

ADHD Internal Conversation

By Louise Levin

Words are very powerful. You can either use them, or they can control you. The use of words, whether through your internal “tapes,” that play continuously in your head, or the words you speak out loud, will inform your brain what is real, what is going on, what needs to be tended to, and what needs to be avoided. Everyone has his or her own internal conversation. Though we may not all talk to ourselves out loud, we nevertheless engage in a steady stream of internal dialogue, whether in direct reaction to, or as meditated musings, on external stimuli and pressures. As we grow older, this conversation can become less organic and more ingrained. Very few individuals are cognizant of their internal conversation and its verbal manifestations.

Your internal conversation is directed by the values imparted in the culture and conversations that surround you. Family members, your circle of friends and your colleagues all contribute to your unique perspective, relating both to your self and your place among others. In a society where the bar is raised so high, it is no wonder that so many people feel that they fall short of some collective, intangible expectation. We are called to look, feel and act in a certain way without being told how; when we do not, our internal conversation may become increasingly negative and “one note.” We become tormented by our perceived shortcomings until failure appears not a mere possibility but a certainty.

By internalizing these constant calls for perfection, our inadequacies are eventually imprinted onto our subconscious, responsible for an increasingly negative self-perception. When the conversation that you have with yourself, the internal conversation, is negative it will follow that the conversation you have with others, the external conversation, will be as well. “I can’t,” “I won’t,” “I’m not,” and “I don’t” play like a song set on repeat, in a constant loop that will begin not only to affect your relationship with yourself, but also the relationships that you have with others. Negativity becomes cyclical; the way that you perceive yourself is what you project to others; what you project to others is how others perceive you; how others perceive you will determine their behavior towards you; how others behave towards you affects how you perceive yourself.

Negative projection is particularly prevalent among ADHD individuals who are repeatedly chastised for their indiscretions. Lacks of impulse control, failure to generalize behaviors, prioritize tasks and/or sustain attention are all symptoms of this disorder. Though we all experience moments of self-doubt, lack of focus, or plain absentmindedness, ADHD is a real disorder, and its symptoms are real factors that directly affect internal conversation and self-perception. The first step to changing this negative feedback loop is acknowledgement of your disorder, coupled with a good understanding of the neurobiological factors at play in your brain.

By working to change your internal and external conversations, to shift focus from negative to positive, one can effectively alter and change the course of the negative loop. As you begin to support a positive self-image, you will project this to others, who will in turn interact with you according to your new, productive outlook on life. By simply changing “can’t” to “can,” “won’t” to “will,” “don’t” to “do,” and “not” to “am,” an individual is committing him or herself to positive thought. The age-old dictum “fake it ‘till you make it” is the best advice for establishing this new, positive behavior. The intent and commitment to a new conversation must be practiced; in much the same way that one approaches a new

instrument, sport or foreign language. As the accomplishment of this task become visceral, rather than practiced, one of the many benefits will be the realization that your disorder is not so much a burden as a gift. Your unbounded creativity, attention to detail, out-of-the-box thinking and effective ability to multitask, will allow you to not only manage your life, but to dominate it.