



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission



Self-talk

THE LINK BETWEEN THINKING AND FEELING

Have you ever found yourself feeling upset or worried about something, and then after a few weeks you realised it did not really matter after all? Or perhaps you talked about your situation with a friend and felt much better afterwards?

Although you may not be aware of it, your experience demonstrated a very important principle:

Changing the way you think will change the way you feel.

WHAT IS SELF-TALK?

As we go about our daily lives we are constantly thinking about and interpreting the situations in which we find ourselves. It is as though we have an internal voice inside our head that determines how we perceive every situation. We call this inner voice our 'self-talk', and it includes our conscious thoughts as well as our unconscious assumptions or beliefs.

Much of our self-talk is reasonable (for example, 'I had better do some preparation for that exam', or 'I am really looking forward to that match'). However, some of our self-talk is negative, unrealistic or self-defeating (for example 'I am going to fail for sure', or 'I didn't play well – I'm hopeless').

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Negative self-talk often causes us to feel bad, and to experience upsetting emotions such as hurt, anger, frustration, depression or anxiety. It can also make us behave in a self-defeating way. For instance, thoughts such as 'I am going to fail for sure' may discourage you from working hard when you are preparing for your exams.

THE ABC OF SELF-TALK

The way you interpret events has a huge impact on the way you feel and behave. The relationship between your thoughts, feelings and behaviours can best be explained by looking at the ABC of self-talk. Here is an example to illustrate:

- > **Activating situation** – the situation itself, or the things that happened when you began to feel bad
 - You get your exam timetable
- > **Beliefs** – our self-talk (thoughts) and assumptions that we make about a situation
 - ‘I am not going to be able to do this.’
 - ‘I will fail and the whole thing will be a disaster. My parents will be so disappointed in me.’
 - ‘I won’t be able to do the course I want and then I won’t be able to get a proper job.’
- > **Consequences** (our feelings and behaviours)
 - You feel stressed, panicky, butterflies in the stomach
 - You cannot bring yourself to sit down and study
 - You sit down in front of the TV and eat a packet of biscuits.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

When things are not going too well, review your own ABC and challenge your beliefs about the activating situation. Have a go!

Remember – whether you think you can or can’t, you are probably right!

TAKE ACTION

You can develop this skill further with the support of a performance psychologist. If you have access to a performance psychologist speak to them of your interest in this area. If not, your coach, state institute or academy, or national sporting organisation, are good places to start looking for further help.