



**Autogenic Self-Therapy Training:
A 4-Part Course Delivered by Craig Trafford;**
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Autogenic Therapy Training – Short Course. Part 3/4

Low Self-Esteem and Some Causes

Many people suffering from eg. anxiety also have low self-esteem. People who concentrate on their weaknesses and pay attention only to their failures will have images of themselves as failures, and in their daily unconscious activity they will tend to reinforce this negative message.

It is sometimes thought that high self-esteem is created by circumstance. That, if you are rich, clever and beautiful, your self-esteem may indeed be high, but this is not necessarily the case. The other major factor that determines a person's self-esteem is their thoughts. As we may have experienced ourselves, negative thinking is a huge contributory factor to low self-esteem.

High self-esteem is necessary for psychological survival, if we reject parts of ourselves, we damage our ability to survive and put limits on our abilities and potential, fearing to take any risks that may lead to rejection. We are all unique and if we can accept and like our unique selves, our lives are much happier.

Challenging Negative Thinking Habits

Here are a few negative thinking habits which you may have experienced such as;

- self-blame,
- comparison to others,
- impossibly high standards of perfection,
- concentration on mistakes,
- ignoring successes,
- name-calling
- and mind reading.
- Write your own here...

Such patterns of negative thinking daily undermine your sense of self-worth. However, you may be so used to this type of thinking, that these negative thoughts seem reasonable and justified, and you no longer notice the effect they are having on you. No matter how bad or untrue the thoughts are, you tend to believe them. This is very painful to live with, more painful than almost any loss. This is because grief fades with time, but unless you take positive steps to

change your thinking habits, your negative thoughts are always with you – undermining, judging, blaming and finding fault.

Negative thoughts cause stress. If we think negatively about the situation, we will also feel negatively about that situation, regardless of the true facts. Although our negative thoughts here are unrealistic, it is very difficult to check up on whether or not they are true. If someone attacks us physically and injures us, we can see that we are hurt by examining the injury. But how can we judge whether or not another person is actually rejecting us or criticising us? We may just be misinterpreting their behaviour. Our feelings of distress cannot prove our interpretation is true, because when we think negatively, we will have such feelings whether the interpretation is right or wrong.

Often, we think negative thoughts in a kind of shorthand. Words like ‘stupid,’ ‘weak,’ or ‘pathetic’ may pop up into our minds and carry with them strong feelings of self-dislike [also known as emotionalised self-condemnation.] Very often, too, people find negative thoughts difficult to turn off. They may seem to have control of your mind, but the truth is, that you are so used to these thoughts that they seem normal and ordinary. However, you do not have to go on living with them. With practise you can learn to change your negative thoughts to positive ones.

You have already begun to change your habit of negative thinking, just by becoming aware of it. Perhaps you have noticed patterns of negative thinking on your life? When looking at the effect our particular patterns of negative thinking have on our lives, we understand the price we pay for negative thoughts is very high. Consider what this continual undermining of your self-worth cost you in terms of family life, friendships and work satisfaction.

When we look at what underlies our negative thinking, we very often find it is the belief that most of our troubles and difficulties are caused by events outside our control. In fact, many of our troubles and difficulties are caused by our beliefs about these events. For example, if you lose your job because there is an economic recession, this is outside your control, but how do you feel about losing your job and what you decide to do about it, is not.

The Next step in challenging our negative thinking is to learn to observe our reactions to events and situations. There is often a gap between the event and our emotional response, but we tend to believe that our response is caused by the event. In fact, it is caused by what happens during the gap, when our beliefs about the event takeover. For example, if we call the event of losing a job **A**, and we call our emotional response, which is eg. depression, **C**. There is in fact something that happens at **B**, which is our beliefs about the event of losing the job. Most people are only aware of what happens at **A**, and believe that what happens at **C**, is caused by **A**, when actually it is caused by thoughts and beliefs at B. If we are calling ourselves inadequate and stupid because we have lost the job, and telling ourselves will never get another one, we will feel depressed. If, however, we recognise that many people are unemployed, and we decide to take the opportunity of unemployment to do something positive, maybe to get closer



to our family or friends, or learn to paint or take up karate, then we will not feel so depressed because we have lost a job.

It is important to remember that negative thoughts don't just stay as thoughts. They also translate into actions. We do not just have negative feelings about events in our lives, we also have behaviours related to those feelings. If we believe that losing a job is the worst thing in the world and will become depressed about it, we may well spend half the day in bed, have very low energy and behave in a depressed way. This will have negative effects on our relationships with family and friends. Because we have low energy, we have less chance of finding another job. If we do get an interview and turn up with a negative and depressed attitude, we are less likely to be employed.

What is useful to do is to learn to fill the gap and find out **what happens at 'B'** which affects our feelings and behaviour.

We then need to provide ourselves with alternative positive thoughts and behaviours.

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As an aside – it is crucial that positive thinking is generated from live experience, or fully-integrated self-honesty rather than the false positive feelings that can attempt to override real feelings and experiences. We go into this in another session, however, you know the difference between what feels good and what feels bad – it can actually be that simple. Find out what feels good – feel good thoughts – and replace the negative thinking with those, step-by-small-step.

Peace,

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