

Helping Children Overcome Negative Self-Talk

By Julianne Neely and Abbie Kelley

Hearing your child say, **“I hate myself”, “I am a bad kid”, or “No one likes me”** can be heart breaking and alarming.

What your children say out loud gives you a window into what they are thinking. You know they are engaging in negative self-talk when you hear things like: **“I’m never going to get this!” or “That will be too hard!”**

Sometimes it’s not what they say, but you may notice self-defeating, subtle facial expressions or mumbles under their breath.

In therapy, we take this kind of **negative self-talk** very seriously because self-talk is a critical part of how children acquire beliefs about themselves. Negative self-talk has been linked to low self-esteem, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and poor academic achievement.

If you see Negative Self-Talk becoming a pattern in your house, help your child replace their negative thinking with positive self-talk.

In home strategies to decrease negative self talk:

- **“In our home” ... Family Rules about loving ourselves** – Sit down as a family and commit to replacing “I can’t” with “I can!” Make a list of rules that you can post to remind everyone in your home (even visitors) that it is okay to make mistakes as long as you try!
- **“Family Share Time”** - Encourage all your family members to talk openly about their stressors. Try instituting ‘talk time’ during dinner or during a specific time set aside in the evening before bedtime.
- **Love yourself!** - Treat yourself like a best friend. How you talk about yourself becomes a model that your children will follow.
- **Praise** - Seek out opportunities to praise your son or daughter for achievements or good behavior. Find ways to praise your children when talking to others – especially if your child is in earshot, but not a part of your conversation.
- **Get Sassy!** - Encourage your child to be THE BOSS of their negative voice and TALK BACK to it! When your negative voice tells you “You’re not going to do well on this test.”... Don’t let it take your confidence away!! Tell that voice, ‘I’m a good learner. I’m going to try my best. If I try my best, I’ll do okay.’”

If this becomes a chronic problem, this may be a symptom to a larger issue and indicate that it is time to try new techniques or speak with a professional for further assistance.

About the authors: Julianne Neely, MSW, LSW and Abbie Kelley, MA, LCPC are licensed therapists in Chicago, IL specializing in child, adolescent, and family counseling. They share a private practice, Individual and Family Connection, where they treat children dealing with behavior problems, anxiety, low self-esteem, ADHD/ADD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and grief/loss. For more information visit: <http://www.ifccounseling.com>