



Calm Yourself with Encouraging Statements

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When we're real upset, it's hard to solve problems. That's because the problem-solving parts of our brain shut down when we're real angry, afraid or otherwise defensive. This makes sense when you live in a war zone – so you can protect yourself with fast fight, flight or freeze responses to life-threatening situations. But for most people, when you're in a relationship at home, or school, or at work, and you have really upset feelings, it isn't a life-or-death situation and it makes things worse to have your problem-solving abilities shut down – especially if you need to make decisions together.

This means that you need to learn how to calm yourself down quickly, so you can think through options, make proposals and make good decisions – either for yourself or with another person, such as a co-parent, co-worker or anyone. This article talks about ways to calm yourself down in a quick and simple way – that you can do all by yourself; anywhere, anytime!

You Can Influence How You Feel

"I'm a good-enough parent! Nobody's perfect."

"I worked really hard. I did a good job on that project!"

"I can get through this. I've gotten through many tough situations before."

"This isn't a crisis! I can handle this!"

Cognitive researchers study how we think and how it influences our feelings. Some say there are three common areas of thinking where you can make a big difference in how you feel: thoughts about yourself, thoughts about the world and thoughts about the future. When you're dealing with making decisions alone or with someone else, it's easy for negative thoughts in these three areas to get triggered. But you can turn them around by telling yourself positive thoughts. For example:

About Yourself: "I'll never get anyone to agree with me," can be turned around by telling yourself this thought is "all-or-nothing thinking" and therefore unrealistic. You can instead tell yourself encouraging statements: "There are a lot of people who agree with me on some issues. I can listen to and discuss ideas with the other person until we reach agreements. Sometimes this just takes time. Even congress has a hard time making agreements!"

About the World: "The world seems out to get me. What did I do to deserve this?" This can also be turned around by telling yourself this is "all-or-nothing" thinking, which is unrealistic. Instead, you can tell yourself encouraging statements: "There are many good things going for me. The world has not singled me out for problems – everyone has problems of one type or another!"

About the Future: “I’ll never get this person to change. All I see in the future is endless frustration!” This is a common thought when you are making decisions with someone who seems difficult to you. You can tell yourself encouraging statements: “There’s usually something that any two people can agree on – especially if we get some help with this. If I listen long enough, respect the other person enough and propose several solutions, then there’s a good chance we can reach agreements – it often just takes time. Besides, I’m not going to let the other person’s behavior determine how I feel! I can find ways to feel good regardless of what others say or do!”

Have a Favorite Phrase

It helps to have a favorite phrase that you can quickly tell yourself when you’re starting to feel stress on your own, or in a conflict with someone else. If you’re going into negotiations with someone, such as a co-parent or co-worker, it helps to remind yourself of this phrase before, during and after decision-making. Here are a few of my favorite phrases for stressful situations:

“It’s not about ME!” I often remind myself of this when I’m dealing with someone who is verbally attacking me in person or in writing. It’s really about them and their inability to manage their own emotions. Personal attacks are not a form of constructive problem solving.

“It’s not a crisis!” This can be very helpful in calming yourself down in the middle of a negotiation session or any sudden, new situation. It’s usually not a life-or-death crisis – it just feels that way because of how our brains work when our defenses are triggered. They usually start out totally negative, such as when we hear a criticism. But then, we can calm ourselves down: “It’s just his point of view.” Or: “All that matters is what we decide to do in the future.” Or: “I’m not going to get stuck in the past.”

“It’s hopeless, but not serious!” This means that I have to accept the situation and can’t change it – but it’s not going to control my life. For example, it’s going to rain all day and I wanted to be outside. I can tell myself: “There’s nothing I can do about the weather, but I can decide to have a good day indoors – read, watch a movie, talk with friends, etc.” Or, “I am making decisions with a real jerk and there’s nothing I can do to change who he/she is. But it’s not going to control my life. I can make necessary compromises and then do something that I enjoy afterward. I can make the most of my own time with my child, my friends, my family and myself.”

Conclusion

By telling yourself encouraging statements, you can calm yourself and deal with difficult people in your life or with anyone when you are upset. Calm yourself down enough to turn off your own fear or anger, and this turns on your problem-solving brain. Of course, it’s great to hear such encouraging statements from others in our lives. But we can also give ourselves a boost in the same way from time to time. What do you think? You can decide!