

Meditation and Self Talk: Dealing with Stress

Stress levels in people today are higher than ever. Our world is much faster paced than ever before. People pile on more to their schedules, and with the economy failing they are working themselves more than what may be physically and mentally healthy. People try to lessen their pressures in many unhealthy different ways; medication, alcohol, drugs, overeating, things that give an easy short term fix. Yet in such stress filled times, there are many easy ways to naturally help with the growing anxiety. Exercise, yoga, many other physical activities, and what I am about to explore are forms of intrapersonal communication; self talk and meditation that go into the mental frame of mind.

People these days have very high stress levels; there are more responsibilities that people take on than they used to in the past. Back in the 50's women stayed at home tended to the children, and took care of the house and dinner. Nowadays that style of life seems like a fantasy. Most women work as well as their husbands and it is still tough for bills to be met and time to be found for the kids. Jobs expect more time, effort, and the failing economy is adding to less pay and benefits received in return. People are dealing with so many higher pressures and contributing outside factors, and all that will clutter a person's mind. People have a harder time sleeping, or less time to try to do so. Then when they do wake up, their minds are full of the worries they had when they fell asleep a few hours before. In all this, there are ways to quiet the mind and sort through all the anxieties that plague us. Self talk is one way that can help.

“Self-talk refers to the dialogue that goes on inside your head.” (2) People will have such dialogue in their head all the time. Some people probably aren’t aware that such a form of intrapersonal communication goes on all the time inside them. Yet for those who probably are aware, may use it to their advantage. Identifying that it exists is a big step in the direction of learning how to use it to an improvement. People, who can identify it, will self talk to themselves inside their heads and it will enable them to sort through some of the clutter. It’s like talking your way through a problem. Many times self talk will be most present in high levels of stress, and people will use it to get their thoughts organized so they can move past the moment and thus will lessen the level of stress. *“The use of positive self-talk has been linked to the reduction of stress.”* (3) There are different types of self talk, one of them can be positive and there are also negative forms as well which we will get to later on. Self talking through a stressful time or moment is a very positive form.

Self talk is also said to be beneficial and positive when used to build self confidence. Self confidence issues are another huge stress that people have these days. Body image, weight, clothing, job status, and many other factors can lead to low self esteem and can cause stress if a person doesn’t feel they have the right things according to society or the media. People with low self esteem will tend to self talk themselves in a negative way. They may constantly tell themselves they aren’t good enough or aren’t good looking enough; the negative thoughts are endless. Yet if someone can turn around how they talk to themselves into positive reinforcement they can boost their confidence levels which may help in everyday life and lessen the stress of how they feel about themselves. Knowing that self talk can be a positive thing is a good way to make sure you use it when it is needed. *“It is more of a "reality check": recognizing self-talk for*

what it is, dealing with negative messages, and harnessing the positive for the greater good of individual persons.”(3)

Self talk is a very large form of intrapersonal communication, and is present as much as our other thoughts and brain functions. *“Self-talk exists because of the phenomenon of inner speech.”(4)* Inner speech happens in our heads constantly, when we process information, have a conversation with another person, hear a sound; our baser function will tell itself what to do or think. Our mind will instantly rely on our past, and present experiences and memories, our ideas on different levels, and will decode and encode it in many different ways. This inner speech, or intrapersonal communication happens, just as we talk to ourselves happens as part of it as a whole. It is said to happen in two forms; *“Self-talk as a dialogue with the self existing in two forms: (a) the silent, internal dialogic process of inner speech, and (b) the audible, external dialogue addressed to the self although others may hear it.”(4)* The first happens solely in one’s head and can only be heard by the person talking to themselves in their heads. The second can be sometimes be heard by others even though it is only intended by the person saying it to hear. People will talk to themselves out loud but it will have the same intent, and that is hopefully to motivate or to talk through something in the hopes of relieving stress.

As said before, self talk can be beneficial when used positively, but self talk can become negative when it adds to someone’s stress level instead of relieving it. This can happen to many people who will unintentionally overanalyze or overdue self talking to themselves. People may continue to self talk to try to organize the many thoughts they have, yet there may be too much going on for the organization to occur. People with these high levels of stress will continue to talk to themselves and they are unable to do anything without comment inside their heads. *“This aspect of yourself has a running commentary about everything you do. It never lets anything go*

by without some comment, remark or evaluation.” (2) Some people are also unable to use self talk to help their self esteem and will continue to use it negatively and it can become very destructive. Many, myself included, will self talk too much to the point that their mind becomes overrun with thoughts of what they are trying to work out. When a stress free conclusion cannot be met, the self talk keeps going in circles throughout the mind, and can actually create more stress. Thinking about something over and over as opposed to talking it through and then letting it go can become a very bad thing and is very negative. For those who are unable to use self talk in a positive light need a different way to quiet their minds and release their stress and a very successful way is meditation. Meditation allows oneself to clear their mind and get rid of self talk and other hurtful stress filled thoughts. This is very beneficial to someone whose self talk is or has become negative. *“To the extent that an individual's self-talk is negative or deleterious, a reduction in such activity would benefit the individual.”(5)*

Meditation exists in many forms and varieties and all of them help the mind, spirit and ones focus. It ranges from different religious versions to more modern approaches that do not have a religious context. Yet most all forms of meditation contain the same activities, and that is sitting in a quiet place, clearing the mind and focusing on breathing. Clearing the mind during meditation is one of the most important aspects of doing it. In clearing away the clutter and stress related thoughts that usually fill the mind, will open up room for thoughts of quiet and calm, which is what most people want. *“The practical effort to focus completely on our breathing takes our minds away from the "mind clutter" that constantly tries to invade our mind and eliminate feelings that will lead to a time of calm.” (1)*

Meditation is very easy overall to do, and it doesn't take a long time to conduct. It is said that what is needed to do is to take a few minutes to yourself, and find a quiet place if you can.

Also if you can, sit down and close your eyes, and begin to let your mind wander, and try if you may clear away your thoughts. While doing this, you want to focus on your breathing.

“Meditation may involve sitting quietly, counting one's breaths.”(5) After a few minutes, you slowly bring your consciousness back to reality. Even a few minutes of this should be very helpful in getting yourself through the day and through stress filled moments. Mediating can be done almost anywhere. It can be done in different forms and lengths of time will vary. Religious forms will often have the subjects meditate for hours. More modern takes without the religious backgrounds will usually take around twenty minutes or so, and many times it is related with exercise like yoga, yet it is not needed to help the mind with stress. A few minutes stolen in the day, like described above can help someone deal with their anxiety and make it through without clutter in the mind. Some versions even prefer to have you meditate twice a day, like a routine; *“Twice daily, preferably in the morning and evening before eating, all you have to do is sit quietly and let your mind go wherever it wants. Inevitably... it will drift in the direction of things that please you greatly.”* (6) But overall meditation in its many forms has the same goal in mind, and that it to put your thoughts in a pleasant place and far away from tension and anxiety.

Meditation clearly has many benefits; it can quiet the mind, help with stress and get rid of unwanted, negative self talk. *“Meditation seems to “quiet” the mind, resulting in less self-talk.”* (5) There are other countless benefits present as well; one of them being that intrapersonal conflicts can exist in self talk; when a person feels conflicted and cannot make a decision. This may be reduced and a conflict more easily reached when a person feels less tension. Less tension comes from meditation. Another benefit for someone who has phobias; phobias usually come from someone with elevated psychological anxieties, and meditation can help with such

problems. Some other very interesting benefits were found to exist from meditation as well. A study conducted by a Dr. Wallace found that:

“During Meditation, subjects entered a unique state of consciousness that was distinguished by highly beneficial effects on the human body; significant decreases in oxygen consumption and carbon dioxide elimination, cardiac output, heart rate, and respiratory rate. Skin resistance (which decreases when stress is present) increased as a result of meditation, and the brain produced more pleasant alpha waves than normal.”

(6)

These are very significant changes in ones physical presence that came on from changing ones mental status through meditating. This Dr. Wallace believes that people who meditate usually become healthier whether it is physical or mental; meditation in his studies showed improvement in both.

After finding evidence of such improvement, I wanted to conduct my own study on my mental state of mind. I know that I am a person who overanalyzes everything, self talks very destructively, and will lose sleep because I cannot shut my mind off. I thought that meditation would be very beneficial. I first kept a journal of days that I did not meditate. I found that I caught myself talking to myself interpersonally, almost constantly. It was like a stream that was always running and would never stop. It was constant. I also found that it did seem to lessen significantly in times that I was less stressed. For instance; my self talk was most present in my most stressful moments of the day- when I was rushing to make it in to work, when I was at work and running around. It was overwhelming to even try to record what I was saying because it was continuous. A quote from my journal shows what I mean:

“I have been trying to write down all the times I self talk during the day and quite frankly Its been quite a challenge! I self talk all the time. Every few minutes. At work and in the mornings when its high stress, its quite a constant stream of self talk.” (Journal entry # 17)

I also noticed that my self talk was much less when I was at rest, when I got home- making dinner, watching television, or exercising. In my times of “rest” it was much easier to record what I was talking to myself about. Yet even when the self talk was less in times of less stress, I had and have always had a hard time falling asleep because I will be unable to shut it off completely, it is still there.

So I proceeded to try meditation. I would do as instructed and sit quietly, let my thoughts clear and wander away from the present and focus on my breathing. I found that things in my head did seem to quiet dramatically. I went through my day, just the same, and found that I was self talking much less than my usual self. There were still periods of high stress where I couldn't control it, and the self talk came through, but overall it was significantly lower. It was most evidently lower when the meditation was done at the beginning of the day, before stress had occurred. I would try to meditate during high stress times, and it was helpful, yet not as much when I meditated before the stress had even occurred yet. As a whole though, meditation was a very beneficial practice that helped with my stress levels, and negative self talk.

Anxieties, tension, low self esteem, are all many problems that afflict people in our modern stress filled world. There is more out there to affect our mental frames of mind than ever before, and there are many healthy ways to help. Self talk can be supportive when it is used in a helpful and positive way. It can be a tool to sort through the clutter and stress that fills the mind.

It can help build confidence and self assurance, and be a way to become in-tuned with yourself. Yet for those that self talk becomes hindering as opposed to helpful, and overruns the mind, mediation is there to help. Meditation is a very valuable device that helps the overall state of mind in a helpful way. It quiets all anxiety and pressures that may be overwhelming to a person's thoughts. It helps with many aspects of mental and physical health and is very easy to do. People who need an answer to their plaguing stress filled lives, should look into training their thoughts through the use of meditation. It is a very reliable source that looks into your own self for support.

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