



# Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## 8 Self-Talk Solutions That Can Ease Mental Stress

Excerpts adapted from Meg Selig

**Persistent self-critical, catastrophizing, or discouraging thoughts can spoil any pleasant experience. They can hold you back from persisting at a goal or trying new things. They can interfere with your self-esteem, happiness, sleep, general mental health, and flood your body with harmful stress chemicals.**

It is ironic that we could be undermining our own physical self-care with thoughts that are... well, uncaring. That is why mental self-care habits are so crucial to well-being.

### Quick and powerful ways to become kinder toward yourself

"Self-talk," according to The Self-Talk Workout by clinical psychologist Rachel Turow, is: "The way you speak to yourself or treat yourself in your own mind, either involuntarily or on purpose." It's normal to experience both positive and negative self-talk. Unfortunately, most mental chatter—thoughts that spontaneously enter our minds-- is about 70% negative, according to research. The suggestions below will help you recognize negative self-talk faster, stop the negative voice sooner, and develop a more encouraging inner voice.

### Accept your thoughts as "just thoughts"

You may have noticed that your mind often creates disturbing mental stories and scenarios. When these odd or upsetting thoughts come up, neutralize them by telling yourself, "Just thoughts." This self-talk reflects the fact that "the mind has a mind of its own" and wanders where

it will. "Just thoughts" disrupts negative thinking and replaces it with more realistic thinking. You might also tell yourself: "This is my mind creating these thoughts, not me. I don't have to judge myself. I don't have to believe these thoughts or take them seriously."

### Practice friendly feelings toward yourself with this fun exercise

In The Self-Talk Workout, Turow offers an amazing strategy to increase self-kindness. When you catch yourself obsessing and stressing, remind yourself to "Inhale, my friend; Exhale, my friend," as you take a deep breath and let it go. The combination of a deep breath with a friendly thought provides a quick way to regulate stress; even one deep breath will decrease activity in the amygdala, the flight-or-fight region of the brain. Try it right now and become your own best friend in an instant.

### Use thought-stopping

When you find yourself lost in stressful thoughts and scenarios, tell your mind, "Mind, stop it!" This technique is called "thought-stopping" and is used frequently in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Thought-stopping helps you interrupt your mental chatter before it gets out of hand. Although unwanted thoughts never quite disappear, they will begin to fade away.

### Use self-compassion messages

Sometimes a repeating thought is just so painful that you may need a comforting thought to counter it. Kristin Neff offers this useful mantra in her book, Self-Compassion: "This is a moment of suffering. Suffering is a part of life. May I be kind to myself at this moment. May I give myself the compassion I need." Just saying part of this mantra—like "May I be kind to myself"—could ease your painful emotions and thoughts. Or, create any comforting message that works for you. For example, you could tell yourself one of these comforting messages

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every time you get lost in a painful scenario: "Getting better at recognizing these hurtful thoughts is the first step toward curbing them. Everyone has moments of suffering like this. May I be kind to myself."

### Give yourself an "inner smile"

Take time every day to notice at least three "small wins." Eventually, your self-confident thoughts will nudge out your self-critical thoughts. The types of successes you can notice are infinite—a good decision, taking the time to exercise on a busy day, helping someone. As you acknowledge your successes, you could add in some encouraging self-talk like: "That wasn't perfect, but I handled that situation better than I normally do. It was a tough situation, but I managed to keep my temper. Yay! Even though my project isn't finished, I definitely made progress today."

### Stick a label on that feeling, story, or scenario

A series of studies by UCLA psychologist Matthew D. Lieberman showed the value of attaching labels to your swirling thoughts and feelings. For example, participants who attached labels to emotions like "anger" or "fear" had less activity in the amygdala, the fight-or-flight part of the brain, and more activity in the prefrontal cortex, the thinking part of the brain. In other words, labeling their feelings shifted them from an emotional state to a problem-solving state. To use this idea, consciously slap a one-or-two word label on your mind's current thought pattern: "Worried." "Feeling victimized." "Furious." If it's hard to think of a label, just select one of the "four basic feelings:" mad, sad, glad, or scared.

### Replace anxious or destructive thoughts with calming and constructive thoughts

"Catch it, challenge it, change it." That's the short version of a well-researched process for changing your self-talk. First, "catch" your negative self-talk-- "Oh, that again." Second, challenge those thoughts. How true are they? Third, change those thoughts into healthier and more encouraging messages. For example, if you catch yourself thinking, "I might as well give up," you could challenge that thought and replace it with, "I can learn from my setbacks and try again." If you catch yourself worrying ceaselessly about another adult, you could replace those worries with, "I've done the best I can; ultimately, it is their decision."

### For better mental habits, practice the 8 skills

It's shocking how much we can undermine the best self-care programs with our own negative thoughts. The eight tactics above can reduce self-caused suffering, lower physical stress, help regulate emotions, and even raise self-confidence. While it's not easy to lasso in your runaway thoughts, you will improve with practice. Start by choosing one of the eight techniques that appeals to you and try it. When you are ready, add another technique to your routine, monitoring what works for you. You will probably notice that your mental suffering diminishes, and your mental health improves.

### First Choice Health EAP is here to help

We understand that easing mental stress is an important part of health and overall well-being. As you enter the new year, you may find yourself in need of support, and First Choice Health EAP can provide assistance with balancing your work, family, and personal life. Don't hesitate to connect with our team of qualified clinical experts!

### References:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/202310/8-self-talk-solutions-that-can-ease-mental-stress>

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