



Right words, right thoughts. That's the power of... SELF TALK

Reframe put downs – focus on upbeat words

Have you noticed how a good photographer takes photos? She takes many shots of the same scene. She walks around, clicking from various points. She crouches down or climbs onto a rock to get different viewpoints. Every time she moves, she is reframing the scene that is captured by her camera.

Reframing our words works a little like that. Verbal reframing can change the way in which you look at things. Your fresh view can, in turn, help you to think differently about something. That means that when reframing is used well, it can work as a powerful tool for you. You can reframe what others say to you. And, you can reframe what you say to yourself.

Why would anyone need to reframe what he says to himself? The sad truth about self talk is that many people say negative things about themselves to themselves – they put themselves down. Often, these put downs become a lifelong habit.

Toxic put downs

Put downs make you feel small. They hurt. When you do it to yourself, then you could land up being pessimistic. And, studies have shown that people who are pessimistic fall ill more easily. Put downs are **toxic**. If you give yourself a daily dose, then these poisonous words slowly but surely attack your confidence and self worth.

Negative self talk can even make your actions negative. If you keep saying that something bad is going to happen, then you might begin to believe that something bad will definitely happen. And, thinking that way can actually make that bad thing happen. It is called a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Because you think something is true, you behave as though it is true and, thus, make it happen. What if, before swallowing a pill, a child keeps saying, **“I’m going to choke, I’m going to choke, I’m going to choke”**? The more she says it, the tenser her throat might become. And then, sure enough, she gags when she tries to swallow the pill. Her self talk helped it to happen.

When she heard herself say it the first time, she should have rescued

herself with a quick reframe. She could turn the I'm-going-to-choke sentence into **“I will drink water to help me swallow these pills”**.

Not a magic trick

Reframing is not some kind of magic. If you already did very badly in an exam, you will not change your marks by simply telling yourself that you are going to get an A. You know that even saying it a hundred times will not get you an A. But, that is not the point.

Changing a negative thought into a positive thought can change your attitude to what is happening. Before your exam, saying **“I am clever enough to do this”** puts you in a better studying mood than saying “I am so stupid”. After the exam, saying **“Whatever my results are, I will learn from this experience”** makes you look for something good that you can take away even if you get a D grade.

Reframing is not like answering a multiple-choice question with only one right answer. You can reframe the same thing as many times as you wish to. Like the photographer, try looking from different angles and click away until you find the frame that works best for you each time.

TWO EXAMPLES

When you say, **“I can't do this.”**

Suggestion: Ask yourself why you can't do it. Look at your answers. Figure out what would enable you to be able to do it. Then, reframe your sentence to: **“I would be able to do this if...”**

When you say, **“Everyone hates me. Nobody ever likes me.”**

Suggestion: Avoid extremes because they are seldom true. Use milder words to replace **“everyone”**, **“nobody”**, **“never ever”** and other such all-or-none words. Take the sting out by saying something like, **“Perhaps, some people may not like me.”**

– By MARY GEORGE

VOCABULARY

toxic (say **“tok-sik”**; adjective) = poisonous. A toxin is a poison.

Self Talk is about how talking to yourself can be used as a life skill. The series is brought to you by What's Up in partnership with the Speak Good English Movement of Singapore.

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