FLEET FEET Sports

Self-Talk in Exercising

Positive Self-talk

Self-talk is the talking you do in your own head about yourself and the things that happen, your own "running commentary" on your life. Often this self-talk happens so automatically that you are barely aware of it. However, what you say to yourself can have a big effect on the way that you feel, and on what you can achieve. Your self-talk can be like an internal coach, encouraging you, boosting your confidence, believing in you, and motivating you to achieve your goals, or it can be like an internal bully, undermining you, criticizing you and beating up on you when you're down.

Sports psychologists have long recognized the importance of positive self-talk in helping athletes achieve their potential. Everyone who faces adversity and obstacles to success - whether physical pain, poor conditions, strong opponents, fatigue – goes through self-talk. The only way an athlete can succeed in the face of these difficulties is to have powerful self-belief and great determination. Positive self-talk is one tool that can be used to achieve your full potential.

Changing your self-talk

There are three steps to changing your self-talk so it works for you rather than against you:

1. **Identify your self-talk.** Self-talk is often so habitual that people are unaware that they are doing it at all. If you are going to change your self-talk, you need to be aware of these thoughts as they happen. Take some time to notice the things you say to yourself during your day.
2. **Assess your self-talk**. Is it negative or positive? If it is negative, ask yourself these questions:
    - Is there any evidence for this thought?
    - Is there any evidence against it?
    - Is this the way I would talk to a friend who was in my position?
    - Are there any more positive ways of viewing this situation?
    - Am I keeping things in perspective?
    - Even if there is some validity to this thought, is it useful spending your energy thinking about it?
3. **Change your self-talk.** If you decide that your self-talk is unhelpful or wrong, replace the negative thoughts with a more positive alternative.

Changing self-talk requires some time and practice, since our ways of thinking tend to be quite ingrained. You will probably need to keep working on the three step process above for some time before it becomes second nature.