PROJECT WAYFINDER

TOAST TO MYSELF

Practicing positive self-talk

TIME	PREP	CLASS FORMAT	LEVEL
Lesson: 25m Deeper Dive: +90m	Student toolkits	In-person: ★★★ Virtual (Synchronous): ★★ Virtual (Asynchronous): ★★	3 (advanced)

NOTES

LESSON OVERVIEW

As we navigate the pressures in life, it is common for us to put ourselves down when we don't measure up to others' or our own expectations. This "negative self-talk" can take many forms and can be so pervasive we don't even realize our inner narrative is so harsh. Our inner critic diminishes our feeling of self-worth. In this lesson students will first identify some of the ways they talk to themselves negatively before offering themselves some kinder, more positive acknowledgments in the form of a toast.

BACKGROUND

Defining Negativity Bias // In to help us to survive, our brains preferentially look for, react to, store, and then recall negative information over positive information. In the words of psychologist Rick Hanson, "the mind is like Velcro for negative experiences, and Teflon for positive ones." To counteract the negativity bias of the brain, we need to actively build up positive implicit memories to balance out our tendency to skew toward negative ones. One way we can do this is with positive affirmations.

Defining Positive Affirmations // Positive affirmations are positive phrases or statements that can be used to counter negative or unhelpful thoughts you have toward yourself. When we allow positive affirmations to really "sink in" by savoring and relishing them, they can positively motivate us and boost our self-worth and self-esteem.

Research // Positive affirmations are based on Self-affirmation Theory. This theory proposes three key ideas about self-identity:

+ Our self-identity isn't fixed: Instead of seeing ourselves as having a fixed and unchanging identity, positive affirmations help us to build a narrative of ourselves that is flexible and always growing and adapting.
+ Our self-identity doesn't need to be perfect: Positive affirmations help us to recognize that we do not have to be perfect, or even excellent, in all areas. What is important is learning to be competent in the different areas we value in order to be moral, flexible, and good (Steele, 1988).
+ Our self-identity impacts our behavior: Positive affirmations help us to act in ways that we value. For example, by repeating the positive affirmation "I am a thoughtful friend", we encourage ourselves to actually act in the way a thoughtful friend would behave.

There is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate the positive impacts of affirmations. In particular, positive affirmations have been found to be most beneficial when individuals are facing challenges that cause them to evaluate their self-worth.

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SUGGESTED FLOW

3m - STEP 1 - NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

+ Introduce students to the theme of the lesson:
    + *"As we navigate all of the different pressures in life, it's common for us to put ourselves down when we don't measure up to others' or our own expectations. Raise your hand if you are sometimes harsh or critical to yourself when you mess up."*
    + Teacher share: Consider raising your hand if this applies to you.
    + *"I want to acknowledge that it is very common for us to talk to ourselves this way. This is called 'negative self-talk.' I'm going to read out some phrases from the toolkit that are common examples of negative self-talk."* Then, read out the negative self-talk phrases from the toolkit page and invite students to mark down which ones they have said to themselves at some point.
    + You can use this slide deck for visual reference.
+ Split into Two Sessions: See 'Seven Archetypes of the Inner Critic' in Deeper Dive.

5m - STEP 2 - DEBRIEF

+ Protocol: *Whole Group Discussion*
+ Questions:
    + Invite students to share out how many they marked.
    + How did it feel to hear those negative phrases out loud?
    + Can you think of other phrases that weren't included?
    + Teacher share: Consider sharing out how many you marked. Also consider sharing a phrase that your inner critic often says to you, whether from this list or a phrase of your own.

+ Talking Points:
    + We talk to ourselves all the time. Often when we talk to ourselves we aren't very kind. In the next part of the lesson we're going to practice shifting our negative self-talk to more positive self-talk. Just a warning: It may not be comfortable! But I invite you to have an open mind as we experiment with it together.

5m - STEP 3 - REFLECTING ON THE POSITIVE

+ Introduce the Positive Self-Talk section in the toolkit,
    + "We're going to start by reflecting on our positive traits."
+ Invite them to complete each of the phrases on their page. Present the slide, "Reflecting on the Positive" in this slide deck for their reference.
+ Teacher share: Consider sharing examples for at least two of these. Your willingness to share your positive affirmations can make a huge difference for students who are nervous or shy to share.

5m - STEP 4 - WRITING A TOAST

+ Ask, "Does anyone know what a 'toast' is?" If they are unclear, share with them that it is a ritual

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of honoring someone or something before clinking glasses and taking a sip. Some toasts take the form of short speeches to celebrate someone.

+ Invite students to write a toast to themselves on their toolkit page using their responses to the Positive Self-Talk prompt. Share this example or your own:

POSITIVE SELF-TALK	TOAST
Ex: A. Something I like about myself is that *I'm not afraid to try new things.* B. Something that I'm proud of about myself is *that I've overcome many challenges in my life.* C. Something that I'm good at is *being a good team player.* D. Something that makes me me is *my ability to make people laugh when they're feeling down.*	Ex: "I want to give a toast to someone who.. *is not afraid to try new things… who has overcome many challenges in their life.. who is a good team player.. and who has the ability to make people laugh when they are feeling down.* And that person is me."

5m - STEP 5 - SHARING

+ Invite students to share their toast.
    + There are a number of different ways you could do this depending on the time you have and what would be best for your specific group of students.
        + Level 1 - No sharing: You can skip sharing and go straight into the next step, which is to debrief.
        + Level 2 - Pair-share: Invite students to share their toast with a partner.
        + Level 3 - Group Share: If you have time and if it feels appropriate for students, invite students to share their toast with the full class.
    + Teacher share: Consider sharing your toast to yourself to kick off the share session.

2m - STEP 6 - DEBRIEF

+ Protocol: *Whole Group Discussion*
+ Questions:
    + How did it feel to share your toast?
    + Where does negative self-talk come from? What are some social + cultural factors that influence our self-talk?
    + How might you practice positive self-talk more often?
+ Talking Points:
    + We would happily offer a toast to someone we care about, but saying these same things to ourselves can feel really challenging and uncomfortable.
    + In fact, our negative self-talk can be so frequent we don't even realize there might be another way we could talk to ourselves. What would it be like if we recognized the good in ourselves?

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VIRTUAL LEARNING

For synchronous virtual learning, invite students to do this activity using this slide deck, and the Wayfinder App or physical toolkit. For asynchronous virtual learning, invite students to do this lesson in the Wayfinder App.

DEEPER DIVE

+ **Seven Archetypes of the Inner Critic:** If you'd like to go deeper into exploring negative self-talk, invite students to individually read through an article about the Seven Archetypes of the Inner Critic or read it together. Invite students to consider which one of the seven archetypes most closely resembles them.

+ **Cultural Norms:** Invite students to reflect further on why they felt the way they did when they shared their toasts. Why might we feel nervous to share? Why might we feel confident to share? How does the influence of our cultures, families, and peers affect how we feel about sharing positive things about ourselves?

+ **Negative Self-Talk Song:** Invite students to free write the negative self-talk phrases that most frequently come up for them. Then, invite them to sing their negative self-talk phrases in the tune of 'Happy Birthday' and to pay attention to how that feels. Saying these negative phrases in this more uplifting tone may inspire a sense of humor about the prevalence and universality of negative self-talk.

+ **Self-Talk Experiments**
  + **COVID // Self-Talk:** Invite students to reflect what kinds of self-talk have come up during this time in quarantine. What kinds of negative self-talk have been coming up more lately? What kinds of positive self-talk have you been using to get through this time? What are some positive self-talk phrases you could say to yourself? In what ways have you been more hard on yourself? In what ways have been more kind to yourself?
  + **Self-Talk While Scrolling:** Invite students to reflect what kinds of self-talk come up particularly when they're scrolling on their social media feeds. Invite them to notice what kinds of content trigger negative self-talk versus positive self-talk. Or, invite them to simply notice how social media affects how they see themselves.

+ **Toast Vision Board:** Invite students to create a visual representation of their toast to themselves. Invite them to write their toast in the middle of a blank sheet of paper and draw or collage around the text to visually represent the positive affirmations within the toast. Invite students to post it up on a classroom wall.