

Lifestyle Coach Facilitation Guide: Core

Session 11: Talk Back to Negative Thoughts

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Background and Preparation

Preparation Checklist

Materials

These are the materials you will use during Session 11.

- Participant handouts for Session 11:
 - Session 11 Overview
 - Negative Thoughts
 - Talking Back to Negative Thoughts
 - Practice Talking Back
 - To-Do Next Week
- “Food and Activity Trackers” for Session 11
- Lifestyle Coach’s Log
- Name tags or tents from previous week, if still needed
- Flip chart or chalk board supplies
- Optional: STOP sign to use with “Practice Talking Back” activity
- Balance scale

Before you begin

- Choose a private place to weigh participants.
- If still needed, prepare name tags or set up the classroom with name tents from the previous week.
- Have your Lifestyle Coach’s Log ready for weigh-ins.

Lifestyle Coach Brief

Learning objectives

At the close of this session, participants will be able to –

- Give examples of negative thoughts that could prevent them from meeting their goals of losing weight and being more physically active.
- Describe how to stop negative thoughts and talk back to them with positive thoughts.
- Practice 1) stopping negative thoughts and 2) talking back to negative thoughts with positive ones.

Session overview

We continue the discussion about taking control of our situation and dealing with the everyday influences that create challenges as we work toward our goals. We look at ways to control negative thoughts that can derail progress. We look closely at how to recognize these thoughts and talk back to them with positive thoughts.

Session 11 is divided into four parts:

Part 1: Weekly Progress and Review (5 minutes)

Review briefly participants' progress during the last week, help them solve problems they had, and take care of any other participant needs before moving to Part 2.

Part 2: What are Negative Thoughts? (30 minutes)

Define negative thoughts, describe the different kinds of negative thoughts, and give examples of each. Although some participants may be uncomfortable, encourage them to look at their own negative thoughts, and ask them to share some of them with the group.

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Part 3: Talking Back to Negative Thoughts (20 minutes)

Explain to participants how to talk back to negative thoughts. Using the image of a stop sign, have participants practice catching themselves having negative thoughts. Show them how to talk back to the negative thoughts with positive ones.

Part 4: Wrap Up and To-Do List (5 minutes)

Key messages

Here are the key messages for this session. They should be reinforced to participants throughout the program.

- Negative thoughts can be so habitual and ingrained that we are not aware of them or the effect they have on our behavior.
- The most powerful antidote for negative thoughts is to stop them mid sentence and counter them with positive thoughts.
- Negative thoughts are often habits formed over time. No matter how effectively we stop them, they will probably return in similar situations until we learn how to talk back to them with positive thoughts.
- Each of us has different kinds of negative or self-defeating thoughts. When these thoughts lead to unhealthy eating or inactivity, use the problem solving process to find the strategies that work best at overcoming self-defeating thoughts.

Classroom Presentation

Part 1: Weekly Progress and Review

Estimated time: 5 minutes

Weigh-In and Recording

Notes

Weigh participants privately, and have them record their weight on their “How Am I Doing? Weight” chart.

Record participants’ weight in your Lifestyle Coach’s Log.

Distribute:

- Session 11 handouts to insert into the Participant Notebooks.
- Session 11 “Food and Activity Trackers.”
- Session 9 “Food and Activity Trackers” with your notes.

Collect Session 10 “Food and Activity Trackers.”

Week in Review

Notes

Discuss participants’ successes and difficulties in meeting their weight loss and physical activity goals.

Ask: Did you have any trouble keeping track last week? Were you able to stay under your fat gram and calorie budget? Did you reach your goal for physical activity?

Open responses.

Praise *all progress*, no matter how small.

Help participants graph their physical activity, if needed.

Present: Last session we –

- Covered the four keys to healthy eating out.

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- Talked about how to apply the keys in various situations.
- Practiced asking for what we want and making healthy meal choices and menu substitutions.
- Created an action plan for the week.

Ask: Did you try your action plan for eating out? Any volunteers who want to share entries related to healthy eating out from their “Food and Activity Trackers”?

Open responses.

Ask: What did you learn last week about healthy eating out? What did you learn about menus?

Open responses.

Ask: How are you feeling this week about your goals and what we are here to accomplish?

Open responses.

Discuss any barriers that participants mention, and help them problem solve to overcome the barriers.

This Week

Notes

Present: This week we will –

- Look at how negative thoughts can prevent us from meeting our goals of losing weight and being more physically active.
- Discuss some strategies we can use to stop negative thoughts.
- Practice stopping negative thoughts and talking back to them with positive thoughts.

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Part 2: What are Negative Thoughts?

Estimated time: 30 minutes

What are Negative Thoughts?

Notes

Present: Today we will talk about negative thoughts.

Ask: Can anyone explain what negative thoughts are?

Open responses.

Present: Negative thoughts are thoughts that cause us to lose hope or that stand in the way of our progress. A negative thought is usually a criticism of ourselves.

Everyone has negative thoughts at times. Negative thoughts can lead us to overeat or to be inactive. After we overeat or when it's too late to go for a walk, we feel discouraged about reaching our goals, and so we have more negative thoughts. When a negative thought leads to our behaving in an unhealthy way and that behavior, in turn, leads to yet another negative thought, we are beginning a spiral into a vicious cycle of self-defeat.

For example, suppose you come home after a hard day at work and you think to yourself, "I am tired of watching what I eat all the time. I'm just going to eat whatever I want."

So you eat some potato chips. And then you think, "I did it again. I will never lose weight." You are now so discouraged that you eat more potato chips.

Ask: Can you think of any other examples of negative or self-defeating thoughts?

Open responses.

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Note to Lifestyle Coach

During this session, some participants may talk about problems outside your area of expertise (e.g., significant clinical depression, anxiety, or a clinical eating disorder). Refer participants with harmful thoughts or behaviors to their health care providers.

Examples of Negative Thoughts

Notes

Present: Sometimes we are not aware we are having negative thoughts. Negative thinking becomes such a habit for most of us that we tend to believe and act on our negative thoughts without considering ways to challenge them.

The goal of this session is to help you become aware of your negative thoughts, to show you how they reduce your chances of reaching your goals, and to teach you how to talk back to negative thoughts with positive thoughts.



Refer participants to the “Negative Thoughts” handout in the Participant Notebook.

The first example in this handout shows the self-defeating cycle of negative thoughts. The handout also has some examples of different types of negative thoughts.

Present: Think about a time when you did not achieve something you wanted to achieve and then gave yourself a hard time about it. Think about whether it made the situation better or worse.

Ask: Would anyone like to share an experience when negative thoughts worked against your efforts to eat healthy and be active?

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Note to Lifestyle Coach

Be prepared to give an example of how negative thoughts can work against us, in case no participant volunteers.

Discuss each category of negative thought.

Good or Bad Thoughts

Notes

Good or Bad Thoughts

Present: This type of thought is sometimes called “all or nothing,” “black or white,” or “light bulb” thinking (either on or off) with nothing in between. This type of thinking divides everything into two categories: completely good or completely bad:

- Good and bad foods.
- Success or failure.
- On the program or off the program.

Example: "Look at what I did. I ate that cake. I'll never be able to succeed in this program."

Ask these questions of the group:

- Do you consider some foods "good" and others "bad"?
- What happens when you eat a little of what you consider a "bad" food?
- Can you think of some problems that go along with considering a food "bad?"

Open responses.

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Note to Lifestyle Coach

Reinforce that no foods are forbidden. Participants should understand that no single unhealthy meal or no single day without activity will destroy their progress toward reaching their lifestyle goals.

Excuses

Notes

Excuses (or Rationalizations)

Present: With these kinds of thoughts, we blame something or someone else for our problems. We act as if we have no choice but to overeat or to be inactive through no fault of our own. We did not mean to go off the program, but we "could not help it because of . . . whatever."

Example: "I have to buy these cookies just in case company drops in."

Ask these questions of the group:

- Can you think of a time when you bought some high-fat and high-calorie food "for someone else"?
- Did that someone really need the food, or did you use the person as an excuse to buy the food for yourself?

Open responses.



Note to Lifestyle Coach

The most important thing is to learn to recognize how our own rationalizations and excuses frequently lead to a cycle of self-defeat.

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“Should” Thoughts

Notes

“Should” Thoughts

Present: “Should” thoughts expect perfection. However, no one is perfect. Therefore “should” thoughts set us up for disappointment. These kinds of thoughts also lead to anger and resentment, because “should” assumes that someone is standing over us, forcing us to do what we don't want to do.

Example: “I should have eaten less of that dessert.”

Ask these questions:

- What “should” you or “should you not” do to lose weight and be more active?
- What do you expect yourself to do perfectly? Perhaps it is keeping track of what you eat?
- What happens when you expect perfection of yourself? How do you feel? How does expecting perfection affect your decisions and choices?

Open responses.



Note to Lifestyle Coach

The message is that no one is perfect, and no one engages in healthy behavior all the time. Therefore, we need to have ways to overcome the negative or discouraging thoughts we have when we make mistakes. Emphasize that everyone has had success with the program, and cite those successes (no matter how small). Remind participants that it's not that big a deal if they go over their fat gram goal one week or miss being active on a few days. They can start over any time they want to — right now, in fact.

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“Not as Good as” Thoughts

Notes

“Not as Good as” Thoughts

Present: With these thoughts, we compare ourselves with someone else, and then blame ourselves for not measuring up.

Example: "Mary lost two pounds this week, and I only lost one."

Ask these questions:

- Do you compare yourself with someone else? With whom?
- How does comparing yourself with that person affect you?
- How does the comparison make you feel? How does it affect your decisions and choices about eating and being active?

Open responses.



Note to Lifestyle Coach

Comparing ourselves with others is rarely useful. The main message is to work on thought strategies that relate to our own progress. However, comparing our own past behavior with our current behavior is all right, especially if the changes from past to present are positive. For example, comparing what we drink now (only diet soda) with what we used to drink (only regular soda) makes us feel good.

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“Give Up” Thoughts

Notes

“Give Up” Thoughts

Present: These thoughts are defeating. They often follow the other kinds of negative thoughts.

Example: "This program is too hard. I'm not losing as much weight as Mary is, so I might as well give up."

Ask: Do you ever want something that is high in fat or calories and think, "I'm sick of this program"?

Open responses.



Note to Lifestyle Coach

The main message is that we are all working on *life-long* healthy behavior change. This program, which teaches us important skills and strategies (including how to counter negative thoughts) is just the beginning of a lifestyle of healthy habits. Later in Part 3, participants will learn to talk back to negative thoughts. In the meantime, however, encourage them not to give up.

You might also include these responses:

- Set small achievable goals for yourself.
- Reward yourself with items unrelated to food.
- Look back at the progress you've made.

Praise participants for their progress in undisputable terms. For example, have on hand two 5-lb bags of flour so that you can show participants who have lost 5 lbs or 10 lbs exactly what they have accomplished. They can hold the weight they lost in their hands and see their achievement.

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Part 3: Talking Back to Negative Thoughts

Estimated time: 20 minutes

Talking Back

Present: We've talked about the kinds of negative thoughts that can creep into our minds and make it difficult to stay focused on our goals. So, how can we prevent or counter these negative thoughts?

Once you are aware of a negative thought, you can "talk back" to it.

Ask: What do you think we mean by "talk back to negative thoughts?"

Open responses.



Refer participants to the "Talking Back to Negative Thoughts" handout in the Participant Notebook.

Here is how to talk back to negative thoughts:

1. Catch yourself having the negative thought. Ask yourself, "Is this thought moving me forward or bringing me down?" As soon as you are aware of a negative thought, say to yourself, "I am doing it to myself." I am being negative about myself."
2. Imagine saying "STOP!" to yourself. Picture a huge, red stop sign. The stop sign is so big that it takes up all the room in your mind. It should startle you, and get rid of the negative thought.
3. Talk back with a positive thought. No matter how effectively you have stopped a negative thought, it will probably return again in a similar situation because it is a habit. That is why building a new habit is important: after you stop a negative thought, talk back to it with a positive thought.

Session 11: Talk Back to Negative Thoughts



Note to Lifestyle Coach

If it helps reinforce the idea of stopping negative thoughts, you could hold up a STOP sign as you discuss Step 2 of talking back. Other possibilities are to suggest to participants that they hold up a hand and think or say “beep” or a mantra such as “I am strong, I am healthy” when a negative thought begins. Discuss other ways in which people might try to stop their negative thinking (e.g., leave the room, make a loud sound).

Briefly go over the various ways of talking back described in the handout.

Good or bad: Talk back with *Work toward balance*. Don't expect perfection of yourself, but don't indulge yourself either. Work toward an overall balance.

Excuses: Talk back with *It's worth a try*. Instead of looking for something or someone else to blame, why not give yourself a chance? You just might succeed.

Should: Talk back with *It's my choice*. You are in charge of your eating and activity. No one else is responsible for your choices. No one is standing over you with unrealistic expectations.

Not as good as: Talk back with *Everyone's different*.

Give up: Talk back with *One step at a time*. It takes time to make life-long changes. Recognize what doesn't work, and try another way. Learning anything is always a success, even if what we learn is that something does *not* work.

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Talking Back: Practice

Now let's **practice** stopping negative thoughts and talking back with positive thoughts. Look over the kinds of negative thoughts we've discussed.



Refer participants to the “Practice Talking Back” handout in the Participant Notebook.

Ask: Do you recognize some of these ways of thinking? What types of thoughts are most familiar to you? For example, do you tend to make excuses, or are you more likely to compare yourself with someone else? Do you have some experiences to share with us?

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Activity - "Practice Talking Back"



Note to Lifestyle Coach

Have each participant do this activity in front of the whole group. If the number of participants is large, divide them into small groups, and have each participant do the activity in front of the smaller group.

Each participant should do the activity for each type of negative thought listed in the handout. Again, if appropriate, hold up the STOP sign each time you hear a participant expressing a negative thought.

Instructions for participants:

1. **Write** an example of each type of negative thought from your own life. If you cannot think of any, use the examples in the handouts.
2. **Say** the first negative thought on your list out loud.
3. **Say "Stop!"**
4. **Talk back** to the negative thought out loud with a positive thought.
5. **Write** the positive thought on your handout.

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Note to Lifestyle Coach

Now might be a good time to refer participants to the “Remember Your Purpose” handout from Session 1. On it, they wrote their reasons for joining the program. Information on that handout may provide participants with images or words to use in talking back to negative thoughts. Any image of significance to the participant may make this process more meaningful and fun. For example, a participant might find it [?enjoyable ?meaningful ?useful] to imagine a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other and to see the task of positive thinking as “letting the angel talk.”

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Part 4: Wrap Up and To-Do List

Estimated time: 5 minutes

To Do Next Week



Refer participants to the “To Do Next Week” handout in the Participant Notebook.

Present: For next week, complete the items on this “To Do Next Week” handout:

- Keep track of your eating and activity.
- Catch yourself thinking negative thoughts. Write them in your “Food and Activity Trackers,” along with how you “talked back” to them. Practice stopping negative thoughts and talking back to them with positive thoughts.

Closing

Summarize these key points:

- Negative thoughts often make it difficult to keep focused on healthy goals.
- You can stop negative thoughts by talking back with positive ones.
- Practice talking back to negative thoughts using the strategies and images that work best for you.

Close: This was an important and personal session in which you were asked to find and reveal the negative thoughts that challenge you when you are working to make healthy changes. Next week, we will look at how slips can happen, and more importantly how to stay on track.

Ask participants if they have any questions before closing the session.

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Make announcements about time or location changes, contact information, and any other issues.

After the session

- Write notes on participants' successes and, when necessary, recommend changes in the participants' "Food and Activity Trackers" from Session 10.
- Insert the physical activity minutes in the participants' "Food and Activity Trackers" in your Lifestyle Coach's Log.
- Write notes about the session on your "Notes and Homework" page at the end of this guide.

