

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS & HARMFUL OR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

KEY POINT: Mental health issues often cause negative self-talk and rumination, which may result in harmful behaviors. Identifying these causes aids the healing-recovery process, and compassion is essential.

Negative self-talk is the critical inner voice, while rumination is the repetitive, cyclical dwelling on those negative thoughts, often leading to getting “stuck” in a loop rather than solving problems.

Think of negative self-talk as the “fuel” (the critical statements) and rumination as the “engine running on empty,” replaying those messages endlessly without moving forward, which worsens anxiety and depression.

DEFINITION:

- **Rumination** in mammals like cows, sheep, and goats is when they regurgitate and re-chew food (“cud”) to digest tough plant material more effectively.

“Keep this Book of the Law [Instructions / Principles] **always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.**”

—Joshua 1:8

- The word “meditate” in this verse is ***hagah*** in the Hebrew language that it was written in. It is directly related to the concept of rumination meaning to chew something over and over.
- Biblical meditation isn't emptying the mind but rather a deep, repetitive, and intentional “thought digestion” of Scripture, involving pondering, muttering, studying, and applying it so it becomes part of you.

NOTES:

DEFINITIONS:

- **Negative mental rumination** means repeatedly dwelling on distressing thoughts which worsens mood and mental health by focusing on problems without finding solutions.
- **Positive mental rumination** involves repeatedly reflecting on positive experiences or qualities, which can boost confidence, but excessive rumination — positive or negative — may be harmful and should be discussed with a mental health professional.

NOTE: “Self-talk” is an ongoing inner dialogue. This can be negative or positive. This can be non-healthy or healthy. This can be maladaptive or adaptive.

- Positive ruminating meditation is a form of positive self-talk in that both practices involve the deliberate and repetitive focus on optimistic and affirming thoughts.
- I (Tim) collect life-affirming and problem-solving self-talk words, phrases, passages, and stories to fuel positive life-affirming rumination.

Note: Many of these are taken from Scripture, but also other helpful sources. I treat these like tools  for my toolbox.

I encourage you to collect some for yourself. A journal can be a good place to collect your discovered tools and a place to note your experiences using them.

NOTES:

NOTE: Positive self-talk is not a denial of problems, challenging circumstances, or feelings of distress.

- **Positive self-talk acknowledges reality:** It accepts that negative situations and feelings are a part of life and a shared human experience.
- **Positive self-talk reframes challenges:** It helps reframe negative thoughts, turning self-doubt into self-encouragement and viewing mistakes as opportunities for growth and improvement.
- **Positive self-talk focuses on solutions:** The internal dialogue shifts from passive dwelling on the problem to actively focusing on potential solutions and one's ability to cope with and overcome the challenge.
- **Positive self-talk promotes resilience:** It builds resilience by fostering a mindset of capability and control, rather than helplessness and pessimism.

NOTES:

A BIBLICAL PRESCRIPTION & PRACTICE FOR FOSTERING HEALTHY SELF-TALK & RUMINATION

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think [meditate / ruminate] about such things.

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

—Philippians 4:6-9

SEVEN REFLECTIVE PAUSE PROJECTS FOR SUPPORT PARTNERS

1. Negative behaviors often result from mental health difficulties, not personal failings, and are linked to brain chemistry.

Describe why it might be hard to see these behaviors as symptoms.

2. Compassion doesn't require accepting harmful actions — support, boundaries, and structure can help change negative patterns.

Describe how you manage destructive behaviors now.

3. Depression may cause ongoing negative thoughts and isolation; talking and listening are helpful.

Describe ways you've discovered to support a loved one with these struggles.

4. Recovery is slow and may seem unattainable amid negative behaviors, but support and hope exist.

Describe how you have found hope in these situations.

5. Stress triggers fight-or-flight responses and impairs mood regulation, affecting communication.

Describe how stress has influenced your loved one's interactions.

6. In distress, loved ones filter experiences through their emotions, and confronting them can worsen symptoms.

Describe how you typically respond during these times.

7. Validating emotions rather than reasoning can lead to better communication.

Describe the differences you have noticed between acknowledging feelings versus trying to convince.

THE V-A-R LIKE A STAR METHOD TOOL ✂

This is a three-part communication tool that promotes healthy compassionate responses and initiatives in your relationships rather than emotionally charged reactions. It is a variation on the LEAP method introduced in chapter eight.

V = VALIDATE

Listen to what the person is saying and identify the emotions that you hear. Validate their emotions and keep your response simple and mild, avoiding intense and aggressive words or phrases.

- EMOTIONS: Sad, angry, discouraged
- EXAMPLE: *"I can see how that situation would make you feel very upset."*

A = AFFIRM

Find the strengths and positive characteristics behind what they are saying and who they are as a person.

- POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS: Endurance, strength, desire to rely on God
- EXAMPLE: *"I am amazed by how you have endured and trusted God through this challenge. It says so much about your strength."*

R = RECONNECT

Reconnecting involves: 1) confirming your commitment to the relationship; 2) humbling yourself and seeking forgiveness where appropriate; and 3) clearly expressing your needs as you navigate life together (such as requesting patience during challenges).

- EXAMPLE: *“I know that this is going to be a process for us. Please forgive me for the mistakes that I’ve made. Please be patient with me as we try to figure this out together.”*

ENDNOTES

* All Scripture references in Syllabus Nine are from the New International Version (NIV) translation.

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