



"No one will ever love you."  
"You're fat, you're fat, and you're fat."  
"You don't deserve happiness."

If someone else said these things to us, we would probably be furious and defensive. But for some reason, most of us are perfectly OK with saying abusive things like this to ourselves day after day.

One of the ironies of the human condition is that we are usually our own harshest critics, and because of that, most of us spend a large portion of our lives feeling like we're not OK. But what does that mean for our lives?

When we begin to look at the issue of whether or not someone is "OK," we are really looking at two related issues. One is self-esteem, and the other is a judgment about how we behave interpersonally. The latter really relates to the question about whether we treat others as if we believe that they are OK. Part of the question about someone's "OK-ness" is not about that person's intrinsic value and worth, but a judgment about how they behave. The reality is that if we don't feel OK about ourselves, it becomes that much easier for us to treat others as if they are not OK. Obviously that can lead to even more problems down the road.

To change the way we see ourselves from negative to positive, we need to understand how we learned to see ourselves negatively in the first place. This means understanding the way in which you may have been injured as a child, both in your family as well as in your relationships with peers. This doesn't mean that you necessarily need to do a

# I'm OK!

## How to Change the Way You See Your SELF

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huge inventory of all of your injuries, but it does mean that you might need to at least understand the dynamics of what injured you, and how those old injuries affect your life today.

There are a number of tools that can be used to boost your self-esteem, but the most popular ones are related to a form of psychotherapy called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. These tools examine the interface between thinking and feeling and how they influence each other. One of the most effective is this four-step process.

### 1. Be aware of that inner voice.

Once you have identified what you want to change, you have to begin to notice your negative self-talk when it first kicks in. Pay attention to internalized negative thoughts like the ones quoted at the beginning of this article, as well as specific depressive feelings or physical behaviors (such as self-harm or addiction) that occur as a result of them. Before you can change anything, you have to be aware that it's happening.

### 2. Nip it in the bud.

Once you realize that your negative thought, feeling or behavior is happening, press your internal stop button before that negativity has a chance to gain power and momentum. Don't try to make sense of anything yet; just turn off the negativity and come to a neutral, thoughtful place.

### 3. Pay attention to your feelings.

Once you've turned off the negativity, you can step back, get grounded and figure out what's causing those bad feel-

ings. Pay close attention to your current physical and emotional states: What caused them? What were you doing when they started? What were you thinking? Who was there? Analyze the situation intellectually, not emotionally.

### 4. Turn it around.

Once you understand why you're being negative, take steps to bring back the positive. If your sister's upcoming wedding has made you feel so fat that you might as well polish off an entire cheesecake, join a weight loss plan and set a reasonable goal to lose some weight before the wedding, rewarding yourself with a beautiful dress and haircut for the party. If your current girlfriend's dismissive reaction to your work stories makes you feel unloved and unappreciated, talk to her about the problem.

Remember, the reality is that you *are* OK, and your commitment to believing that will empower your healing process.

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