

THE POWER OF SELF-TALK: What You Think Is Who You Are; What You Think Is Who You Will Become

Almost every moment of your conscious life, you are engaging in self-talk, which is also called “automatic thoughts.” This is your internal thinking process. It is just like a continual dialogue with yourself. These are the words, phrases, and statements that you use to describe and interpret your world. Self-talk literally creates your reality. You are what you think and you become what you think. Self-talk runs through your head just like a tape recording that you turn on and off depending on what is happening around you. However, most people are not even aware of their self-talk unless and until they slow down and really make a concerted effort to tune into it.

If your self-talk is accurate and pretty much in touch with reality, you tend to function relatively well and feel okay about yourself in your daily living. However, if your self-talk is negative, shaming, and unrealistic, you’ll end up experiencing anxiety, tension, and emotional distress. Negative self-talk can be generated and occur at any point in your life but it often relates to early childhood experiences which shaped how you look at and think about the world. This is especially true if the tape recording in your head that forms the basis for your self-talk is filled with shaming and hurtful messages you received as a child from important people like your parents, siblings, peers, or teachers.

Words are powerful. This includes the words said by others to you in the past and present, words you have said to yourself in the past and the present, and words you say to others currently. If you think about it, words are actually a lot like the seeds that gardeners plant in the ground. Positive, nurturing, and caring words are like healthy seeds that create a bountiful and nourishing harvest of fruits, vegetables, and flowers that grow from real seeds. These kinds of words lead to self-esteem, self-respect, and confidence and trust in ourselves and others. Nurturing and positive words allow the human spirit to heal, grow, and soar.

But the opposite is also true. Negative, hurtful, and demeaning words are like toxic seeds and lead only to a harvest of shriveled, dying, and lifeless plants. These kinds of words can wound us and others and create depression, anxiety, anger, and shame in ourselves and those around us. Harsh, punishing, and disrespectful words kill the human spirit.

In fact, in the present, we often think and use the very same words and phrases that were said to us by others from our past. If these messages were negative, you literally start judging and shaming yourself and others today in the same way that other people did it to you at an earlier time in your life. Negative self-talk can be divided into three general types which correspond to the categories in your *Escalation Prevention Plan*:

- **NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND WORRIES:**

These are the general sorts of things that you think, brood, or “stew” about from the past or in the present until you become tense, anxious, depressed, angry, or shameful. Examples of this might be worrying that your boss doesn’t think that you’re doing a very good job, “stewing” about your partner’s spending habits or not having enough money to pay your bills, or brooding about your child’s poor performance in school.

- **NEGATIVE REHEARSAL:**

This is when you visualize, plan for, or anticipate a negative outcome in the future even before a situation has occurred. For example, this could include setting up an angry confrontation with a friend even when it might not be necessary, getting a phone message from your partner and believing that she must be upset with you about something, or thinking ahead to a family gathering and worrying about how it will go.

- **SPECIFIC NEGATIVE SELF-TALK:**

This includes the very personal and unique words, phrases, and labels that you tend to think to yourself about yourself and others. These messages are critical, cynical, punishing, shaming, and judgmental. For instance, you might say to yourself, “*God, am I stupid!*” or you might think about someone else, “*She’s really a loser!*” or “*He is such a jerk!*”

“VICTIM THINKING”

At the heart of all negative self-talk is a very basic and mistaken assumption that your life circumstances are created by others and by the random events in your life. This often includes the cynical notion that others are incompetent, inconsiderate, and “out to get you.” This assumption frequently gets translated into a belief that you have no control over your reactions and responses in your day-to-day living and to what is happening in your life. In addition, when things don’t happen as you want or anticipate, you end up believing that this as a undeniable sign that people really don’t care about you and that you are somehow defective and unlovable. Examples of this process would include saying things to yourself like “*She really ‘pushes my buttons,’*” “*He really ‘messed me over,’*” or “*That really brought me down.*” This kind of thinking is a “setup” for becoming angry and controlling. It can also contribute to feeling anxious, depressed and to a whole host of other emotional difficulties.

If you think about it, this thought process may actually mirror your position as a child where there truly might have been a lot of negative and shaming things said and done to you and you truly were a victim. At that point, you didn’t have the thinking skills or the personal power to view things independently or in a more realistic way. You also didn’t have the ability to actually change your life circumstances at that point and you counted on your parents and other important people to care for you and provide a safe place for you to learn how to be human.

If your parents or others were disrespectful, shaming, or hurtful with you or those around you, they didn’t adequately fulfill these roles and you received inaccurate and painful messages about your

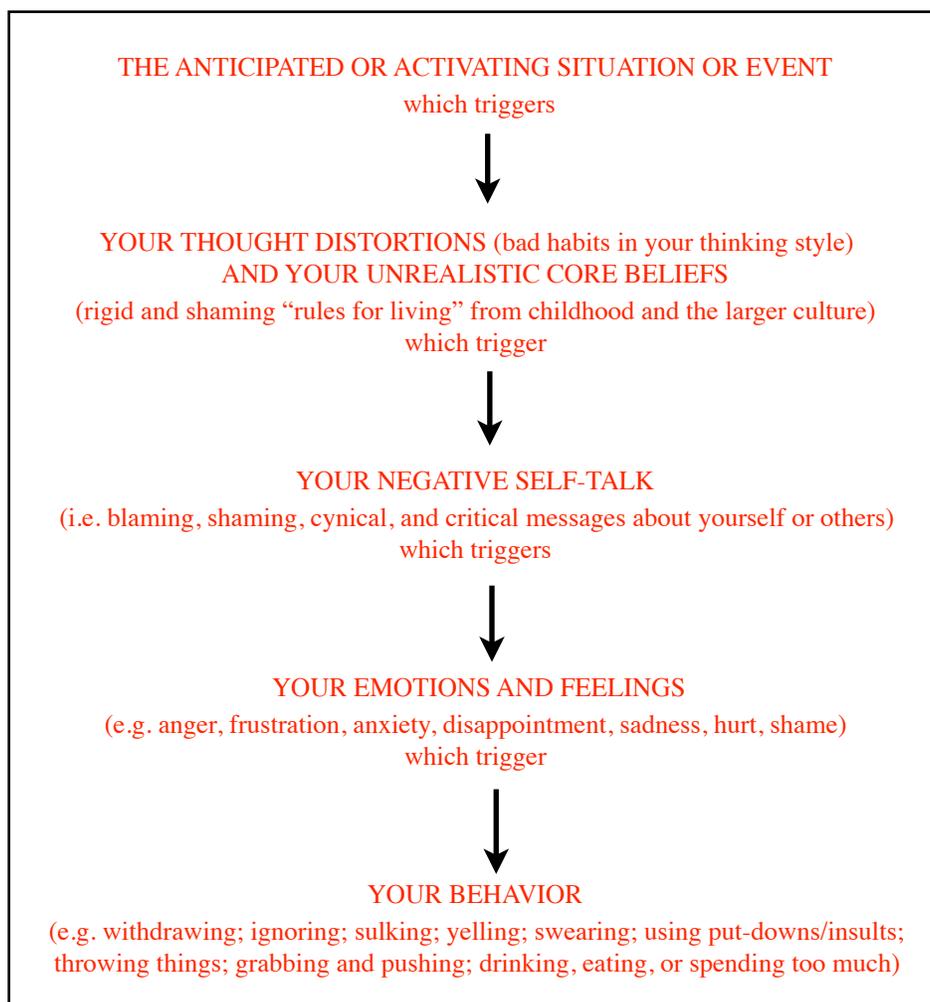
relationships with other people and about the world and your place in it. Sadly, rather than reject the shamers, which you did not have the ability to do if you were literally going to survive, you probably accepted and believed their false messages about you and the world. If their messages were judgmental, negative, and shaming, you ended up believing the lies they told you that came out of the problems and issues they were not adequately addressing within themselves at that time.

As an adult, however, you have a great many more options about how you view yourself and the world around you. In reality, as an adult, little is really ever done to you. Things happen in your life. Most of them have little to do with you and they are issues over which you often may have very little control. An example of this is a partner who comes home from work irritable and crabby. You can personalize your partner's feelings and begin to assume that your partner is angry with you and completely dissatisfied with your relationship. Or you can take a step back and understand that he or she may be tired from a long day, worried about a project at work, angry about a conflict with a boss or coworker, or frustrated about the traffic they experienced on the drive home. The only way to truly find out what is going on in that other person's reality is to sit down with them at a later point (when they are less irritable) and ask.

The point of this scenario is that you do not need to go with the negative assumption even if, as a child, you were berated and put down when one of your parents came home angry. You actually do have the ability to assert more control over your perceptions and reactions in the present as an adult. You do not need to live by the childhood "script" that you were given (more about this "life script" in Unit III). We all have the ability to make choices once we become aware that there are choices to be made. This means becoming a proactive rather than simply a reactive player in your life.

TAKING YOURSELF OUT OF THE VICTIM ROLE

Now, let's think about an alternative way to view your current life. First, let's say that events and situations occur around you. You experience those events and you engage in your own particular negative self-talk as a result of your **THOUGHT DISTORTIONS AND UNREALISTIC CORE BELIEFS**. These will be discussed in greater detail below. But, essentially, thought distortions are bad habits in your thinking style that you use, again and again, to interpret what happens around you in an unrealistic or unhelpful way. Unrealistic core beliefs are the set of "rules for living" that arise from the messages you received from your family or from the culture-at-large (e.g. movies, religion, advertising) about who you are and what the world around you is supposed to be. These literally become the **"filters"** through which information in the present comes into your life. They create your way of looking at the world around you and determine your reactions to it. Most of the time, however, you're not even aware of this internal self-talk process because you don't slow down enough to even notice it. Thus, you tend to really believe that your feelings have literally been created and caused by someone or something outside yourself. Below is a schematic representation of how negative self-talk actually occurs:



As noted previously, outside events and other people really do not have the power to “cause” your emotions or “make” you feel a certain way. That isn’t to say that they can’t “trigger” your feelings and your reactions. However, in reality, the critical variable in determining how you will feel about something going on in your life is your own thought process (your self-talk) that arises from your thought distortions and unrealistic core beliefs (and the life experiences that created them). In order to start changing how you feel, you need to start slowing your internal self-talk process so that you can begin to realize that **YOU DO HAVE CHOICES** about how you perceive or interpret any situation that occurs around you. All you need to do is recognize that these choices exist and put them into action.

It is important to understand that the goal in identifying your negative self-talk is not to try to eliminate all the “negative” or “uncomfortable” emotions in your life. You will never be able to do this. Rather, by being more aware of your self-talk in your ongoing life, you can actively question your perceptions and interpretations. This then opens up the possibility of intervening in the self-talk by reframing it in a more positive way if you wish to do so. This reframing process can actually change how you end up feeling and behaving in a particular situation.

This way of approaching life is very different from what you had the ability to do as a child when your self-talk was first developed. Because you often couldn’t understand, much less reframe, the

negative messages you received in your childhood, you didn't clearly comprehend that, when someone was being negative, hurtful, or shaming around you, it was THEIR problem, not YOURS. This also meant that you internalized the shaming message and really believed that you were as bad, inadequate, incompetent, or unlovable as you were told. These were especially powerful messages when they were given to you by the people who were important to you, like your parents, your teachers, and your peers.

However, you don't need to keep on living this way. The key to changing how you feel as an adult has to do with actively monitoring, identifying, and intervening in your negative self-talk when it does arise. Otherwise, in certain situations, your self-talk begins to play those same old negative and shaming messages you received when you were growing up just as that tape recorder would. Changing also means starting and using a new tape with more positive and affirming messages about yourself, other people, and the world around you. At the very least, you need to push the "stop" button or turn down the volume on the "negative" tape and begin to create and regularly play a more "positive" one in your head (thinking about and incorporating messages from the past and present that truly positive people in your life have communicated to you).

This takes your internal process out of the hands of your "inner child" who still struggles with believing those negative and destructive messages that he or she was told. And it allows your more competent and capable "adult," who can come to know that these negative messages are not really true, to take charge of what is happening with you in the present. Next, let's address thought distortions and unrealistic core beliefs in more detail.

THOUGHT DISTORTIONS AND UNREALISTIC CORE BELIEFS

Thought distortions and unrealistic core beliefs underlie and generate all negative self-talk. They literally become the "filters" through which you understand and make sense out of your life experiences and the situations that occur around you. It is as if they become the "pair of glasses" through which you view and interpret the world. They arise from what you are told, what you see, and what you experience in your family of origin and in society around you in your early years (which can be reinforced by things that happen in your adult life). The way that you see and describe your world in your mind influences everything that you say and do. A major problem is created by them because both of these tend to be:

- **RIGID and INFLEXIBLE** since they encourage only one narrow way of perceiving reality
- **JUDGMENTAL**, since they put a value on certain things that don't necessarily need to have a value put on them
- **INACCURATE and UNREALISTIC**, since they involve misperceptions and false assumptions
- **OVER-GENERAL**, since they ignore the complexity of life and your present experience; and
- **UNBALANCED**, since they don't include all the information that could be available to you at any given moment.

Thought distortions and unrealistic core beliefs are the legacy of the past which determines how you think and react in the present. An example of this, as a child, would be seeing your father acting abusively when he was angry and then deciding, as an adult, either that anger is always a bad thing and should be completely avoided at all costs or that abusive anger is a good tool to use when you want to

discharge your pent-up frustration and control a person or situation. Another example, as a child, might be feeling angry and betrayed that your mother did not protect you from your father's shaming and hurtful behavior and, as a result, in your adult years, deciding that women just cannot really ever be trusted.

THOUGHT DISTORTIONS

Thought distortions are your own particular style of making sense out of the world around you. They are the bad habits in your thinking patterns that continually keep you in a negative and uncomfortable place in your life. They directly generate your negative self-talk. Generally, they are learned from watching the important people in your childhood and noticing the thought patterns they used to make sense of what was happening around them. If you saw important people blame, generalize, personalize, and use "should/ought thinking," you are much more likely to use those same styles of thinking in your own life today. Some examples of thought distortions are listed below.

UNREALISTIC CORE BELIEFS

We all have core beliefs that represent the values that are important to us and that we attempt to live by. Unrealistic core beliefs are the very personal rules for living that are "written in stone" and that many people attempt to impose on themselves and the world around them when, in fact, they don't really fit. These inaccurate core beliefs can also directly generate your negative self-talk. In reality, there is almost always some truth to these beliefs but they are carried to an extreme and don't allow for humanness and imperfection.

Specific unrealistic core beliefs arise from the false perception that life is a certain way and that you are the one who knows the way it should be. Unrealistic core beliefs can be framed in "positive" language (e.g. *I must have approval and respect from other people*) or "negative" language (e.g. *The world is an scary and unsafe place*). Either way, however, these core beliefs fuel negative self-talk because of their inflexibility and the idea that there is only one "correct" way to look at the world. When someone or something violates your overly positive view or confirms your overly negative view or when you do not live up to your own expectation about how you are supposed to operate in the world, you assume that it is because of others' or your own incompetence, worthlessness, and inadequacy. As soon as this happens, you tend to automatically lapse into your negative, cynical, punishing, and shaming self-talk.

These more specific unrealistic beliefs often arise from your thought distortions. They are generally handed down to you in your family of origin and in your childhood through both verbal and behavioral messages and values that you received from those who were important to you. Core beliefs serve as your "**Ten (or Twenty or Thirty) Commandments**" about how you and others are supposed to live and how life is supposed to be. If these beliefs are unrealistic, they often distort the way things really are.

Unrealistic core beliefs are also communicated from generation to generation by the strong cultural messages we receive regarding gender roles and what it means to be a successful and worthwhile person. One example of this would be seeing how women are portrayed in the media and advertising and

deciding that it is a woman's role in life to take care of and please men. Another might be seeing how "real men" are portrayed in the movies and taking on an unrealistic core belief that "a real man should be strong, confident, and in charge at all times (and 'kick butt' whenever necessary)." Some examples of unrealistic core beliefs are also listed below.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THOUGHT DISTORTIONS

Below are a few examples of thought distortions. Notice which ones you tend to use when you think about yourself and others.

SHOULD/UGHT THINKING: This pattern is characterized by the habitual and continual use of words like "*should*," "*must*," "*ought*," "*have to*," and other similar statements. Using these sorts of words changes everyday decisions and preferences into harsh and strict rules that you and everyone else need to live by. It involves the belief that you and others are obligated to behave in a certain rigidly prescribed manner rather than acknowledging to yourself that we all have choices about what we want to do or say in any given situation. This type of thinking implies that no other options are acceptable or, in many instances, are even available at a particular moment.

- For example, you might think to yourself "*I have to be on time*," "*She ought to know better*," and "*No one should ever behave like that*."

GENERALIZING: This pattern involves taking a single negative event and converting it into an ongoing, overarching, and unbending conclusion. One mistake or problem translates into a huge and "never-ending" difficulty rather than being placed in a larger context with other information that you have about yourself or others. One tiny bit of evidence becomes an overwhelming negative absolute. Key words to watch for include "*always*," "*never*," "*every*," "*none*," "*no one*," "*everybody*," and the like.

- For example, after a relationship ends, you might say "*She never really loved me*," "*All men are just out to use me*," or "*No one has ever really cared about me*."

LABELING: This pattern is characterized by making simplistic and stereotyped judgments, generally cynical, critical, and shaming, about yourself or others. Since these labels often carry a load of negative emotional "baggage," they tend to create intense and uncomfortable feelings (about yourself or the other person). These feelings tend to keep you stuck in powerless thinking patterns rather than helping you to move on to actually address the specific problem at hand. They also objectify you and others and make it easier to become actively shaming and disrespectful with yourself or someone else. Labels do not take into account that we are complex human beings and, instead, "pigeonhole" people by recognizing only one negative and limited aspect of their personalities and making that the "whole" of who they are. Labeling often occurs when you are not making any distinction between behavior and your own or others' intrinsic worth.

- Some examples of labels include words like: “crazy,” “dumb,” “lazy,” “bossy,” “ugly,” “wimp,” “idiot,” “stupid,” “rude,” “bitch,” “jerk,” “asshole,” “loser,” and “failure.”

BLAMING: This pattern involves continually seeking to find a scapegoat who is at fault in any given situation (either you or someone else). This can mean viewing yourself as overly responsible and “beating yourself up” for not “getting things right.” Or it can be accepting little or no responsibility at all, which means that you see other people and external circumstances as being completely responsible for whatever happens to you. In this way, you can avoid recognizing your own choices and responsibility and don’t have to actually take charge of your life.

- Examples can include blaming yourself for other people not having fun at a party you give or blaming your partner for not making your marriage and your life more interesting, fulfilling, and happy.

EITHER-OR THINKING: This pattern is characterized by a rigid belief that only two options or choices exist in any given situation. Things are “good or bad” and “right or wrong.” There are absolutely no “shades of gray.” This results in unrealistic and perfectionistic expectations of yourself and others. Unfortunately, neither you nor others are able to live up to these expectations, which always creates a gloomy shadow over you and the world in which you live.

- An example of this would be viewing yourself either as a “success” or a “failure” in your life rather than giving yourself credit for the specific things that you are able to accomplish.

FILTERING: This pattern involves paying attention only to the negative and distressing aspects of whatever situation you face. It is also discounting things that might counteract this negative image and always seeing the glass as “half-empty” rather than “half-full.” It is selectively remembering and experiencing your life, looking only at your emotional pain and the things that you or others have done poorly. This means focusing primarily on loss, rejection, despair, unfairness, and injustice and exaggerating their importance to the exclusion of other things that you could also be noticing that are more positive.

- An example of this would be brooding about one “offhand” comment (that you perceived as negative) made by your partner rather than appreciating the warmth and connection you felt with her (or him) throughout the rest of your evening together.

PERSONALIZING: This pattern is characterized by feeling overly involved in everything that happens around you even though you may have little or nothing to do with what is actually occurring. It means believing that everything in the world revolves around you and then taking things very personally when it makes no sense to do so. This belief that you are involved with something when you really aren’t leads to feeling inadequate, powerless, and victimized in your relationships and in your life in general.

- An example of this would be listening to your partner complaining about your kids’ behavior on a particularly difficult day and saying to yourself that she must think you’re doing a lousy job as a co-parent with her.

ASSUMING: This pattern is motivated by the belief that you know exactly what other people are thinking or feeling. Assumptions occur when you have little or no actual evidence to back up your belief and have made little or no effort to actually check out or clarify what you think is going on with someone else. Making assumptions means you believe that everyone thinks and feels exactly the same way that you would in any given situation. It generally leads to a cynical and negative conclusion, especially if you are stuck in a cycle of critical and shaming thinking about yourself anyway. You begin to believe that others are just as negative and cynical as you are.

- An example of this would be seeing an acquaintance at work, saying “hello,” getting no response, and assuming that he or she was “stuck up” or was angry with you because you had done something to offend them.

PREDICTING THE FUTURE: This pattern is characterized by “looking into your crystal ball” and making negative and gloomy predictions to yourself about what will happen in your future. You then come to believe that this is the only possible outcome that you can actually expect. Unfortunately, this often leads directly to the negative outcome you are imagining since your thinking process literally becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

- An example of this would be struggling with a period of unemployment, beginning to believe that you will never get another position that you will really like, and then undermining yourself in your job interviews and thus not being able to actually get any work that you might really enjoy.

EMOTIONAL REASONING: This pattern is characterized by making your feelings the sole criterion that you use to determine “the truth” and to interpret your reality. Your evaluations, decisions, and actions become completely based on whatever your emotional reaction happens to be, without taking into account any objective testing of the facts involved. How you feel about something becomes your only reality in assessing what is happening in your day-to-day living.

- An example of this would be feeling powerless and “out of control” when you are becoming angry and explosive with a partner and then believing that there is nothing you can do to effectively handle what is happening. As a result, you end up staying in the situation and allowing yourself to continue to escalate rather than taking a respectful time-out or responding in other more effective ways.
- In effect, it’s like saying to yourself “*I feel powerless and ‘out of control’ right now and so I really am powerless and ‘out of control’ in this situation.*”

COMPARING: This pattern is characterized by constantly comparing yourself to others in an ongoing battle to try to prove to yourself that you’re good enough. You put yourself in competition with everyone around you. Unfortunately, most of the time you come out “on the short end of the stick.” This only reinforces your negative appraisal of yourself and your belief that you are inadequate and incompetent. When you compare in this way, you tend to minimize your own abilities, strengths, and accomplishments and exaggerate others’ positives as well as minimizing their shortcomings.

- An example of this type of comparing would be notice someone who is young, attractive, and physically fit and then begin to view yourself as old, ugly, slovenly, and fat.

On the other hand, this comparing process can also mean that you act grandiose and arrogant and continually strive to see yourself as better than others, becoming judgmental, demeaning, and devaluing of them in your mind.

- An example of this type of comparing would be seeing someone driving a car that was older and rustier than yours and concluding that they must be a “loser” when it comes to work, making money, and taking care of their possessions.

CATASTROPHIZING (aka “disaster” or “doomsday” thinking): This pattern is characterized by continually expecting the worst to happen in whatever situation you find yourself. It also involves magnifying relatively trivial events or problems and making them into insurmountable ones. It tends to keep you in an anxious and worried state continually wondering, “*What bad things are going to happen to me next?*” It exists because you believe that you don’t have the ability to handle difficulties when they do arise and won’t be able to address whatever problem situations do occur in the future.

- An example of this might be getting laid off from your work and believing that you will never be able to find another job and that you and your family will wind up homeless and living on the street.

Notice that there are similarities and linkages between many of the bad thinking habits mentioned above. However, the bottom line on all of them is that you disparage and demean yourself or others and fuel your negative self-talk when you engage in these types of thought distortions.

SOME EXAMPLES OF UNREALISTIC CORE BELIEFS

The following list gives some examples of unrealistic core beliefs (in bold) that people may have. Review this list and see how many of these core beliefs tend to influence the way you think and feel about yourself and the people and situations in your life. Underneath each core belief is some specific negative self-talk that might follow directly from it. Add your own core beliefs to this list if you can think of others that fit for you. Try to be as honest as you possibly can with yourself in identifying your own unrealistic core beliefs. Many people tend to deny that these exist in their lives (they don’t sound very good [or realistic] when you actually say them out loud to yourself or others) despite their attitudes and actual behaviors clearly indicating something very different.

I have to be strong enough to handle everything by myself.

“If I’m laid off from my job and I need assistance and emotional support, I’m weak-willed.”

My basic value as a person comes from being busy and productive at all times.

“When I take time off or go on vacation and I try to relax, I’m useless.”

It is my responsibility to take care of others and fix them whenever they’re unhappy or upset.

“If I can’t get my partner out of a bad mood, I’m (or they’re) not trying hard enough.”

I have to be competent and successful in everything that I do.

“If I’m not good at doing something, I’m a loser.”

Anger is always bad and destructive.

“If I (or others) get pissed off about something, I (or they) will end up ‘out of control’ and saying or doing some awful things.”

I must have approval and respect from strangers, peers, friends, and family.

“If someone doesn’t want to be my friend, they’re a ‘stuck-up’ jerk (or it proves how bad I really am as a person).”

Women are not really as capable and competent as men are.

“If a female coworker has a better idea than I do, I’m incompetent (or she’s a ‘brown-noser’).”

Other people should always be fair with me.

“If others don’t treat me right, I’m not really cared about (or they’re assholes for treating me so badly).”

It is wrong for people to be concerned about their own needs and wants.

“If I ask my friends for help when I need it, I’m being selfish and pushy.”

People should always “try their best” to please and satisfy others.

“If others don’t appreciate what I’m doing, I must be ‘screwing up’ and not trying hard enough (or they’re inconsiderate ‘slobs’ who should be noticing me more and giving me credit).”

Real men are never supposed to experience certain feelings (e.g. sadness, hurt, disappointment, fear).

“If I cry when I’m sad or hurt, my girlfriend will think I’m a ‘wimp.’”

Children should be courteous and respectful to their parents at all times.

“If my kids sass me, it means they’re rotten little brats (or that I’m doing a lousy job as a parent).”

Disagreement is always a bad thing in a relationship.

“If someone argues with me, they must not respect me (or I must be ‘wrong’).”

People and things should be the way I want them to be.

“If my partner won’t do what I want them to do, they must not really care about me (or I’m not worthy of their respect).”

If people make mistakes, they deserve to be blamed, ridiculed, and punished.

“If my partner is late, they’re rude and inconsiderate and I have a right to yell at them about it.”

People are very fragile and should never be hurt by others.

“If a friend tells me they are upset with me because of something I’ve said or done, they’re mean and acting like an ‘asshole’ (or I’m a lousy friend).”

My partner is supposed to live up to all my expectations.

“If my spouse doesn’t follow through with what they told me they would do, I’m not a lovable person (or they’re an irresponsible jerk).”

Good relationships are always based on sacrifice.

“If my girlfriend doesn’t give in to me whenever I need something, she’s bad and uncaring (or I’m not really very important to her).”

Outside events and other people cause all my unhappiness and bad feelings.

“If I get mad at my kids, it’s their fault because they made me feel this way.”

Marriages are supposed to last forever.

“If I get divorced, I am (or my partner is) a complete failure and didn’t really try hard enough.”

People have to have a lot of money to really be happy and to lead a truly good life.

“If I don’t have much money, it proves I’m worthless and not very important and successful.”

Formal education lets you know how smart people actually are.

“If I didn’t finish high school or college, I’m stupid.”

Men should always be strong, confident, and “in charge” of whatever is going on around them.

“If my partner won’t do what I want, I must be a weakling (or she’s a ‘ball-buster’).”

Women should always be “nice,” polite and passive.

“If I speak up for myself when I don’t like something, I’m a ‘bitch’ and nobody will like me.”

A woman’s real job is to take care of her husband and their kids.

“If my partner spends time with her friends, she’s selfish and is a lousy wife and mother (or the kids and I are not her ‘first priority’).”

Other people can never really be trusted.

“If my partner talks to someone else at a party, they like that person better than they like me and they are probably going to leave me.”

People should always accept me exactly the way I am.

“If others don’t put up with my anger or my bad moods, I’m not really cared about (or other people are self-centered jerks).”

People can never change who they really are.

“If I have an anger problem, it will continue to be a problem for me the rest of my life.”

Mechanical things should never break down.

“If my ceiling fan stops working, I’m incompetent if I can’t fix it (or the person who installed it is a jerk for doing such shoddy work).”

My partner should be exactly the same person she was when we first met.

“If my partner changes as a person (e.g. goes back to school, gets a better job, develops new friends and activities, has different ideas about the world), there must be something wrong with our relationship or she doesn’t love me as much as she once did.”

Hopefully, this section has given you a better understanding of what self-talk is, where it comes from, and how it affects you and your view of other people and the world around you. You can read “*Changing Your Negative Self-Talk*” on this website to get a better understanding of how to start intervening in the negative self-talk that you are now more aware of. That article talks about how to notice and then actually change the negative self-talk that you experience.