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**Self-Talk and Healthy Lifestyle**

Self-talk means the way we talk to, or about, ourselves. Often, we talk about ourselves in an unhelpful way, and in ways we would never talk to a friend.

We often rush to blame ourselves for our current health, when there are actually many areas beyond our control that affect our health.

Our health and our lifestyles are affected by many different factors including genetics, behaviour, medical care, environment and our physical and social circumstances.

We generally focus on our behaviours when looking at health and lifestyle and forget that there are many other factors that affect our health.

Many of these factors are outside of our control, or harder to control. For example, if we have two jobs or work shifts, it can be harder to have the time to fit in a healthy lifestyle.

Also, if we live far from shops when healthy food is affordable it can be harder to buy fresh food. This is not our fault.

**An unhelpful cycle**

Even though many factors beyond our control impact on our health and weight, many of us find that we blame ourselves, or feel blamed and judged by others. Sometimes people experience discrimination based on their health or weight. This is called weight stigma.

No one should experience being judged or discriminated based on their health or weight.

We also know that weight stigma can lead to feeling stressed, and then eating more to cope with the stress. This can then lead to weight gain and something called ‘unhelpful self-talk’.

**How does unhelpful self-talk affect us?**

Self-talk can impact the way we feel about ourselves. The way we talk about our health, weight and body can affect our mood, self-belief and self-confidence.

These things can all then affect our choices and decisions, for example, what to eat, how we view food, how we view exercise and how we see ourselves.

For example, if our unhelpful self-talk tells us we can’t do something, and then we don’t do it, we often see it as proof to back up unhelpful self-talk. This can make our unhelpful self-talk even stronger.

**So, how can we turn unhelpful self-talk into helpful self-talk?**

Helpful self-talk often just means slight changes to the words we say to ourselves, or about ourselves.

For example, let’s think about how we might talk to ourselves when thinking about going to the gym.

Unhelpful self-talk might be, ‘I don’t belong in a gym.’ Helpful self-talk could be, ‘Going to the gym is my first step to getting healthier, and it is what gyms are there for.’

**Top tip** – To change unhelpful self-talk into helpful self-talk, it is often best to think – “What would I say to a friend who was having these unhelpful thoughts?”

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**Helpful self-talk can have a ripple effect…**

Sometimes we may end up saying our self-talk out loud because we become so used to the thoughts and words.

When our self-talk becomes more helpful (for example “I can do this”, “I’m enjoying getting a bit more fresh air”) we will often see a ripple effect in those around us.

They will be likely to see us in that way too, but also begin to copy the helpful self-talk approach to their own body, health and fitness.

**Some top tips for helpful self-talk at home**

* Ask family or friends to help us to notice if we are using unhelpful self-talk. This can help us to realise we are doing it, which is the first step to making changes.
* Spend some time thinking each day or each week, have we been kind to ourselves?
* Practise writing down unhelpful self-talk we say or feel and then try and change it to be more helpful, forgiving or accepting. The more you practise, the easier it gets.
* Consider ways in which our friends or family could help us with small changes to our language or actions. Discuss these with our family and friends.
* Recognise times when family or friends have benefitted from our helpful self-talk.
* Consider how we will respond if someone around us says something unhelpful to us.
* Gently notice unhelpful self-talk in others around us, many of us are in the habit of it!

Changing our self-talk really can give us a more helpful outlook and can support us to bounce back when there are setbacks.

For more support on this topic you can speak to your Live Life Better Derbyshire advisor.

For more help and advice on weight management [visit our website www.livelifebetterderbyshire.org.uk](http://www.livelifebetterderbyshire.org.uk/) or call 0800 085 2299.