it is much more likely for self-criticism to be a positive thing if it is done productively, intentionally, and deliberately rather than as a reaction. Instead of instantly passing judgments, try to schedule a time to reflect on your mistakes.
5. **Be open to trying therapy** – Often the most powerful and efficient way to work on problems of self-talk. There are tons of different types of therapy that could be utilized. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has dozens of strategies, techniques, and skills that have proven to be successful to help identify and modify habits of thought and behavior that continues to interfere with our lives. A therapist can provide structure, accountability, clarification, and encouragement.

**Art exercise to change perspective and encourage creativity:**

* **Step One** – Create a work of art with whatever medium you choose to use as long as it is on a piece of paper/posterboard. This work of art should be a portrayal of a specific moment, situation, event, etc. that causes you emotional grief. The portrayal could be a specific object, a scene, setting, anything that resembles your emotional grief. If there are any negative thoughts, do not engage in them. Acknowledge that you had a negative thought and continue to work on your masterpiece. Give yourself a time limit of 1 hour to complete it. No more!
* **Step Two** – Once your work of art is finished, rip your masterpiece up into at least 16 different pieces. While you are ripping it, REALLY feel all of the emotions that you feel are most relevant to your experience. If you get emotional, it is okay, don’t fight it, keep ripping until you feel that you have reached a release point. Do not go any smaller than 1” x 1” ripped pieces. Once you are done ripping, set a timer for an hour and rearrange your ripped pieces into a new masterpiece via a collage.

**Reference List**

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