

Creating positive self-talk

By Sue Smarkala, The Adlerian Team

An unexamined life is not worth living
- Socrates

As parents, how can we help our children build positive internal tapes? How can we share our experiences about negative and positive self-talk? The first step is to know these internal tapes are in play for us all. These limiting beliefs are changeable once we recognize them. When you or your child hesitates to take a step forward, talk about the limiting thoughts. Look at the available choices. Then, choose one and try it out. The support you provide to your children encourages them to move forward and supports them to build trust in their True Selves.

The process of examining where we are in achieving our goals is challenging. We are busy, in the middle of ‘doing’ our life. When we realize that we are not making the progress we want, one of the stumbling blocks may be our self-talk.

Awareness – the first step

How aware are you of a voice inside your head that constantly points out your failings, your insecurities, your fears and from time to time your strengths? It is this voice that can keep us from making the changes in our lives that would move us toward our goals. Here are some examples of the internal tapes:

“You have never done that before and it doesn’t look easy. You have failed before and it could happen again. Be careful!”

OR on the positive side, *“You are good at that. You really helped a lot of people today. You made a great contribution!”*

Each person has a personal Inner Critic (and an Inner Cheerleader). It may have a gender; it may have a name; it may sound a lot like a parent or person from your childhood. Rick Carson, in *Taming Your Gremlin*, describes this multidimensional Inner Critic as a gremlin who is out to thwart our every action. W. Timothy Gallwey, in *The Inner Game of Work*, talks of “Self 1” – the Inner Critic, and “Self

2” – the True Self, the best of who we are. Gallwey challenges us to operate from our Self 2, where “learning, surprise and discovery” are the norm, rather than living as Self 1 and creating experiences “... hardwired for consistency, control and predictability.”

Both of these authors encourage us to self-identify when we are being monopolized by our gremlin or are stuck in “Self 1” thinking. By developing self-awareness, we begin to differentiate between our True Self thinking and the chatter of the gremlin in our heads.

The internal tapes are created as we observed life as a child, and figured out how to behave in the world. Children learn by doing and sometimes their skills are not fully formed to complete the task properly. Often the results are less than expected and feedback is given. “That was a silly thing to do!” “What were you thinking?” “Never do that again without Mommy/ Daddy helping you.” Unfortunately, as we grow older, the comments from our Inner Critic stay the same – “Watch out!”, “Be careful!”, “Don’t try that!”

Challenging the inner critic

The Inner Critic sees its job as keeping us from changing, from learning, from doing anything different. It is a self protection mechanism. The first step toward opening up our choices is to recognize that the Inner Critic chatter is something separate and apart from our True Self. By recognizing that some of our thoughts are actually the Inner Critic talking, we interrupt the critic’s influence in our daily life. We now can focus on the choices we have. The very first choice is, “Will I listen?” The next step is to identify the range of choices our True Self has. Once we have identified the gremlin conversation and reviewed our options, make a choice and move forward.

Inner Critic(I.C.): “You have never done that before and it doesn’t look safe. You will hurt yourself.”

True Self(T.S.): “I hear you, Inner Critic. This is a new area of experience, true. I have support from others. We have developed a plan that covers all possibilities that we can see. It’s a solid plan. Let’s do it!”

I.C.: “You aren’t qualified to suggest something like that!”

T.S.: “I am new in this situation. I am ready to speak up and I have special knowledge on the topic.”

It is not useful to argue with our Inner Critic. Gremlins love to argue and never lose. To deal with our gremlins, we have to recognize the chatter for what it is – an attempt to keep us from moving forward, to keep us from achieving our goals. Our focus has to be on what we want to achieve, and find ways to identify the choices we have, to move in the direction of our goals. As we develop our ability to make choices, to build successes, to see our progress towards goals, we build trust in self.

Gremlins can sound so reasonable and caring. There are times when the Inner Critic is particularly insistent. It is valuable to notice the times the Inner Critic chatter occurs, and create a journal of particular situations, and the choices that are available. The greater our awareness is in the moment, the greater opportunity we have to shift our attention to the opinions and beliefs of the True Self, and identify the choices that will move us forward.

Assisting children and teenagers to understand and manage their Inner Critic is a life skill and necessary for their daily success. We carry more negative based messages than positive ones and it takes practice, focus and monitoring to block the Inner Critic and encourage our True Self to direct our lives.

References:

Carson, Rick, *Taming Your Gremlin*, HarperCollins Publishers Inc., New York, 2003

Gallwey, W. Timothy, *The Inner Game of Work*, Random House, Inc., New York, 2000

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