

Eating Disorder Self vs. Healthy Self Dialogue

This is an example of a dialogue I did when I was in recovery from my eating disorder.

Situation: I have just eaten a meal and I start feeling uncomfortable about the food in my stomach. The eating disorder is urging me to purge. At this point, I would write down the first ED thought and start challenging it using my healthy self voice. Sometimes I would physically write this down, or I would type them in an email, or write them in my phone.

Eating Disorder Self: *I can't believe you ate that food, you need to purge right away.*

Healthy Self: *I was hungry and I deserve to eat. Food is an essential part of life. Why am I not allowed to eat and keep my food down?*

Eating Disorder Self: *Because you are going to gain weight.*

Healthy Self: *Eating one meal isn't going to lead to weight gain. That is not how the body works. The body needs food everyday to function, just like a car needs gas to drive.*

Eating Disorder Self: *You ate too much though and that means you are definitely going to gain weight.*

Healthy Self: *What do you believe will happen to me if I gain weight?*

Eating Disorder Self: *You are going to hate yourself and your body. You will be depressed and unable to function. People are going to notice and they will judge you. You won't be able to wear cute clothes anymore. You won't be special anymore.*

Healthy Self: *How do I feel about my body now? Do you help me feel better about my body or worse? It is very unlikely that I could feel worse about my body than I do with an eating disorder. And you are the thing that makes me depressed, I doubt that recovery is going to make me more depressed than an eating disorder. The people who love me and care about me do not care what I look like, just as I don't care about what they look like. My body is not what makes me "special." The things that make me special are my kindness, sense of humor, intelligence, determination, creativity, loyalty and compassion. My body does not define me or my worth.*

The dialogue ends when the eating disorder doesn't have a response and is quiet. When I began my recovery, my dialogues were very long, even longer than this one. Throughout the recovery process, I learned how my eating disorder thought, I learned its patterns and I learned how it would respond in certain situations. That meant that my healthy self became stronger and better at challenging my eating disorder. The dialogues became shorter and shorter and eventually my healthy self was so strong that it would shut down the ED with one statement. If I got stuck in a dialogue, I would imagine what I would say to a loved one or friend.

To strengthen your healthy self, you have to practice talking back to your eating disorder self, even if at first you don't believe what you are saying. In the beginning, you might have no idea what to say back when you hear eating disorder thoughts like that. Challenging and talking back to your eating disorder self is usually hard. It takes practice to create a repertoire of responses so that you more readily are prepared to combat your eating disorder voice. You will need to be able to come up with statements from your healthy self that are unique to you and your situation.

Here are a few Healthy Self statements you might try.

- I want to be a role model for other girls and women by accepting my body.
- If I overeat, I know that I can get back on track without restricting or purging.
- What good is having this body if I don't have any fun in it?
- Being alone with my "desired" body doesn't work. Bigger jeans = bigger life!
- This feeling seems intolerable, but it is just a feeling and it will fade.
- I know that I have a distorted body image and do not see myself as others do.
- My best thinking got me here. Maybe it is time that I try something else.
- When it comes to weight, 300 calories of cheese and crackers is no different than 300 calories of fruit.
- There are no good foods or bad foods. No specific food can make me fat.
- I need to think about what I want to eat, instead of just what has the least calories.
- Restricting my food will just set me up for bingeing later.
- Full is not the same thing as fat.
- Right now I cannot be the judge of my own body.

- If I never learn to tolerate my natural body, I will never get well.
- I want to have relationships and fun and I can't have those and my eating disorder.
- Having weight loss as my goal keeps me sick and I am letting it go.
- There is never a "thin enough" I will get to; I need to start acceptance right now.
- Exercise is only healthy for me if it is a choice and not an obligation.
- It does not take any willpower for me to pass up a cookie. What is hard for me is to eat the cookie; that is how I will exercise my own free will.
- Balance is the key, not extreme thinking or acting.
- Any self-esteem I think I am gaining from my body is being cancelled out by what I am doing to myself to get it.

This skill requires a lot of practice and repetition. It might feel cumbersome and weird at the beginning but you will get better and more efficient with time. As you practice this skill, you will find that the same eating disorder thoughts come up over and over again. The eating disorder might be loud, but it is predictable and unoriginal. Right now it might feel like you are completely powerless against your eating disorder. This technique allows you to strengthen your healthy self voice which will weaken your eating disorder voice until it quieter and quieter. Eventually, it won't show up at all.