



How to Stop Talking Yourself Into Relapse

Have you ever said things like this?
 "I can handle it; it's not a problem."
 "I can't have fun unless I'm drinking."
 "I'll just have one. It's no big deal."

These are just a few of the con-
 vining conversations that whisper
 permission to indulge once again in
 addictive substances or activities.
 Before you know it, this deceptive
 self-talk has become a deafening
 self-shout, and the danger of relapse
 is just around the corner. That's the
 power of language and how it shapes
 our thoughts and actions.

But it is possible to get ahold of
 this self-defeating, one-way conversa-
 tion. Change your self-talk and you
 change yourself.

Addictions help avoid painful
 emotions. People develop addic-
 tions not only to substances—such as
 drugs, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, sug-
 ar, food—but also to activities, such
 as gambling, sex, the Internet, work,
 theft, shopping. The common thread
 is a preoccupation that interferes with
 life, continued use or involvement
 despite negative consequences, and
 loss of control. While they may bring
 short-term relief, addictions result in
 long-term nightmares.

To the voices in your head, how-
 ever, it's ALL about short-term relief.

Lynne Namka, author of *Avoiding
 Relapse: Catching Your Inner Con*, refers
 to this self-talk as the "Inner Con."
 This is the grand seducer who tempts
 you back to your addiction with huge
 fabrications, distortions, tricks and
 rationalizations that ignore the severe
 emotional, interpersonal and physical
 consequences of continued use.

"Your Inner Con is absorbed in to-
 tally protecting and preserving itself,"
 she writes. "It feeds your fixation and
 agonizes about not being complete
 without using. It seduces, swindles
 and victimizes you to go against
 yourself and your better nature. It

divides your psyche and creates
 mistrust in yourself. Its purpose is to
 keep hounding you until you weaken
 and give in. It will say anything to get
 you to use."

This Inner Con is the fear-based
 part of you. It fears change. It fears
 facing the painful emotions that the
 addiction hides. Actually, it's the ac-
 tive voice of your addiction.

But it is not who you are. It is just
 a fragment of the total you.

Understanding this, relapse into
 addiction becomes only one choice
 of many. Doing some or all of the fol-
 lowing actions will help counter this
 negative, seductive self-talk:

Get support. Talk to a trusted friend
 or family member, or attend 12-step
 meetings. Work with a mental health
 professional. Find an "accountability
 buddie" you can trust.

**Counter the negative, distorted
 self-talk with affirmations.** "I am the
 master, not the slave. I choose not to
 smoke," or "I am able to say NO," or
 "I am a good person, and I choose to
 have friends who do not pressure me
 into drinking with them."

Journal. Make lists of all of your
 Inner Con's statements. Write dia-
 logues between this and other inner
 characters. Write all the emotions that
 surface when you're not engaged in
 your addiction. Then talk to a friend,
 a sponsor or your therapist.

Schedule daily contemplation time
 to help change beliefs and destruc-
 tive self-talk. Use this time to journal,
 meditate, pray, read or study. You
 may want to make this a daily prac-
 tice for the rest of your life.

Replacing the negative self-talk
 with supportive beliefs and self-talk
 frees up blocked positive energy. It
 puts you on a path not to destruction
 but to fulfillment. *

10 Ways to Lower Stress and Raise Joy

*Over the past year, stress has become
 a constant companion for almost
 everyone—and just as unwelcome as
 the pandemic. But we have more say
 with stress and can ask it to leave just
 by the choices we make. Below are 10
 of the very best ways to lower stress—
 and raise our joy in life.*

- 1. Lighten up.** Laugh, smile, be playful. Giggle.
- 2. Move.** Get active. Exercise, walk, play a game, weed/garden. Dance.
- 3. Breathe.** Deeply. As often as you can remember.
- 4. Watch it.** Careful with sugar, caffeine, fatty foods and alcohol. Don't over/under eat. Drink water. Eat fruit/veggies.
- 5. Change.** Move locations. Do different activities. Associate with different people.
- 6. Get it out.** Talk to a friend or counselor. Write it out.
- 7. Have fun.** Play games. Go to the park or playground. Do something creative.
- 8. Relax.** Take a bath or a nap or a shower. Sit in the sun/shade. Do nothing.
- 9. Take care.** Get a massage or footrub. Stretch.
- 10. Do something nice.** Be kind. Do something good for the planet. Anonymous is OK.

Bonus: Immerse yourself in nature. Connect to spirit. Appreciate beauty everywhere. *

A Letter From

Cheie R. Weiss



If nothing else, 2020 got us clear on our major struggles. For some, addiction became more apparent as typical distractions became less available. The front page feature explores how to stop talking yourself into relapse.

For others of us, controlling behavior may have become more pronounced, as less and less was actually in our control. There's a quiz on this page to assess whether controlling is one of the pieces of armor you might put on to ward off feelings of fear or anxiety.

And for couples, so much togetherness in a more constricted environment may have brought long-buried relationship issues to the surface. The back page article offers a roadmap to help you learn to trust again if you're dealing with betrayal.

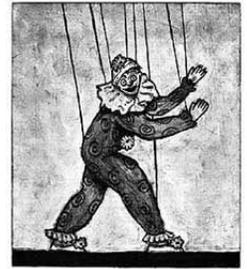
Underlying the whole year was stress. Lots of it. See the Top 10 for some tips on reducing stress and bringing more joy into your life—any time.

The good news is that we always have a choice of where to place our attention, even in the most challenging of situations, as the page 3 feature proposes. The more we can focus on gratitude, rather than grievance, the less need we feel for control, or for a drink, or to stray. We experience less stress and strife. What's one thing you're grateful for?

Wishing you a 2021 that more than makes up for the challenges of 2020! Don't hesitate to call if you could use some support.

Do You Have an Urge to Control?

From the boss at work who has to have a hand in every little detail of your work to the friend who makes travel plans down to the minute to the parent who directs every aspect of their child's life—some people can be really controlling! They may mean well, but their actions often result in frustration, resentment and a lack of intimacy with loved ones. The thing is, they often don't even know they're doing it. Take this quiz to see whether you might be controlling a little too much.



True False Set 1

- 1. I discourage the people around me from expressing anger, fear or sadness.
- 2. I know what's best for others; that's why they should listen to what I have to say. I'm only trying to help them.
- 3. I'd rather do most things myself.
- 4. When people go against my suggestions, I tend to withdraw my affection; when they do what I say, I'll lavish the praise.
- 5. I take it as disloyalty or personal rejection when others act or feel differently than I do.
- 6. When I'm in a relationship, I want to know where my significant other is all the time.
- 7. I am easily irritated, especially by others' incompetence or rebelliousness.
- 8. When watching television with others, I have to have the remote. Similarly, when in a car with others, I feel uncomfortable unless I'm the driver.

Set 2

- 1. I encourage others to express their true feelings around me.
- 2. I would rather people be themselves than try to please me, and that they do things out of choice, not obligation.
- 3. It doesn't bother me when others question or disagree with me. In fact, I enjoy a lively debate.
- 4. I steer clear of micromanaging family members or employees, and instead encourage independence and independent thinking.
- 5. I choose not to focus on power, prestige or perfection; I hold others to be the best they can be—and true to themselves.
- 6. I find it easy to relax, laugh or be spontaneous.
- 7. I value stability and consistency, and don't get caught up in chaos and drama.
- 8. Getting someone to do something by yelling at them isn't something that works for me.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to examine where your urge to control is coming from. Most often, fear is the deep culprit. Learning how to approach and handle fear in a positive manner helps us accept others—and ourselves—better. And doing so sets us up for better relationships, better health and better self-esteem. Please don't hesitate to call if you'd like to explore this issue in your life. *

The Life-Giving Practice of Putting Gratitude Into Action

Rachel has lots of everything—nice apartment in the city, a well-paying job, new car, nice clothes. But she didn't get that last promotion at work. Her last vacation was a disappointment, and no matter how hard she tries, she just can't save money.

What she thinks: *I just don't understand why things are going wrong. It just doesn't seem fair when I work so hard. People don't appreciate me and I deserve better this.*

Jeff has recently been through a painful divorce and he's not sleeping well. He's having difficulties with his children, who blame him for the divorce. His work life is rocky as well, and sometimes he's unsure if he's in the right career.

What he thinks: *Yes, life is rough right now, but every life has difficult times. Really, I am so grateful to be alive, for my children, for my home, my good health, all that I have.*

One approach is about holding a grievance—about what's missing or wrong. The other is about being grateful for all you have.

Gratitude isn't a new idea; most spiritual practices and philosophies emphasize gratitude and compassion for others. But in recent years, gratitude has shifted from being an idea to a concrete tool that people can use to become happier and healthier. This practice focuses on appreciating what you have and what others have done for you and de-emphasizes being angry or blaming others for your problems.

"When we develop a sense of appreciation for those around us and cultivate a sense of gratitude for life itself, we are relieved of the burden that comes with seeing ourselves as 'victims,'" writes Greg Krech in *Gratitude, Grace and the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection*.

Krech calls this state of appreciation "grace," a term used in many religions. However, grace as a practice is not a belief as much as a shift in thinking. Or as Krech puts it: "It's the difference between seeing life as an entitlement and seeing it as a gift."

However it is practiced, gratitude isn't a blindly optimistic approach in which the bad things in life are whitewashed or ignored. It's more a matter of where we put our focus and attention. Yes, pain and injustice and cruelty exist in this world. But when we focus on the gifts of life, we gain a feeling of well-being. We often feel more energized to reach out and help others; we feel we have some power to positively affect our

world. This again leads to a feeling of well-being...and gratitude. It's a self-sustaining cycle!

In her book *Radical Gratitude*, author and speaker Ellen Vaughn tells the story of a soldier in Vietnam, imprisoned as a POW for seven years. When he returned to the United States, he

"Be joyful even when you have considered all the facts."

—Wendell Berry

was startled at the small things people complained about. He decided then he would never stop being grateful for everything in his life, no matter how difficult.

Of course, most of us don't have such extreme experiences to help us count our blessings. In their book *Seasons of Grace: The Life-Giving Practice of Gratitude*, authors Alan Jones and John O'Neil write that practicing gratitude can be as simple as writing a thank-you note, working in the garden, walking on the beach aware of nature's gifts or telling someone you love what you appreciate about him/her. According to

them, it's even more than what you do, it's the attitude with which you do it.

Consider the following exercise for putting gratitude into action in your relationships, whether they be spouses, friends, children or business partners:

Find 10 minutes to tell the person what specifically you appreciate about him/her.

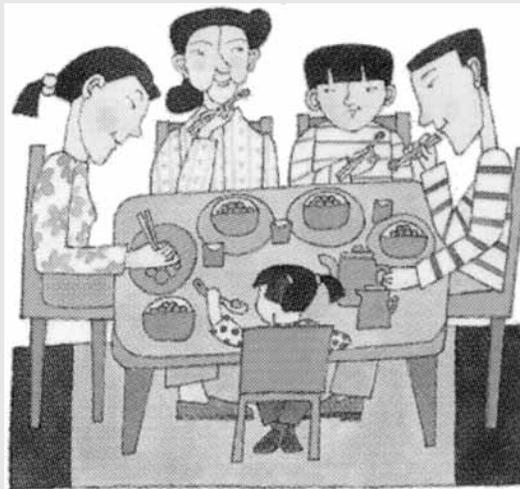
Ask yourself a few questions in advance: What were some of the highlights—the fun times when you laughed—when you first met? What specific qualities do

you admire about him/her? What efforts by this other person have helped your relationship make it through difficult times?

Share the results with the person, requesting that he or she not make judgments or negate any of the appreciative comments.

This simple exercise helps you stop taking the important people in your life for granted and can effectively reawaken an awareness of the gifts of your relationship with that individual.

Now try it on yourself! *



A Roadmap for Healing from Betrayal

Awoman learns her sister has hidden assets from their parents' estate.

A husband discovers his wife has been having an affair with his friend.

A man finds out his business partner has been using the company's profits to fund a gambling addiction.

Whether it's by a sibling, colleague, spouse or other close individual, betrayal slices through us like nothing else. It shatters close bonds, destroys self-esteem and breeds insecurity. It's almost guaranteed to cause pain, heartache, shock and fury.

But it's possible to mend the wounds of betrayal. It's possible to conquer rage and regain dignity. Most of all, it's possible to trust again.

To get through betrayal, it's helpful to have a roadmap—a plan, if you will—for what to expect and what you might want to consider. Here are some ideas.

Get support. Sharing your feelings

helps to release the pain. Consider whether you will be best served by support from your family, friends, therapist or a supportive group.

Consider when/if/how to confront. Thinking this through in advance and acting with intention can positively affect the entire healing process.

Also consider how or whether to talk to children about what has happened.

Weigh your options. You could seek revenge, hold on to outrage and resentment, forget about the transgression or forgive. The choice is yours. What do each of these options hold for you?

Examine why the person betrayed you and what makes you vulnerable to betrayal. Confronting the reasons behind betrayal requires a commitment to self-examination and

mutual examination of the relationship itself. Doing so, while difficult, can create a stronger relationship than existed before the betrayal.

Rebuild your self-image. The journey back to trust also includes reconciliation with yourself, so that you can trust yourself again.

Start by banishing self-blame; change the negative statements about yourself to self-loving statements. For example: "I am whole. I am a devoted friend/spouse/sibling. I am loved from the inside out." Write lists of your positive qualities to keep perspective.

Trust is the cornerstone of all relationships. Moving past the trauma of broken trust can mean moving into a new realm of intimacy with ourselves and with others. *



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