© Emotional Intelligence Institute 2024 All Rights Reserved 

# 4 Dealing with Stress in HEALTHY Ways

## 4C LESSON

## Investigating and Controlling Our Self-Talk



*"The highest possible stage in moral culture is when we recognize that we ought to control our thoughts."*

*Charles Darwin, early evolutionary biologist who was the originator of the concept of natural selection. (1809-1882)*

**Without proper guidance for understanding unhealthy and unproductive self-talk, we become susceptible to thoughts that can adversely affect us. We can to easily be influenced by our urges and other potent emotions. This lesson cites a number of distortions to be aware of, and explains how to make healthier adjustments.**

4C

## INVESTIGATING OUR THINKING MORE KNOWLEDGABLY

The manner in which we talk to ourselves has an incredible impact on our lives. Psychologists often refer to our inner voice as the highway of behavioral development, since everything we surmise depends on what we tell ourselves. Self-talk determines our attitudes and moods, as well as our choices and direction. Thus, further investigation of our self-talk is an important way to increase self-awareness, as it often exposes the very underpinnings of our behavior.

Previous lessons shared much about the thinking process: from the effect that thinking has on learning, to the thoughts that influence opinions and beliefs. You learned that the mind is susceptible to accept misleading information, such as too general comparisons, assumptions, exaggerations, uneducated opinions, and denials without questioning such reasoning. This lesson and its supplements will provide a more in-depth examination of such a major, yet subtle mind function.

While investigating our thinking more closely, we must remember that the mind is extremely susceptible to erroneous thinking habits. Paying closer attention to how we are communicating with ourselves may reveal a number of inferior habits, but also stimulate healthier options. Lacking such investigation, we may never realize how much time we ramble in thought over useless or even emotionally damaging subject matter, as well as other erroneous thinking habits.

When we are under-educated psychologically, destructive emotional influences can easily warp our thinking and distort our behavior. Erroneous thinking habits can also become a source for *unnecessary* emotional suffering. Wikipedia lists an *Outline of Thought* that includes a number of different categories of erroneous thinking, yet it does not list a multitude of specific distortions that would fall within each category. This lesson should assist students in identifying and avoiding these more specific distortions.

---

*"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think."*

Albert Einstein, a man whose name is synonymous with genius.
He is best-known for his general theory of relativity. (1879 – 1955)

Since our thoughts are totally private, for the most part, it is impossible for others to alert us of erroneous thinking— unless, of course, we are *thinking* aloud and others understand the problem. With little assistance from others, how do we learn to pause and reflect on whether our *thoughts* are worthwhile, distorted, or inappropriate? How do we even recognize the many types of erroneous thinking patterns, as well as learn to disregard or avoid them? Such analysis and improvement is not so easy on our own. This lesson's activities provide practical direction and logical answers to these questions.

We humans furnish lengthy supervised care of our off-spring— most notably eighteen years in contrast to a much shorter duration by other creatures of the animal kingdom. Childhood provides a fertile ground for acquiring healthy, as well as unhealthy thinking habits. Dis - turbingly, by growing up with too little knowledge of inappropriate thinking, children esta- blish habits that are difficult to change during adulthood.




Quality guidance for children must eventually involve, not only teaching them to articulate with clarity and develop mature ways of behaving, but also helping them learn how to assure they are processing their thoughts in healthy ways.

With so much of success and mature happiness depending on how well we manage our minds emotionally, learning distinct lessons for investigating and directing our thinking is imperative. To further stress the impact and value of healthy self-talk, we might equate the effects to the physical benefits of anti-oxidants and other valuable nutrients.

***Investigating our thinking more knowledgably reminds us*** *that paying close attention to our thoughts and self-talk is important as they direct virtually everything we say and do, generating 100% of the approach we take with our lives. Thus, examining how we apply our minds is a critical practice for expanding self-awareness as it can reveal inappropriate or distorted things we say to ourselves, as well as stimulate healthier options.*

## UNDERSTANDING THE THINKING PROCESS

Historically, the way we process our thinking has been one of the most intriguing, yet perplexing wonders of the human mind. In the 20th Century, Norman Vincent Peale wrote a very influential book on the subject, titled *The Power of Positive Thinking*, stressing how important positive thinking is for achieving victory over self and overpowering the difficulties of life. Among other works written later in the century, *My Ego, Higher Power, and I*, by Jerry Hirschfield, PhD, suggests a three-part framework as the source that determines our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

More recently, Hollywood attempted to explain thought processing in the animated movie, *Inside Out*. The film inspired viewers, young and old, to consider better managing the emotional activity that goes on within their minds, especially related to joy, fear, anger, disgust, and sadness.

No doubt, a close investigation of our self-talk is necessary groundwork for improving our emotional development. Yet, with self-scrutiny, self-honesty, and humility being intellectual, multi-tasking thought processes, educated guidance is truly necessary. Making meaningful adjustments to our thinking relies upon what we *learn* needs our attention, our *willingness* to make healthy adjustments, and knowing how to *practice* improving.

A concern about the quality of our self-talk in casual situations can compare to the awkwardness of a novice sailor steering a sailboat during calm seas. However, our ability to *control* our self-talk when experiencing difficulties is more akin to steering a boat safely in stormy seas. Thus, what we tell ourselves and take heed to can make a big difference in our emotional development.

---

*"Good thoughts bear good fruit, bad thoughts bear bad fruit – and man is his own gardener."*

John Leonard, American literary, television, film, and cultural critic. (1939 – 2008)



When the mind is in a casual mode of thinking, rather than a heightened attention, our chance of doing our best is notably more limited, no matter the task. Casual, reactionary thinking allows us to go with the flow, or accept and express our thoughts too spontaneously, instead of considering our wisest reasoning.

In perspective, a more casual mode of thinking may be the only necessity for playing a simple game of *checkers*, yet engaging in a more sophisticated game of *chess* requires sharper alertness and wiser reasoning power. None of us can avoid the problems that challenge us in the same way that chess might, so learning to pay closer attention to our self-talk for erroneous thinking is most important. Thinking too casually at the wrong time can cause us to overlook critical direction and lead to catastrophes and heartaches.

4C

## *Reactionary self-talk can guide us wrongfully in such situations as follows:*

1. When depressed, we need to find a healthy solution to help us feel better; but instead, we have a tendency to become immobilized or unknowingly do what makes the situation worse.
2. When anger erupts, we are more prone to blurt out hurtful words, rather than consider restraining ourselves until we cool off— causing unnecessary rifts in relationships.
3. When lured by unhealthy food, we tend to give in and do more damage to our bodies.
4. When feeling rebellious or self-righteous, we become increasingly susceptible to carefree, dishonest, and devious behavior that eventually become consequential.
5. When over-confident, we can become too impatient, too daring, or too selfish, which increases our chance for errors, indifference, and social conflicts.

The revelation from investigating our own thoughts and feelings can motivate us to accept worthwhile, yet more difficult challenges. With too little concern, we are prone to allow irrational, immature, or other unstable thinking to occur too often. When we neglect improvement for too long, emotionally charged feelings can become so powerful that any interest in healthier reactions may be totally abandoned.

***Understanding the thinking process reminds us*** *that, with such a broad range of factors easily misdirecting us, educated assistance is imperative. We know that our emotional equilibrium relies on how well we learn to navigate our thinking, yet such scrutiny is not often taught anywhere in k-12 education. Thus, by the time children reach adulthood, erroneous thinking may have already gained a strong hold on the mind.*

## LEARNING THE SYMPTOMS OF PROBLEMATIC THINKING

There is an ease in which we can distort our thinking, yet the complexities of thought processing make it difficult for us to recognize such problems. Challenging problematic thinking is also cumbersome, due to how easily we can deny or neglect self-honesty. Knowing common warning signs helps us grasp whether we are experiencing a symptom of problematic thinking. Please spend time familiarizing yourself with the following symptoms:

---

*"A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes."*

Mahatma Gandhi, Preeminent leader of Indian nationalism. (1869-1948)

## 12 Symptoms of Problematic Thinking

1. Being lackadaisical about the content of your thinking.
2. Considering that my thoughts are not hurting anyone, so there is no need to question them.
3. Being prone to concentrate too intensely, without considering other important matters.
4. Missing important priorities, because the mind is too busy with inappropriate thinking.
5. Accepting others' opinions and beliefs without considering challenging facts or health factors.
6. Thinking too anxiously and too long about unhealthy desires.
7. Denying or ignoring, rather than confronting bad habits.
8. Listening too long to alarming thoughts without evident threats or considering solutions.
9. Thinking so negatively that relationships are adversely affected.
10. Spending too much time on unhealthy thoughts.
11. Drawing conclusions without investigation or with just a minor clue.
12. Not considering that time could be better spent on memorizing important subject-matter.

4C

***Learning the symptoms of problematic thinking reminds us*** *to watch for erroneous thinking. There is an ease in which we can distort our thinking, yet the complexities of thought processing make it difficult for us to recognize such problems. Challenging problematic thinking is also cumbersome, due to how easily we can deny or neglect self-honesty. We can make excuses for our ill thinking and poor behavior without considering that we need to improve.*

## IN CONCLUSION: Overpowering Unhealthy Self-Talk

Psychologists remind us that unhealthy self-talk is at the root of much of our emotional pain and that learning to apply healthy self-talk is a much better option. When we gain better control of our self-talk, we also gain better control of our emotions. Evaluating our self-talk is a critical practice for improving self-awareness and overall emotional development.

Unhealthy self-talk can occur when we encounter some of our most important emotional choices. Nonetheless, if we don't consider how easily unhealthy self-talk can come to mind, we are susceptible to fostering risky thinking habits. To avoid such impairments, we undoubtedly must better understand what is and is not healthy self-talk and how to overpower the latter.

Overpowering unhealthy mind chatter on a regular basis requires careful practice. Advancing emotional development requires us to comprehend and practice healthy self-talk. Even though maximizing the mind's capability would be close to impossible, surely we can learn to increase the mind's capability with better understanding. We must also be careful not to strive toward other educational endeavors and miss to educate ourselves about the frailties of our own minds.

We can make extraordinary progress toward healthier mind development when we are willing to investigate the quality of our own thinking in an educated manner. Practicing healthy thinking habits allows us to take the mind to a whole new level. By setting the bar higher, we are rewarded with more sensible outcomes. Perhaps when schools start sharing the difference between healthy and unhealthy thinking habits with children, society will see an evolutionary leap for humankind.

This has been a rather short lesson for such an important subject. However, the activities included will require much more time to digest and are quite valuable for identifying and better managing your thinking habits. Please remember that the clarity of investigating our thinking depends not only on an educated understanding and interest in improvement, but also on our ability to critique ourselves with total honesty and humility.

---

*Life is fragile. Be cautious in life.*

Lailah Gifty Akita, author and founder of Smart Youth Volunteer Foundation.

# NOTES




*Change your thoughts and you change your world.*
Norman Vincent Peale, minister and author, most notably
of *The Power of Positive Thinking.* (1898 – 1993)