



What is your self talk? Is it overly dramatic and causing you over upsetness?

Modern psychotherapy does not believe that anxiety and depression are 'just chemical' - and it recommends learning how to develop awareness and management of your 'attributional style' – (how you explain the world to yourself through your thinking, either positively or negatively).

A popular definition of mental health illness includes the phrase '*when stress becomes a disorder, it causes a shift in thinking...*' – and when we have a negative shift in thinking, we develop negative attributional styles.

Has your stress become a disorder, shifting your thinking into an unhelpful dramatic negative style? Does this thinking cause you to feel overly upset in response to situations? Does it cause you to make self sabotaging choices of behaviour? Do you want to learn how to build awareness of your thinking, and how to 'thought-stop' and dispute the thinking?

Check out the following examples of unhelpful self talk that would cause helplessness and maximum upsetness:

'I battle my demons...'

If you accept this statement as 100% true and rational, then you're going to be very upset (that's an understatement) at being under attack by an external malignant evil force.

But, it's not true that you are being attacked by evil at all is it? You are not Regan in The Exorcist. These are not the mad and bad old days when mental health issues were thought to be because of demonic possession. It is more true to say "I find it difficult and confusing

to manage my stress disorder sometimes, but I'm learning more and more about it and doing my best."

'I can't cope...'

if you accept this statement as 100% true and rational, then you will be very upset and will not make attempts to cope well. After all, you have decided that you 'can't'.

But, it's not true to say that you literally CAN'T cope; if that were true you would have ceased to exist surely? It is more true to say "I have a stress disorder and find it difficult to cope right now, and I'd rather I didn't have to cope, but I'm doing my best, and it's okay, I'm okay."

'People are horrible...'

If you accept this statement as 100% true and rational, then you are saying that you have never had good experiences with people, and that the whole human race is a rotten 'horrible' species.

But, it's not true to say that ALL people are horrible. Or even that any people are 100% horrible. People are not their behaviours, their behaviours are something they do sometimes. It is more true to say "I'm sad and disappointed in the behaviour of some people some of the time, and I'd really prefer it if they behaved a different way."

Do you see the difference in unhealthy irrational self talk and healthy rational self talk? Do you see the power of pausing, reappraising, and reframing to give you more control in appropriate emotional responses? Perspective is everything.

The Greek stoic Epictetus says 'it is not an event that causes a man's upsetness, it is his judgement of the event.' And Shakespeare says: 'Nothing is good or bad. Thinking makes it so.' And: 'Make not your thoughts your prisons.'

It's absolutely possible to learn and develop the skill of building awareness of your self talk, to see if you have 'bad thinking habits' - and how to apply a non judgmental self

critique to the bad habits, and to change them... bit by bit, day by day, apply apply apply til the change is permanent.

Here is a guide to use when examining and reframing the unhealthy self talk:

- Which of the bad thinking habits am I using here?
- What is the evidence for this thought?
- Is there any evidence against it?
- Does thinking this way help me or hurt me?
- How does thinking this way make me feel and behave?
- Does this choice of words or phrasing maximise my discomfort?
- Has thinking this way been healthy or unhealthy for my life so far?
- What would I advise my best friend they thought this way?
 - Externalise your self talk.
 - Talk to yourself as if you are your own best friend, or your own therapist.
Gently and non judgementally.

CBT is not about 'positive thinking', it is about realistic healthy rational thinking. It is about the fascinating science of thinking and feeling and behaving. It is about learning practical new coping skills. It is about literally learning well-being and how to be happy.

Write things down!

This post shows my examples and my words. The power for change is in you finding out what your words are. It's a challenge. Thinking is not a 'language'. And words and phrases don't come to you neatly written in sentences and paragraphs floating though your mind as if from a book. Rather, our thinking is lurking, and bad habits get wired into our brain as negative neural default pathways – but we can rewire to dismantle habits like *negatively fortune telling*, and *negatively mind reading*, and *making negative mountains out of no big deal molehills*, and being *hyper aware and sensitive to others perception* of us... and so on. (You know that human beings don't have fortune telling or mind reading powers, right? It is more like assuming and anticipating and problem solving, but when it

goes awry, and we believe it, we are not responding to how things actually are, but how we think they are through our dodgy mental filtering.)

CBT gives you guided self help through theory and practical application. It helps you to verbalise and capture your ‘thinking’ by learning a shorthand of keywords and descriptions for your particular bad thinking habits – and gives you ‘thought forms’ and other exercises to guide you in writing down and disputing overly dramatic and upsetting thinking. But only you can decide to do it. Only you know what’s in your head, and only you can replace what’s in your head with your own choice of reframing. Only you can change your life.

When we let loose and capture and lay out our self talk on paper, it allows us to step back and see the irrationality and unhealthiness of some of our thinking, and to examine and dispute and reshape and replace the language. The beautiful thing is that when you’ve journalled a big issue (a situational anxiety) once, it’s done and you don’t have to do it again. You’ve *learned by discovery*, and processed information and lodged keyword associations in your brain that you can call on as a skill to thought stop and reframe in that situation in future, and in many related or similar situations. You will literally develop a new healthy language to use instead of the unhealthy one. It will work because it is YOUR rational thinking skills and YOUR choice of words and phrases that will replace YOUR unhealthy self talk that YOU have examined.... because YOU choose to.

Summary :

Learning the discipline of writing things down will help you to describe situations as you currently see them – and then to examine your description, and the words and phrases used, for irrationalities. And then to construct a different self talk that is more rational and healthy.

Learning by discovery:

It is said that people remember 20% of what they hear, 40% of what they see and hear, and 80% of what they discover themselves. Another person, whether it’s a therapist or friend

or family, cannot get inside your head and discover and change the way you explain the world to yourself – only you can do that. It's one thing to know and understand the CBT theory ("oh, right, fascinating, yeah I get it.."), but it's quite another to APPLY the practice. Apply apply apply, until it is natural and becomes your default automatic thinking. Really. It's proven. It's worth it. Try it.

If you see yourself and your habits in this post (and come on, everybody is there to a matter of degree, we should have been thought this in school) – then you might have a little walk around this blog and discover how you can shift your thinking to a healthy framework to allow you to be happier.

As one of my clients said, “Oh God, the drama of my head is bloody exhausting”.

Go, go, go.....

Good luck!