

Self Talk For Reducing Anxiety

The way you talk to yourself about a situation greatly affects the way you cope with it. If you worry and doubt, you will increase your anxiety and distract your attention from your work. To reduce anxiety and become more effective, encourage yourself with self-talk that is believable and that helps you to finish the task. Use the following examples to help change the way you talk to yourself.

Situation	Anxiety provoking self-talk	Productive self-talk
Walking into the room where the anxiety-provoking event is to take place.	"Now calm down and stop shaking....This is crazy. STOP IT! What is happening to me? It won't stop -- what is happening?"	"My hands are shaking...OK, I'm tense, so I need to relax for a moment. Take a deep breath... calm down... there, that's better. This won't kill me; I'll do the best I can."
Faced with a difficult test question.	"I can't do this. I studied it and now I can't do it. I'm blowing my whole grade here..."	"I can't remember this. Hmm... better move on. I can get some of the other questions and then I'll come back to this one."
Working a math problem that looks very complex.	"This is just too confusing. I don't even know where to start. There are too many unknowns. I'll never get anywhere with this..."	"My job isn't to get everything right; it's to think based on what I currently know. I'm not an expert, and I don't have to know it all. So...there is a lot of information in this problem, and I can't work it all at once. Maybe I should organize it in a sequence of simpler problems and take it one step at a time. OK, the problem requires that I solve..."
Trying to write the first line of a paper.	"I just don't write well. The beginning is so important and I can't think of anything that is good... I've got to come up with the perfect opening..."	"OK, I don't have to start at the beginning. I could start somewhere else and write the introduction later, after I know what I want to say."
Walking toward the front of the room for an oral presentation.	"I can't talk in public. I'll forget everything... I've always stumbled over my words when it really counts. Last time I was so nervous I sounded like a robot..."	"I can handle this... Just relax... take a deep slow breath and I'll start as I rehearsed it."

Changing the way you talk to yourself requires a lot of consistent practice, patience and determination. Monitor the ways you talk to yourself over the next week. Use the back of this form to write down the situation and your self-talk. Then generate some productive self-talk if necessary.

Follow these guidelines for productive self-talk:

- 1) make the statement encouraging,
- 2) direct it to the task at hand, and
- 3) keep it believable.

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	Situation	Negative Self-talk	Productive Self-talk
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			