



JOY COACH SARAH

SELF TALK UPDATE

by Sarah Campbell

Why It's Important

What if you could move through your day without second guessing yourself and felt good about your decisions? What if the voice inside your head said kind things to you instead of criticisms? How would it feel to look in the mirror and see your own beauty? Can you imagine moving through your day without comparing yourself to anyone, even what you think you should be?

So many of us have a critic in our minds that offers us constant seemingly unsolicited negative opinions. It may be our own voice, or that of an authority figure. For some it only pops up in times of stress. For others it is an unrelenting and unwelcome companion. Having this constant source of negative input is very stressful. It affects our interactions with others, and can lead to low self-esteem and depression. Often we feel like everyone else has it together, and we somehow got left behind. The truth is, you are not alone. Many people are dealing with their inner voice every day just like you are.

Have you noticed that even though your inner critic has been diligently pointing out the error of your ways, it has not motivated you to change? No matter how many times you remind yourself of what you should be doing, how you should be acting, even how you should be feeling, it doesn't seem to work? How just trying harder and buckling down backfires eventually every time? I sure have! I tried for years to just do everything right. It turns out that is impossible, all that happened is I exhausted myself and became more confused and unhappy.

How It Works

The bizarre thing is, that voice is trying to protect you. As children, we looked around our environment for clues as to how to behave in order to avoid pain. In a very basic sense, your inner voice developed to help you successfully navigate your life without getting in trouble. Unfortunately, this process also installed beliefs about yourself based on the most dramatic negative events of your childhood.

As we grew up and became more able to be responsible for the situations we found ourselves in, we kept that safety mechanism installed, and continued to pay attention to those internal cues after they became obsolete. Now, instead of helping us, those outdated messages keep us from being fully present to the joy that life offers.

It is now time to gently, with compassion, kindness, and patience, update our self talk.

I chose those words specifically. Kindness, compassion, and patience are very important right now. It's time to learn that you cannot use self-judgement as a tool for change. On a very basic level, cruelty is not motivating. We all react more enthusiastically to requests when they are asked with love and respect. The same is true in our inner reality. You cannot hate yourself thin, and you cannot criticize away unwanted behaviors.

The good news is that we can change! You have the power to change your self talk and to enjoy everyday life more than you thought possible. In the absence of negativity, you will have more time and energy for the activities and people that you love.

Changing your self talk is a skill you can learn, and changing the way you speak to yourself for the better is linked to lower rates of depression, greater immunity, reduced rates of cardiovascular disease, and better coping skills in times of stress.

What to do

We have two main ways to work- reflection and adding positive input.

Reflection is about noticing what you are doing now, and finding ways to tweak it so that it has a more positive impact on you.

Adding positive input is about just that- giving yourself additional positive input to tip the inner scale away from fear and towards love.

Ways to reflect

Talking back is a good thing

When you catch a self-critical thought, talk back to it. If you are alone (in the car is a great place), talking back to yourself out loud is very useful. You might ask yourself, “Is that true?”, “Why did you say that?”, or “Is telling yourself that going to help this situation?” You can also do this silently if there are other people around, of course!

For example, say you are making a meal in the kitchen and you accidentally drop an ingredient on the floor. It may be that your first reaction is to think, “Oh, I always do things like that! I’m so clumsy!” You could ask yourself out loud, “Is that true? When was the last time you dropped something? Hasn’t it been weeks if not months? That’s not all the time, in fact, you aren’t clumsy!”

Write it out

Write down your thoughts verbatim. No editing. Then take a look. Just like we did above, check to see if they are relevant to your life today. Does the way you are speaking to yourself help you feel better, or be more productive? Can you rewrite the messages you send yourself in more neutral language?

Hint: looking for the underlying emotion and addressing that is a good place to begin. For example, at one point in my life I may have written down: “I never finish anything. Why do I even think I can do things?” I could look at that and rewrite it as: “I feel overwhelmed. How can I break down this task into smaller pieces?”

Adding positive input

Celebrate a small win

Did you make yourself a meal at home? Brush your teeth? Do your laundry? Reach out to a friend?

All of these things are action steps in the direction of better self care, and deserve to be celebrated.

Be kind to your small self

Find a picture of yourself as a child that you like. Look at the child in the photo with kindness, and tell your small self something reassuring. One of my favorite things to tell my child self is, “You made it. You are grown up and you are safe.”

Practicing gratitude

Write down three things that you are thankful for everyday, no repetitions. Nothing is too big (people, houses, the universe), or too small (warm socks, oranges, lip balm). Practicing gratitude has us actively looking for the good in life , which positively affects how we look at everything else, including ourselves. My list for today is: Air conditioning, clean lounge pants, and hydrangeas.

Look for the beauty in everyone

There is a spark of beauty in every person. It may be the glint in an eye, the softness of a cheek, or the regard they offer others. Seeing beauty in others helps us more easily see it in ourselves. Please note: this is not about comparison. We each have our own individual beauty that is ours alone.

Helpful Hints

Choose one skill to practice

By doing one practice at a time, you give it more respect and value. In addition, people find success faster by working on one skill at a time, versus trying to do everything at once, which can get overwhelming.

Take it slow

Just like when you meet someone new, making friends with yourself is going to take some time, and may feel unfamiliar at first. It takes patience to build trust. We don't make BFFs in a day. It takes shared positive experiences and repetition (That's what practicing your skills will give you with yourself!).

Aim for neutral

It may be too much to expect yourself to do an emotional 180 right off. If you are starting from a place of negativity, aim for neutral at first. After you find a more up to date perspective, you can add love.

Simply trying is a success

Just that fact that you have read this far and are open to change is a big win. Take a deep breath, allow your heart to soften a bit, and feel that.

Questions?

I am here for you.

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