

Me and My Inner Chatter

Shilpa Jasubhai*

Clinical Psychologist, India

Abstract

Ancient Indian physician and scholar Charaka emphasized positive mental health when he articulated that the task of medicine is not simply to strive for absence of disease but to enable an individual to learn about and lead an ideal life. The inner chatter is referred to as self-talk. According to psychology it is the internal dialog with our selves, which influences how we feel and behave. Several studies have documented a relationship between positive self-talk and performance. The need for identifying the underlying cause of the self-talk is increasing day by day. More and more individuals of all ages are getting trapped into negative inner chatter. The present article aims at providing an outline of the INNER CHATTER, creating an awareness and providing a guidance for self-help.

Keywords: Positive mental health, Inner chatter, Negative self-talk

Is your inner chatter promoting or disrupting you?

What is Self -talk? The inner chatter is referred to as self-talk. The dictionary meaning of self-talk is “the act or practice of talking to oneself, either aloud or silently and mentally”. According to psychology it is the internal dialog with our selves, which influences how we feel and behave.

Have you ever observed suddenly catching yourself daydreaming, following a train of thoughts that has nothing to do with what you are doing? You may be preparing a presentation or may be out with friends and suddenly you get lost in thoughts. You experience temporary loss of mental control. We all do a lot of unintentional thinking when alone or doing something. At times mind wandering or daydreaming can be enjoyable. But at other times it can be negative, disturbing, strange, or self-defeating.

Each of us has a set pattern of thoughts that go on and on in our mind. It can be positive and supportive or negative and self-defeating. This little voice can often be more harmful than helpful, particularly when it gets into the mode of excessive negativity. This inner dialog combines conscious thoughts with unconscious beliefs and prejudices which governs one's reactions and behavior. In a day to day life we humans are prone to reacting to a trigger with a negative self-chatter like “I can't do anything right”, “I'm not working hard enough”, “I'll never get anywhere”, “I'm not as smart as they are”, “I look so ugly today”, “I'm a complete failure”, etc.

The inner conversation goes on constantly in the mind and becomes a deep-rooted habit. These unwanted thoughts i.e. inner chatter may conflict with one's morals, values, and beliefs and affect our self-esteem and self-confidence. Negative self-talk constantly

reinforces our thoughts until they are implanted deep into our brains which we perceive as the reality. This negativity is not always the reality and it is harmful. It can make people inactive, self-absorbed and disconnected with the world around them. Anger, stress, depression, guilt, over thinking, lack of sleep, extreme mood swings may influence inner chatter.

The negative things we were told as children by our parents, siblings, teachers, friends, relatives, etc stays in our mind for a long time. These experiences keep playing over and over in our mind and create feelings of anger, fear, guilt, and hopelessness. Let me share my experience. In school once I was scolded by a teacher for pronouncing a word wrongly in front of the whole class and everyone had made fun of me. For many years I had an extreme fear of speaking in a crowd. I avoided conversation and used to reply in yes and no, out of a fear of not making fool of myself. These experiences become the reality at the unconscious level in our mind and our mind gets addicted to thinking and reacting based on those beliefs.

The inner voices are constantly judging us on for example, what wrong we have done or the opportunities we have missed, etc. In general, negative self-talk i.e. our inner critic is either focused on painfully repeating the past or fearfully reviewing the future. We refuse to accept and acknowledge this deep rooted fear. We unconsciously try to hide it from showing up and try to convince ourselves and others that this fear is not true. Somewhere it makes one feel secure from the shame of failure by not acting upon it. This happens automatically.

Our lives are like a story book and we are constantly narrating the events of this story to ourselves as they unfold. Events themselves don't cause the suffering; it's the way we think about the events that influences our feelings. This self-talk or thinking that is playing in the background governs our emotions. If our thoughts determine how we feel, that means how we habitually think will determine how we feel.

The negative self-talk often creates stress and takes emotional toll on a person and everyone around him/her. It may lead to a cognitive distortion and blame. For example, if you get stuck in traffic while going to the office, you might start wondering how your boss will react, he may even deduct half day pay. These thoughts may make you irritated and upset and spoil your mood. It will affect your work too.

The negative self-talk prevents you from believing in yourself and your potential. It weakens your ability to make positive changes in

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***Corresponding author:** Shilpa Jasubhai, Clinical Psychologist, Ahmedabad, India, E-mail: sjasubhai@gmail.com

your life or lowers the confidence. Frequently experiencing destructive and dysfunctional self-talk can not only be stressful, but it can actually paralyze one into self-absorption and inaction or may even lead to depression and anxiety. I have been dealing with so many young adults with constant negative self-talk and experiencing anxiety and depression.

Do you want to know what is encouraging your negative internal chatter?

“What are you most afraid of that other people will find out or think about you?” Right down whatever comes instantly in your mind. E.g. dumb, weird, incompetent, unattractive, not good enough, lazy, etc.

You may not be able to think of any fears because your logical brain will convince you that these fears are not true. Unfortunately, the inner chatter runs in the background constantly. The fears reside in that habitual internal chatter, often called mental habits. The source of negative internal chatter is the fears you hold onto and the things you do to compensate for these false beliefs or fears. Overcoming and changing these negative thoughts requires you to uncover these false beliefs. Only when you acknowledge and accept your fears and your false beliefs, you can take a step to change it. Identify and examine your habits of thinking.

Simple self-help techniques can be useful, such as maintaining a thought diary, restructuring inner voice with creative and positive tones, and addressing oneself in the third person. According to a past research using one's name instead of “I” during inner dialogue can create a beneficial psychological distance from the self and its emotional intensity. It allows one to perform with better perspective, calmness and confidence.

Confidence Mirror Exercise is an exercise that acts as a trigger for confidence and it is known as the self-confident mirror exercise. Sit in a comfortable position in front of the mirror. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. While you're doing this. Do this for about a minute, a minute and a half and once you feel calm and at ease then just open your eyes and begin to stare at the mirror. Inside the mirror visualize an alternate version of yourself and begin to see that alternate version as a majorly confident person. Initially you will not be able to see a clear image but keep staring and notice how confident that person is. Imagine that picture becoming clearer and that person getting extremely magnetic and confident now. Notice how that person is walking, talking, communicating, handling challenges, etc. And once you are able to see that confident person, jump into his/

her shoes and allow the confidence to flow through your entire body. The moment you feel the height of his/her confidence flowing inside of you, squeeze tightly the thumb and index finger of your left hand and say “I am confident”. Repeat this exercise until a combination of squeezing your thumb and index finger and saying the statement acts as trigger and makes you feel extremely confident and happy. This is EUREKA! Your moment!!!

Practicing breathing exercise every time mind starts wandering, using affirmation and intentionally counteracting those negative thoughts with positive truths in your life helps distort the destructive thoughts. These exercises replace negative views of who you are with positive options for personal enhancement. Positive self-talk is not being dishonest with one's self, rather it is about recognizing the truth, in situations and in yourself and approaching unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way.

“HAPPINESS IN LIFE DEPENDS ON THE QUALITY OF YOUR THOUGHTS.... DON'T THINK ABOUT WHAT MIGHT GO WRONG, THINK ABOUT WHAT COULD GO RIGHT.... TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR MIND BEFORE IT TAKES CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE.”

(By the way this is my inner chatter)

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