

## Session 11: Talk Back to Negative Thoughts.

### Objectives:

In this session, the participant will:

- Recognize that everyone has negative thoughts and identify examples of them.
- Learn how to stop negative thoughts and talk back to them with positive ones.
- Practice stopping negative thoughts and talking back to them with positive ones.

### To Do Before the Session:

Get materials ready:

- New Keeping Track book and last sessions book in which you've made comments.
- Pages for Session 11 participant notebook.
- To record participant weight, Lifestyle Balance Update for each participant and or Group Session Update log begun at Session 1.
- Optional handouts that are appropriate for the participant (for example, a Stop! sign prop to hold up when you hear the participant expressing a negative thought).

### Weigh the participant. Graph.

**Receive and review Keeping Track records. Discuss successes and difficulties in meeting the study goals. Review the last session, including home activities. Graph activity.**

Did you have any trouble Keeping Track last week? Were you able to stay under your fat gram budget? Reach your goal for physical activity? Try your action plan? What did you learn last week about healthy eating out?

Praise all progress, no matter how small. Discuss barriers and problem solve with the participant.

Graph physical activity.

If the participant has brought in restaurant menus, help the participant practice ordering from the menus.

**Help the participant identify examples of negative thoughts.**

Today we're going to talk about stopping negative thoughts.

**Everyone has negative thoughts at times. These negative thoughts can lead you to overeat or be inactive. Then afterwards you may feel even worse about yourself. A vicious cycle of self-defeat can result.**

For example, suppose you came home after a hard day at work. You think to yourself, "I'm tired of working so hard. I'm sick of being in Lifestyle Balance. I can never eat what I want." This negative thought might lead you to eat some potato chips. And then you think, "I did it again. I'll never lose weight." Next, you're discouraged and go on to eat more of them.

**Sometimes we aren't aware we are having negative thoughts.** Negative thinking becomes such a habit for most of us that we tend to believe and act on our negative thoughts without even hearing them.

**The goal of this session is to help you hear your negative thoughts and teach you to talk back to them.**

**Here are some common examples of negative thoughts.**

Review each category and the example(s) on the work sheet, then ask a question or two to get the participant thinking about his or her own experience with negative thoughts.

**1. Good or Bad Thoughts.**

These thoughts divide the world into:

- Good and bad foods;
- Seeing yourself as a success or failure;
- Being on or off the program.

Sometimes this is called "all or nothing" or "light bulb" thinking (either on or off) with nothing in between.

Example: "Look at what I did. I ate that cake. I'll never be able to succeed in the Lifestyle Balance Program."

- Do you have some foods you consider "good," and some foods you consider "bad?"
- What happens when you eat a little of what you consider to be a "bad" food?
- Can you think of some problems with considering a food "bad?"

**2. Excuses (or Rationalizations)**

These thoughts **blame something or someone else for our problems.** We act as if they have so much power that we have no choice but to overeat or be inactive. **We don't mean to go off the program, but we "can't help it."**

Example: "I don't have the will power."  
"I have to buy these cookies just in case company drops in."

- Can you think of a time when you bought some high-fat/calorie food "for someone else"? Did they really need the food, or do you think you used them as an excuse to buy the food for yourself?

**3. Should Thoughts.**

These thoughts **expect perfection.** Of course, no one is perfect, so SHOULD thoughts are a **set-up for disappointment.** They also **lead to anger and resentment** because "should" assumes that someone is standing over us, forcing us to do what we don't want to do.

Example: "I should have eaten less of that dessert."

- What kind of things do you think you "should" or "should not" do to lose weight and be more active?
- What do you expect yourself to do perfectly (for example, self-monitoring)? What happens when you expect perfection of yourself? How do you feel? How does it affect your future decisions and choices?

**4. Not As Good As Thoughts.**

These thoughts **compare ourselves to someone else** and then **blame ourselves for not measuring up.**

Example: "Mary lost two pounds this week, and I only lose one."

- Do you compare yourself to someone else? Who?
- How does comparing yourself to that person affect you? How does it make you feel? How does it affect your decisions and choices about eating and being active?

**5. Give Up Thoughts.**

These thoughts **defeat ourselves.** They **often follow the other kinds of negative thoughts.**

Example: "This program is too hard. I might as well give up."

- Do you ever want something good to eat and think, "I'm sick of this Lifestyle Balance program"?

**Explain how to talk back to a negative thought.**

**Once you are aware of a negative thought, you can "talk back to it."** Here's how:

1. First, **catch yourself** having the negative thought. Ask yourself, "Is this thought moving me forward or bringing me down?" As soon as you're aware of a negative thought, say to yourself, "**I'm doing it to myself.**"
2. Then **imagine shouting "STOP!" to yourself.** Picture a **huge, red stop sign.** *[You may want to hold up the STOP! sign prop at this point.]* The stop sign is so big that it takes up all the room in your mind. This should startle you and get rid of the negative thought.
3. **Talk back with a positive thought.** No matter how effectively you've stopped a negative thought, it will probably return again in a similar situation because it has become a habit for you. So it's important to **begin to build a new habit: positive thinking.** After you stop a negative thought, talk back to it with a positive one.

Review the categories and the examples on the work sheet, making the following points.

1. **Good or Bad:** Talk back with **Work Toward Balance.**  
Don't expect perfection of yourself, but don't indulge yourself either. Work toward an **overall balance.**
2. **Excuses:** Talk back with **It's Worth a Try.**  
Instead of looking for something or someone else to blame, why not give yourself a chance? Try something. You just might succeed.
3. **Should:** Talk back with **It's My Choice.**  
You are in charge of your eating and activity. No one else is responsible for your choices or standing over you with unrealistic expectations.
4. **Not As Good As:** Talk back with **Everyone's Different.**
5. **Give Up:** Talk back with **One Step at a Time.**

Problem solving is a process. It takes time to make life-long changes. Learn from what doesn't work and try another option. Learning is always a success.

Now let's **practice** stopping negative thoughts and talking back with positive thoughts. Look back over the kinds of negative thoughts we've discussed. What kind are most familiar to you? For example, do you tend to make excuses or are you more likely to compare yourself to someone else? What are some examples?

Write examples of negative thoughts on the work sheet. If the participant doesn't name examples, use several from the previous pages.

Now let's take them one at a time. First, say the negative thought out loud. Then say "Stop!" And then talk back to it out loud with a positive thought.

Use the remaining time in the session to actually role-play this with the participant. Use a stop sign prop if you find it helpful. Record the positive thoughts on the work sheet.

This session may be an appropriate time to review with participants the work sheet "Remember Your Purpose" (Session 1) on which they recorded their personal reasons for joining the study and so on. Details from this work sheet may provide images and words for the participant to use in talking back to negative thoughts with positive ones. Any imagery that is significant to the participant may help make the process of "talking back" more meaningful and fun; for example, a participant might find it enjoyable to imagine a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other, and to see the task of positive thinking as, "letting the angel talk."

### **Assign home activity.**

For next week:

- Keep track of your eating and activity.
- Catch yourself thinking negative thoughts. Write them in your Keeping Track books.
- Practice stopping them and talking back to them with positive thoughts.

Next week we'll talk about how you did. Any questions?

Collect completed Keeping Track book from last session and review and make comments in the Keeping Track book before the next session.

During this session, some participants may raise problems outside the expertise of the Lifestyle Coach, such as a significant clinical depression, anxiety, or a clinical eating disorder. Refer to outside agencies like mental health, private physicians, etc. as necessary.