

Tapping Into Negative Mental Chatter to Yourself

Negative self-talk is a common, counterproductive habit that can send you on a downward spiral physically, mentally and emotionally. Self-talk is often critical in nature and may be associated with negative events in your life, which may range from major events, like losing an important account at work, or everyday habits, like eating poorly or not exercising.

As you might suspect, correlations exist between self-critical self-talk and self-esteem,¹ such that the more negative thoughts you have about yourself, the more your self-esteem suffers. In the video above, Julie Schiffman demonstrates a simple technique to gain control of negative mental chatter related to weight management or body image.

Schiffman is a practitioner of the Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), which is a form of psychological acupuncture that involves tapping with the fingertips on specific meridians in order to clear negative emotions and thought patterns.

You can use EFT to help silence your inner critic and give yourself a figurative bear hug instead. The fact is, many of us engage in negative self-talk and are overly critical of ourselves, but you deserve better.

Self-Forgiveness Is Key to a Positive Mind

If you have trouble stopping negative self-talk, self-forgiveness may be the missing prerequisite. This is an area where EFT can prove to be invaluable as well, and one that's associated with positive emotions, high self-esteem, low neuroticism and low levels of anxiety and depression.²

What exactly does it mean to forgive yourself, whether it be from a mistake you made, a time you behaved badly or an instance when you offended or harmed someone else? Researchers explained in PLOS One:3

“Self-forgiveness has been defined as a positive attitudinal shift in the feelings, actions, and beliefs about the self, following a self-perceived transgression or wrongdoing committed by the self.

Thus, forgiving the self can be considered as an adaptive mechanism of humans that helps them to restore a positive sense of the self and safeguards their overall well-being against the toxic effects of guilt, shame and regret.

A transgression from normative rules or offences toward other people with unwanted consequences may in fact elicit psychological distress that needs to be reduced. Self-forgiveness may help to achieve such a restoration by limiting self-punishment, self-condamnation, and, instead, increasing benevolence towards the self.”

Importantly, self-forgiveness is also associated with self-acceptance, an important part of psychological health that involves accepting all of your attributes, both positive and negative. “Self-acceptance enables an individual to appropriately evaluate his/her efficient and inefficient features and accept any negative aspects as parts of their personality,” researchers wrote in the journal PLOS One.4

Self-acceptance includes three main attitudes, including love for your body – even if you’re not completely satisfied with your weight, fitness level or any other physical attribute. It also involves the ability to protect yourself from other’s negative judgments, such that you don’t let it phase you if other people judge you.

Self-acceptance also involves recognizing and appreciating your own capabilities and believing in yourself. People who

have high levels of self-acceptance tend to also have higher levels of self-esteem and interpersonal satisfaction. They're also less likely to suffer from [depression](#), [anxiety](#), eating disorders and [obesity](#).⁵

Regulatory Modes Affect Self-Forgiveness

Goal-directed behaviors, such as stopping negative mental chatter, may exist in two dimensions known as assessment and locomotion. During the assessment function, you select the best course of action to pursue the goal. During locomotion, you move on or act on the goal to effect change and reach the desired goal.

The problem with those wrapped up in assessment function is that they may focus on past experiences and consequences of past actions that keep them from moving forward. Locomotors, on the other hand, may stay more future-focused or centered on present possibilities. According to researchers in PLOS One:⁶

“Empirical evidence shows that assessment positively correlates with fear of invalidity, discomfort with ambiguity, neuroticism, low self-esteem, and negative mood. Locomotion, on the other hand, positively correlates with psychological vitality, self-esteem, optimism, and being decisive, and it negatively correlates with social anxiety and depression.

The above regulatory concerns can have secondary consequences: assessment may leave people confined in the current state, evaluating the past and comparing it with the present, potentially creating repercussions for self-forgiveness; whereas locomotion may help to overcome the past mistakes and effectively move forward, potentially more easily leading to self-forgiveness.”

Indeed, in a study looking into this association, researchers found that those with a strong locomotion orientation were more inclined toward self-forgiveness due to their desire for change and future focus, while those with strong assessment

orientation were more focused on evaluating the past and therefore more likely to refrain from self-forgiveness.⁷

If you know you fall into the assessment tendency, you may use EFT to tap on your tendency to focus on the past and instead be present and look toward the future.

Self-Forgiveness Boosts Physical and Mental Health

A meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* revealed that self-forgiveness can help to boost physical health and psychological well-being.⁸ It's more strongly associated with mental health outcomes, particularly for depression and positive relationship outcomes.

Such associations make sense, as positive thoughts and attitudes are able to prompt changes in your body that strengthen your immune system, boost positive emotions, decrease pain and chronic disease, and provide stress relief.

One study found, for instance, that happiness, optimism, life satisfaction and other positive psychological attributes are associated with a lower risk of heart disease.⁹ It's even been scientifically shown that positivity can alter your genes.

A team of researchers at UCLA showed that people with a [deep sense of happiness](#) and well-being had lower levels of inflammatory gene expression and stronger antiviral and antibody responses.¹⁰ While it's previously been suggested that self-forgiveness could have negative outcomes by enabling bad behaviors to continue, the meta-analysis found this wasn't the case.

The Importance of Self-Compassion

Self-forgiveness goes hand in hand with learning to be kind and loving to yourself, i.e., having self-compassion. Kristin Neff, Ph.D., an associate professor with the University of Texas at Austin's department of educational psychology,

defined self-compassion as having three primary components, as follows:¹¹

Self-kindness versus self-judgment – When you're in a self-compassionate frame of mind, you soothe and comfort yourself in times of need; you do not regard yourself in a harsh, critical or judgmental way, or take a "stiff upper lip" approach when you're suffering. Common humanity versus isolation – This allows you to understand that being human is to be imperfect and failing and making mistakes are common to humanity. This gives you a broader perspective when evaluating your own shortcomings. Mindfulness versus overidentification – Being mindful means being present in the current moment and accepting it at face value, not giving too much weight to negative thoughts or experiences (but not ignoring them either).

Self-compassion can act as a buffer to your emotional health and recovery during stressful times like divorce. People who had higher levels of self-compassion at the beginning of one study were less negatively affected emotionally by the divorce on a daily basis.¹²

Even among college students, taking a short two-week self-compassion course led to gains in healthy impulse control and self-growth and decreases in self-judgment, habitual negative self-directed thinking, anxiety and depression.¹³

In the video below, Schiffman demonstrates how to use EFT to help you love and accept yourself – something most of us can benefit from and that can also naturally help to limit your negative mental chatter.

Get Rid of the 'Shoulds'

Negative views about your body or weight, or the tendency to criticize yourself for not making healthier eating choices or exercising is common. How many times a day do you think, "I should have gone to the gym," or "I should have stuck to my

diet”?

Schiffman recommends that you take “should” out of your vocabulary altogether, because whenever you say, “I should do this or that,” you’re setting yourself up for a great deal of disappointment, guilt and shame.

By saying “should,” you’re giving false power to an imaginary authority figure that’s essentially standing over you and demanding that you must do something. This is hardly a motivating mindset and the rebellious side of you is likely to push back and say, “I don’t want to.” Then, when you choose not to, you feel guilty and like you’ve failed.

“So,” Schiffman says in the featured video, “either do it or don’t do it. But stop ‘shoulding,’ as it puts you on your own personal guilt trip. Try replacing it with ‘could’ or ‘will’ ... ‘I could exercise’ ... at least it makes us feel like we have our power back.”

At the same time, if you’re feeling disappointed with how you look or your weight, tapping with EFT can help you change your thought process by calming your mind and the negative mental chatter.

As Schiffman says, people have, on average, 70,000 thoughts in a day, 40,000 of which are repetitive. This means you could be telling yourself over and over again that you’re not good enough or not worthy. “No wonder you’re feeling stuck,” Schiffman says. With EFT, you can shut down the negative voice and free your mind for more positive thoughts.

A Quick Guide to EFT

If you’re facing a serious mental health issue, I recommend you recruit the help of a professional EFT practitioner. However, you can use the following resource to learn the mechanics of EFT, as well to help you gain an appreciation for its wide-ranging application, including to free your mind from

negative mental chatter.

[EFT: Basic Steps to Your Emotional Freedom](#)

There are two basic areas to learn in order to use EFT: the tapping locations and technique, and the positive affirmations. Tapping is done with your fingertips, solidly but not so hard that it hurts. Ideally, remove any glasses or watch (which could interfere electromagnetically with the process) prior to tapping, and tap each point five to seven times. The tapping points are below; it's easiest to start at the top and work your way down.

1. Top of the Head (TH) – With fingers back-to-back down the center of the skull.
2. Eyebrow (EB) – Just above and to one side of the nose, at the beginning of the eyebrow.
3. Side of the Eye (SE) – On the bone bordering the outside corner of the eye.
4. Under the Eye (UE) – On the bone under an eye about 1 inch below your pupil.
5. Under the Nose (UN) – On the small area between the bottom of your nose and the top of your upper lip.
6. Chin (Ch) – Midway between the point of your chin and the bottom of your lower lip. Even though it is not directly on the point of the chin, we call it the chin point because it is descriptive enough for people to understand easily.
7. Collar Bone (CB) – The junction where the sternum (breastbone), collarbone and the first rib meet. This is a very important point and in acupuncture is referred to as K (kidney) 27. To locate it, first place your forefinger on the U-shaped notch at the top of the breastbone (about where a man would knot his tie).

From the bottom of the U, move your forefinger down toward the navel 1 inch and then go to the left (or right) 1 inch. This point is referred to as Collar Bone even though it is not on the collarbone (or clavicle) per se.

8. Under the Arm (UA) – On the side of the body, at a point even with the nipple (for men) or in the middle of the bra strap (for women). It is about 4 inches below the armpit.

9. Wrists (WR) – The last point is the inside of both wrists.

While tapping, you'll want to hold the problem or negative emotions in your mind while saying (ideally out loud) your positive affirmations, which can take on any number of forms.

A basic phrase to use would be, "Even though I have this [you fill in the blank], I deeply and completely love and accept myself." Sometimes one round of tapping is enough to clear up an issue while others repeated rounds are necessary. The great thing about EFT is that it costs nothing and you can use it as often as necessary to support your emotional health.

You can also perform EFT on children (or teach them how to do it themselves) during stressful situations or to help stop negative self-talk and gain positive attributes like a positive mindset, self-forgiveness and self-compassion.



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