Identifying Negative Thinking

Some common forms of negative self-doubting include:

➢ **Filtering.** You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones. For example, say you had a great day at work. You completed your tasks ahead of time and were complimented for doing a speedy and thorough job. But you forgot one minor step. That evening, you focus only on your oversight and forget about the compliments you received.

➢ **Personalizing.** When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself. For example, you hear that an evening out with friends is canceled, and you assume that the change in plans is because no one wanted to be around you.

➢ **Catastrophizing**. You automatically anticipate the worst. You refuse to go out with friends for fear that you'll make a fool of yourself. Or one change in your daily routine leads you to think the entire day will be a disaster.

➢ **Polarizing.** You see things only as good or bad, black or white. There is no middle ground. You feel that you have to be perfect or that you're a total failure.

Focusing on positive thinking

It is possible to turn negative thinking into positive thinking. The process is simple, but it takes time and practice — you're replacing a bad habit by creating a new way of thinking. You didn't develop your old habit in a few months. Don't expect a miracle in developing a new way of thinking. The following are some ways to think and behave in a more positive way:

➢ **Check yourself.** Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.

➢ **Be open to humor.** Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times. Seek humor in everyday happenings. When you can laugh at life, you feel less stressed.

➢ **Follow a healthy lifestyle.** Exercise at least three times a week to positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet to fuel your mind and body. And learn to manage stress.

➢ **Surround yourself with positive people.** Make sure those in your life are positive, supportive people you can depend on to give helpful advice and feedback. Negative people, those who believe they have no power over their lives, may increase your stress level and may make you doubt your ability to manage stress in healthy ways.

➢ **Practice positive self-talk.** Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about yourself.

Examples of typical negative self-talk and how to apply a positive twist include:

Negative self-talk	Positive spin
➢ I've never done it before.	➢ It's an opportunity to learn something new.
➢ It's too complicated.	➢ I'll tackle it from a different angle.
➢ I don't have the resources.	➢ Necessity is the mother of invention.
➢ I'm too lazy to get this done.	➢ I wasn't able to fit it into my schedule but can re-examine some priorities.
➢ There's no way it will work.	➢ I can try to make it work.
➢ It's too radical a change.	➢ Let's take a chance.
➢ No one bothers to communicate with me.	➢ I'll see if I can open the channels of communication.
➢ I'm not going to get any better at this.	➢ I'll give it another try.