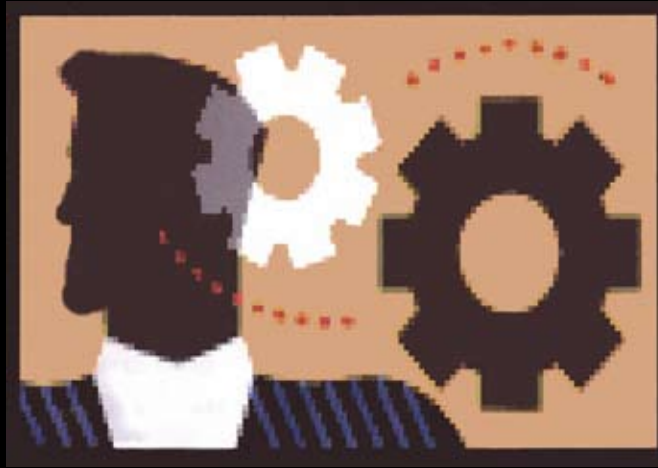


Challenging negative self-talk ...

Even though you can't always control the situation you're in, you can change the way you think about it

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THE PROBLEM with self-talk is that it always feels true. Even though your thoughts might often be biased or incorrect, you tend to assume that they're facts when they're actually perceptions.

Self-talk is often skewed towards the negative, and sometimes it's just plain wrong. If you are experiencing depression, it is particularly likely that you interpret things negatively. That's why it's useful to keep an eye on the things you tell yourself, and challenge some of the negative aspects of your thinking.

You can test, challenge and change your self-talk. You can change some of the negative aspects of your thinking by challenging the irrational parts and replacing them with more reasonable thoughts. With practice, you can learn to notice your own negative self-talk as it happens, and consciously choose to think about the situation in a more realistic and helpful way.

dispute the self-talk

Disputing your self-talk means challenging the negative or unhelpful aspects. Doing this enables you to feel better and to respond to situations in a more helpful way.

Learning to dispute negative thoughts might take time and practice, but is worth the effort! Once you start looking at it you'll probably be surprised how much of your thinking is inaccurate, exaggerated, or focused on the negatives of the situation. Whenever you find yourself feeling depressed, angry, anxious or upset, use this as your

signal to stop and become aware of your thoughts. Use your feelings as your cue to reflect on your thinking.

A good way to test the accuracy of your perceptions might be to ask yourself some challenging questions. These questions will help you to check out your self-talk, to see whether your current view is reasonable. This will also help you discover other ways of thinking about your situation.

challenging questions

There are four main types of challenging questions to ask yourself:

1. reality testing

- What is my evidence for and against my thinking?
- Are my thoughts factual, or are they just my interpretations?
- Am I jumping to negative conclusions?
- How can I find out if my thoughts are actually true?

2. alternative explanations

- Are there any other ways that I could look at this situation?
- What else could this mean?
- If I were being positive, how would I perceive this situation?

3. putting it in perspective

- Is this situation as bad as I am making out?
- What is the worst thing that could happen? How likely is it?
- What is the best that can happen?
- What is most likely to happen?
- Is there anything good about this situation?
- Will this matter in 5 years time?

When you feel anxious, depressed or stressed-out your self-talk is likely to become extreme—you'll be more likely to expect the worst and focus on the most negative aspects of your situation. So, it's helpful to try and put things into their proper perspective.

4. goal-directed thinking

- Is thinking this way helping me to feel good or to achieve my goals?
- What can I do that will help me solve the problem?
- Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me do it better next time?

Recognising that your current way of thinking might be self-defeating (ie. it doesn't make you feel good or help you to get what you want) can sometimes motivate you to look at things from a different perspective.

For more tips on ways to challenge negative or faulty thinking, check out the common thinking errors fact sheet. Changing the way you think about things may not be easy at first, but with time and practice, you will get better. Give it a go—it's worth the effort!

Acknowledgement: This fact sheet comes from: *Taking Charge! A Guide for Teenagers: Practical Ways to Overcome Stress, Hassles and Upsetting Emotions*. By: Dr Sarah Edelman and Louise Rémond. Foundation for Life Sciences (2005) www.flis.org.au

Check out Reach Out Central (ROC) www.roc.reachout.com.au for scenarios where you have a choice about how you can interpret your situation and you can see what effect that may have on your mood and the way people react. Try-out replacing negative thoughts with positive ones, and watch your mood metre climb!