



## Creating Soothing Self-Talk

As you've been in the group, you've noticed the emphasis on kindness, gentleness, compassion. With this as a backdrop and using the principles of embodiment, practice noticing when you are speaking negatively to yourself. Notice when it seems to happen; what triggers it; what your favorite ways to diminish yourself are.

Becoming aware of what you do to yourself (and how you do it) is the first step. That is, if we're doing it gently. Otherwise, that awareness can be used to increase the hopelessness and suffering.

Once you become aware, over time you'll develop the choice to try doing something different. No matter what happens you can still notice what the outcome is. Basically that means: Do you feel better or worse? Is there some relief?

## Suggestions for Developing Wholesome Self-talk

### 1. *Dis-Identifying*

There are different ways to dis-identify from something. The main idea is to find a way to take what is going on inside of you and separate from it. This way, we find there is a part of us that observes what is happening to another part.

Sometimes we can dis-identify psychologically by thinking about differences, sometimes it takes more concrete forms like writing, drawing, singing, moving, etc. Whatever form you use, try noticing that there is someone who is paying attention to that which is happening.

**Noting:** If you feel flooded, you may find it helpful to start by locating what's overwhelming and then begin labeling the experience (i.e., anger, jealousy, and anxiety). Just as it in meditation, the simple act of noticing (noting) can help to externalize the experience—putting it outside of you psychologically and, with practice giving you some more space to breathe (as in the example below.)

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*"Anger. Anger. Anger."*

*"Sadness. Sadness. Sadness."*

Sometimes that means we have to take a moment to breathe, realize there's more to us than this triggered part before we can do anything. At those times, you might want to say something simple to encourage the dis-identification. One simple way is to note the triggered state without doing anything. By slowing, noting and repeating what you note, you can sometimes slow down the overwhelm.

*"I'm really triggered..... I'm really triggered."*

**Externalizing:** Sometimes noting isn't enough. These internal voices can take over a lot of psychological real estate. When these parts are at their full strength, they often take over with a vengeance. If we're not held captive by them, we might simply recognize them as parts trying to do their "jobs" of protecting us and keeping us safe. In their grips, though, we find ourselves feeling like hostages.

One way is to notice where in the body the experience is located. It can, at times, even feel like it's happening outside your body instead of inside it. Take a moment to locate it. This state can show up as thoughts (words in your head), feelings, sensations, images.

It can be helpful to notice whatever comes up as a communication from that part. Perhaps your chest starts feeling really heavy with a lot of pressure. The feeling might increase, it might actually hurt. That might be the part trying to say something to you—to let you know the experience it was feeling at some time in your life.

You might notice a force field around your body, or a sense of not being able to move. Sometimes your head gets really noisy, like there is an entire kindergarten class on recess. Some people just notice feeling states, or they have an image of being somewhere at a certain age. Whatever comes up, take note, and use the information as an access point.

*"My head is so noisy I can't even figure out what the words are."*

*"My belly feels like there's a sick blob in there. Makes me sick."*

*"I feel like a pinball machine, everything's bouncing off the walls."*

*"I want to curl up in a ball and shut everyone out."*



Once you have a clearer idea of this triggered part, you might want to speak to it as if it's separate from you. That's a simple way of dis-identifying from it, recognizing that there is a part of you, inside, that is having the experience, and another part of you witnessing and observing the triggered part.

It can be helpful to treat these parts as you would a child who is overwrought and needs a time out. If that works, you might speak to a triggered part with kindness and confidence.

"You're really triggered, aren't you? I want to know what's happening. I see that you're really distressed (or sad, or angry, or frustrated, or scared, or hurt....) It matters to me that you're upset..... I'm afraid I won't do a good job in listening, I'm afraid I might get scared, but I'm willing to try, and if I can't do it well now, I'll try again."

In whatever way feels comfortable to you, let these troubled parts know you're open to them, ready to hear. That might take some breathing and grounding on your part. If so, take your own time; slow it down so you don't lose yourself in the situation. Take a walk if you need to. Movement can help shift the emotional state, making it possible to be less flooded by the state.

### **Sometimes we have to be more concrete in externalizing these parts.**

Try drawing the experience, writing it down, or in some way putting it outside you. As much as you can, develop the details of this internal experience. How does the voice sound? Where in your body does this part live? What does this part look like (is it a blob, a dark cloud, a 4 year old, or a mean Nazi guard)? Make it as true outside as it is inside to you.

Then take a look at it through your eyes. Doing this moves this internalized version of the part outside of you. Feel free to move this part as far away from you as you need to in order to have some space.

If you find yourself getting overwhelmed or sliding back into identifying with the triggered part, ask the parts to slow down and not overwhelm you. Do this with as much kindness as you can muster. It's important to stay as steady as you can.

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Take another breath or two to center yourself. Notice how you are feeling with this part separate from you. If you don't notice a change, you can be sure that the triggered part has slid back into position! Or there might be another part "protecting" you to keep you from feeling calmer. Sometimes protector parts do that to make sure you don't get hurt and nothing bad happens.

If you can't get centered, breathe in kindness, compassion, healing light, or whatever energy/feeling feels better to you. Focus on this kindness. Concentrate on it without any pressure. Take your time to savor and soak up this different energy.

We all have parts of ourselves that don't exemplify who we want to be. Sometimes it helps to compartmentalize the meanness, or other troubling parts, by putting them into a separate compartment. It's another way of separating from them.

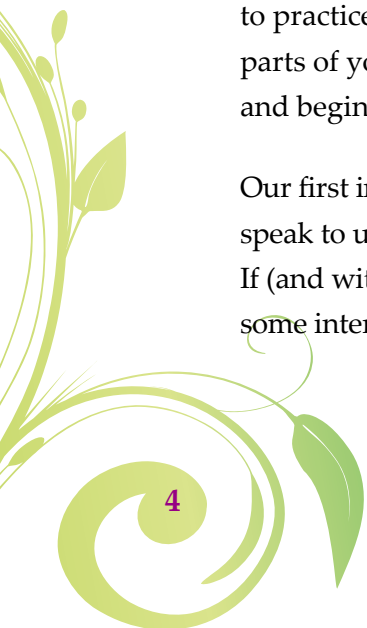
Deliberately addressing those parts as separate from you may allow for some sense of freedom or safety, and it can help you pay closer attention to them. Some people find it necessary to put these parts in a box, or a container of some kind. This can be done psychologically by imagining putting something in a box.

At times it might feel important to make the container even more concrete, by finding a physical container, writing or drawing something to represent the part, and then putting the box somewhere. Some people have even buried the container! Trust yourself and find the way to have the psychic space you need to calm down.

## *2. Learning to befriend these states*

When you notice that there's some internal noise that is triggering you it's the perfect time to practice compassion and loving-kindness! It's hard, at first, to see the internal voices as parts of yourself, but with practice, like the example above, you can externalize the part and begin to intervene with compassion.

Our first instinct when someone is mean or rude to us is to respond in kind. When our parts speak to us in a critical or demeaning way, our usual response is to sink into it, becoming it. If (and with practice it becomes more often) we can slow ourselves down a little and create some internal distance, we'll have a chance to respond in a way that's more helpful.





Key to developing this compassion is to realize these parts are doing tasks that they took on so long ago. With practice you can begin to see their behavior as messages from the past. Unfortunately these behaviors move from internal impulses, thoughts, or feelings into actual re-enactments in “real life.” This can show up as explosive rage, self-destructive behaviors, complete withdrawal, overeating, obsessing, or other forms of extreme behavior.

The Internal Family Systems model calls these parts “firefighters.” Firefighters will do anything to protect the exiled part from being hurt or exposed again. When that happens we often find ourselves startled, overwhelmed, confused. If you begin to see their behavior as messages from the past instead of you being out of control, you can begin to pay closer attention and learn to befriend them. Once that happens, you’re on your way to a happier, more compassionate internal experience of life.

Try linking the internal noise, behavior, or feeling, to the past. Imagine that what you are feeling is actually the undigested experience that was encoded so long ago. An infant, or child, and even young adults, doesn’t have the necessary development yet to deal with a lot of overwhelm. They really don’t know what to do with it. What people do with overwhelming material, is push it out of their minds, into some cordoned off psychological space where it doesn’t intrude anymore. (See the section on Parallel Lives for review.)

What you are feeling now may very well be the intensity that you were not able to “digest” all those years ago. In this way, your current experience is a vital key to why the past was so difficult... and a key to a different future.

*“Wow. That’s really intense. If it’s this hard for me now, it must have been brutally intolerable for me when I was (fill in the age).”*

During this process, you can check and see if the part is listening or paying attention. If you don’t get immediate internal feedback, ask the part if it’s aware you are there. Usually there’s some answer. If there isn’t you might consider that the part is hiding, or worried, or discouraged, or upset. Since we don’t know, you might try talking to it as kindly as you can.

*“I know I haven’t always been there for you. I want you to know I’m trying to learn how to do this. I know I have to do it differently than I’ve been doing. I make mistakes and don’t*

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*always know how to talk to you or take time to listen to you. I hope you'll be patient with me. You can always let me know when I'm doing something that isn't working for you."*

When you have some internal balance (it doesn't have to be 100% more balanced....feeling 5% more balanced can often work) try speaking to these critical or frantic voices with some kindness. By using kindness, you create internal room to witness them with less charge. Then you could welcome these parts as you would a guest to your house. The intention is to befriend these parts instead of continuing to push them away.

*"I know you're really hurting but beating me up doesn't help me listen better. Can you turn it down a little so I can be more present to you and actually hear what you have to say?"*

### 3. Setting Loving or Kind Boundaries

Sometimes it's too much to try to "process" anything psychologically. You might be feeling stressed, or burned out by your own physiology. Be gentle with yourself. This is the perfect time to practice compassion. At that time, you might want to "drop the content" and turn your attention elsewhere.

Having the ability to concentrate can really help. As you try to turn your attention, the triggered part will still be pulling on you. You need to be able to focus more on where you want to go than what is pulling on you. Many people find practicing metta as a compassionate way to refocus their energy away from the internal noise without dissociating.

Focusing on something else can help provide a simple boundary. You might pick up sewing, knitting, or other handwork, or try reviewing multiplication tables, or weeding in your garden.

There are times when parts are not ready or interested in kindness, care, compassion. There are some parts that are so angry or hurt and all they've known is to fight. Just as you practice setting boundaries with others who are cruel or insensitive, you can do the same with yourself. Internal boundaries help to make sense of the chaos you might feel inside when life gets too overwhelming.

*"I understand how upset you are. But it's not okay for you to treat me this way." "If you want my attention then let's find a way for it to work for both of us."*



**Time Boundary:** As we've already discussed, you might need to have a part take a time out to calm down. Other times you might find yourself at work and a part gets triggered. You know you can't deal with that level of emotion in the moment. Let this part know that you can't do anything with it right now, but that you'll definitely find time later to listen. Try to commit to a particular time when you can revisit the situation with this part.

It's helpful to not promise the time driving home or anytime when you have to be paying close attention to other things!

Another way of setting a time boundary might be to let this part know that you can't work with it on your own and that you're going to bring this up with your therapist when you next see her/him. It may even be important to call your therapist and arrange for an additional session. Some parts will continue to "fight" for attention. Practice letting the agitated parts know with a firm, loving voice, that this is not the time. You can't tend to them right now but you will return soon. If at all possible it's important to let them know when, and with whom, you'll be dealing with their concerns.

#### 4. *Creating an Antidote*

Sometimes when we're in painful situations we go into fantasy or magical thinking as a way to tolerate what's upsetting us. Try this instead: Balance out the painful, distressing experience with what you want to cultivate in your life.

*"I am feeling so much pain. I really want to hurt less. May I be at peace."*

*"I hate myself. While that feels true right now, I really want to find a way to care about myself."*

*"I don't want to be present. I want out. And yet, I know there are other parts of me that do want to be here."*