

TIP OF THE MONTH

Countering & Transforming Negative Self-Talk

Adapted from The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund J. Bourne, PhD.



Barbara Frederickson reminds us, “The negative screams at you but the positive only whispers.” Negative thinking is very familiar, and while it can be helpful, it can also take over our thought process. In fact, negative self-talk is one of the primary drivers of anxiety. Thankfully, with intention and practice, we can use the following six-step process to counter and transform negative self-talk and reduce anxiety by reframing our thoughts to be more affirming and constructive.



NOTICE

“Catch yourself in the act” of engaging in negative self-talk. Notice and name it. Pay particular attention to situations where you feel anxious, scared or worried, angry, discouraged, guilty, ashamed, or embarrassed. Notice self-talk

that includes judgments, “what if,” or “should.”

Examples:

- “I should never make mistakes”
- “What if something bad happens”
- “I’m a failure”
- “I’m not good enough”



STOP

Interrupt the pattern of negative self-talk and kindly but firmly tell yourself to STOP. If it helps, ask yourself these questions: “Is what I am saying to myself helping or hurting?”, “Is this constructive or is it causing me more stress?”, “Do I really want to stay upset right now?” If your self-talk is not helpful, then resolve to practice stopping and relaxing.



RELAX

Interrupt your negative train of thoughts and redirect to relaxation first. Anxiety develops as the result of cumulative, long-term stress. Before we can effectively move forward or solve a problem, we need to step back and self-soothe first.

Consider these options:

- Abdominal breathing
- Body scan
- Guided visualization
- Meditation
- Music
- Walking outdoors



WRITE IT DOWN

Write down the negative self-talk or inner dialogue that led you to feel anxious, angry, or depressed. This can help you understand and gain perspective on what you are telling yourself. Ask yourself: “What was I telling myself that made me feel upset?” It is important to identify self-talk to disentangle thoughts from feelings. Self-talk consists of thoughts, not feelings. Negative judgments trigger emotional reactions.

Example:

I was feeling anxious and started to think “I’m a mess, I can’t deal with this.”



IDENTIFY THE TYPE

Identify the type of negative self-talk you are engaged in.

Here are a few common types:

- The Worrier (promotes anxiety)
- The Critic (promotes low self-esteem)
- The Victim (promotes depression)
- The Perfectionist (promotes chronic stress and burnout)

Does your thought involve overestimating a negative outcome, catastrophizing a worst case scenario, or underestimating your ability to cope? Identify the type of inner dialogue and recognize it as one “lens” or “story” rather than the whole truth. Focus more on whether your self-talk is helpful, rather than whether it is true or false.



COUNTER

Counter or dispute your negative self-talk with positive, rational, self-supportive statements. Answer each negative statement you’ve identified by writing down an opposing, positive, helpful statement.

Examples:

- “I can be anxious and still do this”
- “I can continue to make progress one step at a time”
- “It’s okay to make mistakes”

If you need additional assistance beyond these tips, FEAP is here to assist you. [Explore resources on our website](#) or contact us at 434.243.2643.

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