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The Importance of Self-Compassion

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Context plays a significant role in overcoming a phobia of public speaking. As strange as it may sound, that context isn't related exclusively to external factors, such as the audience, your topic, preparation, etc. In fact, internal factors, such as thoughts, emotions, and other psychological experiences are crucial.

You already know about some of the ways to cope with negative thoughts, but this time, the context is broader and concerns how you treat yourself. Even if you have never before considered your self-talk, and the attitudes you have towards yourself, it is worth doing now, since it can create a significant different in your public speaking abilities.

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Encouraging Your Friends

Imagine that one of your close friends has a fear of public speaking. He or she feels very insecure and struggles with numerous intrusive thoughts about it.

As a good friend, you'll try to help him or her. You'll probably say that they shouldn't be so afraid; that they are not defined by this particular speech; that they should be less stringent and more flexible when talking about themselves.

You will also likely encourage them to focus on all of their strengths and see the challenge of public speaking as a minor obstacle, that they are perfectly capable of overcoming. In other

words, you would probably encourage your friend in every way possible.

When It Is Your Turn

However, when you walk in the speaker's shoes, and you feel nervous about a forthcoming public performance, you might take another, less constructive approach. Perhaps your thoughts about that event can be quite harsh and include conclusions, such as, "I am sure I can't do it", "I am weak and incompetent", "Everyone will remember my failure". Most people who fear public speaking, tend to make numerous, mainly negative, assumptions and perceive themselves as inadequate, while that may not be the case.

The Value of Self-Talk

The way we speak to ourselves, within our inner world, while thinking about our successes and failures, has a great impact on how we perform our tasks and how we perceive ourselves, regardless of the outcome. We can be our best friend or the worst enemy - it's up to us.

Being Kind to Yourself

You can change the way you speak to yourself and be your supportive friend, in stressful situations. The first step is to realize the pattern you use. You can achieve that by examining your thoughts. As a start, you could identify your cognitive distortions and recognize the thoughts that represent these distortions. You can use mindfulness as well, allowing your thoughts to be present at the moment, without overwhelming you.

A Positive Relationship with Yourself

Another approach that most people find to be very helpful is self-compassion. It represents the foundation of emotional well-being and includes being aware of thoughts and emotions that lead you to feel confused, afraid or inadequate.

Being compassionate toward others, or empathizing with others, is the ability to recognize when someone is suffering and wanting to help them. Notice the importance of the desire to help - to take action, to relieve suffering. Self-compassion is the same, only directed towards yourself. Being afraid and believing that makes you weak always includes suffering. Although suffering is usually an unavoidable part of life, you don't have to make it worse and spin in a circle of self-doubt, inadequacy, and anxiety.

How Could It Help?

Being self-compassionate and engaging in positive self-talk, will help you become aware and of challenging thoughts and emotions, such as fear, sadness, anger and even self-loathing. However, don't confuse a positive relationship with yourself, with self-indulgence.

Self-compassion implies accepting all the aspects of yourself, both positive and negative, as well as being kind to yourself, without unnecessarily indulging more than material goods. Another common misconception is that self-compassion will jeopardize your self-discipline

when, in fact, it will more likely motivate you to be even more goal-oriented. Self-criticizing brings you down, while self-encouragement is inspiring. It is only natural, for every human, to be more active when happy.

Know What to Say

Self-compassion can have a more tangible form than a language you use while speaking to yourself. You can create your individual self-compassionate phrases and use them whenever you need to.

For example, instead of:

- “If I’m afraid of public speaking, I am such a coward.”
- “Everyone will see what a loser I am, and that will be horrible.”
- “I’ll never be able to speak in front of other people, and that will ruin my career.”

Try with:

- “I am afraid of public speaking, but being afraid doesn’t make me weak. Being afraid is a normal human reaction, and it has nothing to do with my competency. I actually have many examples of being strong.”
- “Maybe my public speech won’t impress everyone, but I’m still a decent human being, and I’m perfectly OK with myself.”
- “Maybe I’ll never be a fantastic public speaker, but I’ll do what needs to be done, and there’s no need to beat myself up over that. I have plenty of other great qualities, such as (list the qualities you like in yourself).”

These are only examples - you can create your personal phrases, using your thoughts and constructive alternatives.

Remember, be kind to yourself in the same way you are with your friends and other people you care about.

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