



Content developed by

from Nemours

Learning Goals

- Positive self-talk helps us feel good and do well.
- Negative self-talk makes us feel down on ourselves.
- You can improve your self-talk — it's all up to you.
- Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to a good friend.

Print Out Before Class

Bring copies for everyone:

- *Self-Talk Practice* handout
- *How Can Self-Talk Help Me?* handout
- *Tips From Michael Phelps* handout

Other Materials

- Markers, pens, or pencils for everyone.

Lesson 6: Talk To Yourself Like A (Really Good) Friend

TEACHER NOTE

In lesson 4, we taught kids to use power thoughts to boost confidence and cope with nervous feelings. Today, we'll teach more about how kids can use their thoughts to help themselves.

Self-talk can be helpful — when it's realistic, optimistic, encouraging, or calming. But self-talk that is too critical, worried, or pessimistic can make kids feel down and keep them from trying.

We'll do an activity that gives examples of different kinds of self-talk and lets kids identify positive and negative self-talk. We'll explain that everyone has the power to choose how to talk to themselves. We'll encourage kids to talk to themselves the way they would talk to a good friend.

QUICK TIPS

- *Self-talk is a term for the inner dialog that is a normal part of thinking. Everyone 'talks' to themselves — and the way we do it matters.*
- *Over time, a pattern of negative, critical self-talk can lead to depression and low resilience. A pattern of worry self-talk fuels anxiety.*
- *A pattern of positive self-talk builds optimism, confidence, grit, and resilience. It helps kids believe in themselves and try their best.*
- *Adults can help kids be aware of their self-talk and to change negative self-talk to more positive messages.*

START THE DISCUSSION

1. Do you ever talk to yourself?

Instructor: All italicized text is intended as notes to teachers. All other text may be read out loud to your class.



Take It Home!

Kids will take home 3 handouts. Encourage them to share what they learned with a parent. Encourage kids to notice their own self-talk during their normal activities, to talk to themselves in positive ways, and to rephrase negative self-talk.

Resources

KidsHealth:

- Self-Esteem (for kids)

OR

- Self-Esteem (for teens)
- Confidence

(Lesson 6: [Talk To Yourself Like A \(Really Good\) Friend](#), continued)

(Playfully) Raise your hand if you ever talk to yourself.

Show of hands.

Yes, we all do it.

Sometimes, we talk to ourselves out loud. Like this: "Now where did I put my pen?" We even answer ourselves: "Oh, good, here it is."

But mostly, we talk to ourselves without saying the words out loud.

We each have a quiet voice in our mind that makes comments — pretty much all the time. A name for this inner voice is "self-talk." Have you ever heard of it?

This inner voice is the way we tell ourselves about whatever's going on. You might look down the street and tell yourself, "Here comes my bus." Or you see what time it is and say to yourself, "It's almost time for lunch. I hope there's pizza."

Most of the time, we don't even notice that we're saying things to ourselves. That's because we're so used to it. But this self-talk is there in the background, and it influences us — even if we're not paying much attention.

If we tune in, and try to listen our own self-talk, we can start to notice the way we talk to ourselves — what we say but also how we say it.

2. The way we talk to ourselves matters.

Let's talk about why self-talk matters.

Some self-talk sounds like this:

- "Oh, I forgot my backpack! I'll go get it."
- "Hmmm, I think this math problem needs me to use long division."
- "Hey, the bus is coming. I'd better hurry!"



(Lesson 6: [Talk To Yourself Like A \(Really Good\) Friend](#), continued)

Self-talk like this is there to help you stay on track with what you're doing. You use this good, basic self-talk all through the day. It's a nice, reliable part of your mind doing its job.

But some types of self-talk aren't helpful to us at all. Sometimes self-talk takes on a critical tone. It can sound like this:

- "Oh, I forgot my backpack. I'm always forgetting things!"
- "I can't believe I missed that shot. I'm such a loser."
- "Maybe no one will sit with me. Everyone has more friends than I do."
- "I totally messed up this spelling test. I just can't do anything right."

See the difference?

Now, maybe you talk to yourself like this once in a while. But why do you think it's not good to talk to yourself like this on a regular basis?

It might feel like someone else is criticizing you all the time, right? How does that make you feel about yourself?

3. Self-talk is powerful.

What we say to ourselves matters because it affects the way we feel about ourselves. It even affects what we do.

Imagine you know a girl who wants to be on the swim team. But even though she wants it, she says to herself, "I probably won't make the team. Why bother to try out?"

How do you think she might feel when she says this to herself? What do you think she might do?

Let kids answer.

- She might feel sad, or bad about herself, like a loser.
- She might not try out, she might even give up swimming.
- She might not try out for other things, either. And that's too bad — because she might have made it.



(Lesson 6: [Talk To Yourself Like A \(Really Good\) Friend](#), continued)

If you were her friend, what would you say to her?

Let kids answer.

Now, what if she decides to talk to herself like her own best friend? She could say, "I might not make the team, but at least I can give it a shot. I might make it. But if I don't, I can keep swimming and try out next year." With this different self-talk, how do you think she might feel? What do you think she might do?

Let them answer.

- She might feel brave, strong, and good about herself.
- She might feel nervous, but she'll give it her best effort.
- She might feel glad she tried out, even if she didn't make it.
- She might get the courage to try out next time.

4. We can change our self-talk.

The good thing is, we can change what we say to ourselves. To do this, **we just need to take time to notice what we want to change.** Then we can think of better, more encouraging ways to talk to ourselves.

Let's all decide to talk to ourselves the way we'd talk to a really good friend — starting now!

5. Let's try it.

Pass out the handout called Self-Talk Practice and a marker or pen for each student.

There are lots of examples of self-talk on your handout. Take a few minutes to look at them. Can you spot self-talk that could help you feel good or do well? A hint is to look for things you might say to your favorite friend.

Put a big check next to the ones that sound positive or helpful.

Put an X next to the ones that sound more negative or critical. These are the things you wouldn't say to a friend. And you wouldn't want a friend to say them to you!

Give kids time to complete this. They can work alone or in pairs.



(Lesson 6: [Talk To Yourself Like A \(Really Good\) Friend](#), continued)

Or, do this activity as a group. You can read each example out loud (or have kids volunteer to take turns reading each one), then have kids call out whether to put a check or an X next to each one as you go.

6. What have we learned?

- The way we talk to ourselves matters.
- Positive self-talk is when we talk to ourselves in ways that are encouraging, kind, or helpful. It makes us feel good about ourselves. It helps us try things, believe in ourselves, and work hard to do well.
- Negative self-talk means talking in a way that's critical or unkind. It makes us feel bad or discouraged. It makes us more likely to give up, not try, or avoid things.
- People don't always notice their self-talk. It plays in the background of our minds. But if we try to notice it, we can use positive self-talk to help us. We can change negative self-talk.
- Always try to talk to yourself the same way you'd talk to a really good friend.

7. Take the next step.

Give kids the handouts [How Can Self-Talk Help Me?](#) *and* [Tips From Michael Phelps](#).

You might have discovered that your self-talk can use some improvement. But don't worry! You can choose self-talk that helps you feel and do your best.

Take these handouts home. For the next few days, notice what you say to yourself. Pay attention to your positive self-talk. See if you can spot when negative self-talk pops up. Think of a friendlier thing to say to yourself and try it out!

Michael Phelps found that using positive self-talk helped him win. See what he has to say about ways to build confidence and feel better in the [Tips from Michael Phelps](#) handout. You might have seen this handout before, but it's good to look at it again.

If you like, show the handouts to your mom, dad, or another adult you're close to. Teach them what we learned. If you are having trouble with too much negative self-talk, ask them to help you find a friendlier way to talk to yourself.