



# Mental Spring Cleaning

Is Your Self-Talk  
*Toxic* or *Tender*?



Chances are, if you've requested this workbook, you want to take a closer look at your current patterns of self-talk. This might also mean that you sense something is off or amiss, and that you believe you could be talking differently to yourself. We don't often make or take the time to stop and examine how we are speaking to ourselves and how that can affect our overall happiness and well-being. This easy workbook will give you the opportunity to do just that, while having fun along the way! You'll also gain new tools you can apply immediately so that you can begin creating the life of your dreams. So grab a pencil, roll up your sleeves and dig in, who knows what realizations and discoveries await you...

A Change-It-Yourself Workbook by Michele Wahlder, Professional Life & Career Coach

# It's time for some “Mental Spring Cleaning!”

Springtime is a wonderful time to purge your home of clutter, your closet of outdated styles and your garden of overgrown weeds. Why not also use this rejuvenating time of year to clear yourself of unproductive, hurtful and toxic self-talk?

When it's time for spring-cleaning, you sort through your wardrobe and clean out last year's “fashion faux pas.” You can use the same process for eliminating thoughts that don't positively support your self-image. Like ill-fitting clothes that negatively impact your body image, self-loathing language patterns can detrimentally affect your esteem and confidence levels.

Updating your “wordrobe” with encouraging, uplifting and affirming internal self-statements is a vital part of cultivating inner radiance and outer beauty. When you mentally spring clean, you'll suddenly discover a new feeling of aliveness and energy for life!

There are 4 toxic self-talk culprits that can block your self-esteem, clutter your self-concept and stunt your growth. Great thinkers in cognitive psychology have used the terms below and others. I have fondly created the acronym, “**BADS**” for these 4 culprits:

1. **Belittling**
2. **Awfulizing**
3. **Deceiving**
4. **Shoulding**

As you read through each one, ask yourself if any of them sound familiar. By retraining yourself with the exercises provided, you'll be able to become aware of your self-talk, stop yourself and then replace the toxic thought with a tender alternative.

# #1. B is for Belittling Self-Talk

This usually occurs when we are caught up in “perfectionistic” or “comparative” thinking cycles. In perfectionism, we brutally judge ourselves by superhuman standards and unrealistic expectations of who we think we ought to be. We devalue, belittle and diminish ourselves and who we actually are. When comparing ourselves to others, we minimize and belittle our desirable qualities or achievements, while exaggerating those of others.

When we participate in this type of self-talk, we are actually telling ourselves that we are “not good enough”. The expectations we place on ourselves to be “better” mothers, more “perfect” spouses and increasingly “successful” business people, more this, more that, doesn’t honor who we already are. And certainly, does not inspire our greatness, but instead beats us down. Chronically making comparisons to other’s lives creates a sense of inadequacy and dictates a perfectionism that is basically unattainable.

**Instead of toxic:** *“All the other mothers baked homemade items for the bake sale and I bought mine from the bakery. I’m such a fraud and my son will surely have permanent emotional scars.”*

**Try tender:** *“My son is going to remember the special times we share, not whether or not the cookies I brought were store-bought. I choose to focus on creating meaningful moments with him.”*

## Try This:

Consider a time recently when you were caught up in your own belittling self-talk. Using the example below as a model, write about the situation in the blank spaces provided, and the thoughts you had around the situation. Then consider and list the feelings that resulted from this line of thinking.

SITUATION	CURRENT “TOXIC” THINKING/BELIEFS	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of toxic thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: I brought pre-packaged store bought cookies to my son’s school bake sale. His friend’s mom looked at me funny.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I’m not a good mother.</li> <li>- The other mothers are judging me.</li> <li>- I am such a fraud.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guilt</li> <li>- Stress</li> <li>- Shame</li> </ul>

Now, how you *could you think* your way through the situation differently? What self-affirming, loving thoughts might you use instead? How would this affect your resulting mood?

In the second chart, re-wire your thinking by writing about the same situation, but this time, list the beliefs or thoughts that you might choose to engage in instead, and the new feelings that would result.

SITUATION	POSSIBLE “TENDER” THOUGHT CHOICES	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of tender thoughts and beliefs
<p><i>Example: I brought pre-packaged store bought cookies to my son’s school bake sale. His friend’s mom looked at me funny.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My son will remember special times we share, not the store bought cookies.</li> <li>- I’m a great mom, in many ways. Baking does not make me a better mom.</li> <li>- I choose to create meaningful moments with him.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confidence</li> <li>- Relaxed</li> <li>- Love</li> <li>- Pride</li> </ul>

## #2. A is for Awfulizing Self-Talk

Also known as “gloom and doom” thinking, “awfulizing” is an exhausting negative “futurizing” thought process. Originally developed by the American psychotherapist Albert Ellis, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) holds that the irrational belief system of “awfulizing”, has strong self-defeating components.

It clouds our vision, darkens our world and prevents us from enjoying the here and now. Projecting the worst-case scenario and then living it as though it were happening right now is not an effective strategy. Worrying excessively is about as productive as rocking in a rocking chair- it keeps you moving, but gets you nowhere.

**Instead of toxic:** *“I did horribly in my job interview today, I totally blew it; they will never hire me now.” “I could end up on welfare, oh no!”*

**Try tender:** *“I could have done better on the question concerning past employment. I have learned a lot from this interview process and will be better prepared for my next one. I have always found a way to make ends meet.”*

## Try This:

Consider a time recently when you were caught up in your own “awfulizing” self-talk. Using the example below as a model, write about the situation in the blank spaces provided, and the thoughts you had around the situation. Then consider and list the feelings that resulted from this line of thinking.

SITUATION	CURRENT “TOXIC” THINKING/BELIEFS	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of toxic thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: I had a terrible job interview that ended awkwardly and I haven't heard back.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I totally blew it.</li> <li>- I'll never find a new job.</li> <li>- I bet my next interview goes just as bad.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- anxious</li> <li>- depressed</li> <li>- sad</li> <li>- hopeless</li> </ul>

Now, how you *could you think* your way through the situation differently? What self-affirming, loving thoughts might you use instead? How would this affect your resulting mood?

In the second chart, re-wire your thinking by writing about the same situation, but this time, list the beliefs or thoughts that you might choose to engage in instead, and the new feelings that would result.

SITUATION	POSSIBLE “TENDER” THOUGHT CHOICES	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of tender thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: I had a terrible job interview that ended awkwardly and I haven't heard back.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sure, I could have done better on the question concerning past employment. Next time, I'll say...</li> <li>- I'll be better prepared for my next one.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- hopeful</li> <li>- optimistic</li> <li>- trusting</li> </ul>

### #3. D is for Deceiving Self-Talk

When we get caught up in telling ourselves that other people, places and/or situations are to blame for our current circumstances, we are, for the most part, deceiving and lying to ourselves. In choosing to view ourselves as helpless victims of our circumstances and other people’s bad behavior, we lose our personal power and become slaves to our sad stories. In every situation, we have a choice, even if it is only to change our attitude - this is called taking personal responsibility. Focusing on what is going wrong in our lives and how we aren’t getting what we want is a choice, just as focusing on what is working well in our lives and how grateful we are is a choice. It is really up to us.

**Instead of toxic:** *“I wish I could sleep, but my friend Pamela keeps calling me about her relationship problems after 11pm. She is so inconsiderate, selfish and disrespectful. Doesn’t she know I am sleeping? Why me? I always attract “taking” rather than “giving” friends.”*

**Try tender:** *“I see that Pamela is calling again. I really feel bad for her; she is having such a rough time with this relationship break-up. I am long overdue in letting her know I prefer not to take calls after 9pm, so I can get my rest. I will tell her tomorrow that I would love to support her through this time, but it will have to be earlier in the evening.”*

#### Try This:

Consider a time recently when you were caught up in deceiving self-talk. Using the example below as a model, write about the situation in the blank spaces provided, and the thoughts you had around the situation. Then consider and list the feelings that resulted from this line of thinking.

SITUATION	CURRENT “TOXIC” THINKING/BELIEFS	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of toxic thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: Pamela keeps calling me about her relationship problems after 11pm. It’s affecting my sleep and my energy level.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- She’s so inconsiderate and selfish.</li> <li>- I can’t ever find friends that treat me right.</li> <li>- Why me?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- self-pity</li> <li>- resentment</li> <li>- dread</li> <li>- anger</li> </ul>

Now, how you *could you think* your way through the situation differently? What self-affirming, loving thoughts might you use instead? How would this affect your resulting mood?

In the second chart, re-wire your thinking by writing about the same situation, but this time, list the beliefs or thoughts that you might choose to engage in instead, and the new feelings that would result.

SITUATION	POSSIBLE “TENDER” THOUGHT CHOICES	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of tender thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: Pamela keeps calling me about her relationship problems after 11pm. It’s affecting my sleep and my energy level.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I am long overdue in letting her know I don’t like taking calls after 9pm.</li> <li>- This is an opportunity for me to practice boundary setting.</li> <li>- I attract people that respect and honor my limits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- empowered</li> <li>- respected</li> <li>- appreciative</li> <li>- compassion</li> </ul>

## #4. S is for “Shoulding” Self-Talk

“Should” statements directed at ourselves are disempowering and can lead to a sense of guilt, shame and frustration. “Musts”, “oughts”, and “have-tos” are similar offenders. The psychologist Clayton Barbeau came up with the term “shoulding yourself” to describe this cognitive distortion, while Dr. Albert Ellis has this a “musterbation”. When we “should on ourselves”, we need to examine whether it feels self-motivating or self-punishing? If it is self-motivating, it will feel energizing and light, if it is self-punishing, it will feel heavy and draining. Most of the time “shoulding” on ourselves is depleting and can actually make us feel rebellious. It may even urge us to do the exact opposite of what we actually want for ourselves.

**Instead of toxic:** *“I shouldn’t have eaten any ice cream last night, I hate myself. I’m so gross. I should know better. I might as well stop my diet now.”*

**Try tender:** *“Yes, I chose to eat the ice cream last night, but it doesn’t help me at all to beat myself up over it. Today I will get back on my diet and when I have a sweet tooth, I’ll choose healthy snacks, instead.”*

### Try This:

Consider a time recently when you were caught up in your own “shoulding” self-talk. Using the example below as a model, write about the situation in the blank spaces provided, and the thoughts you had around the situation. Then consider and list the feelings that resulted from this line of thinking.

SITUATION	CURRENT "TOXIC" THINKING/BELIEFS	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of toxic thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: I shouldn't have eaten two big bowls of ice cream late last night.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I totally blew it.</li> <li>- I'm a gross pig.</li> <li>- I hate myself.</li> <li>- I might as well quit my diet.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- depressed</li> <li>- self-loathing</li> <li>- hopeless</li> <li>- disempowered</li> </ul>

Now, how you *could you think* your way through the situation differently? What self-affirming, loving thoughts might you use instead? How would this affect your resulting mood?

In the second chart, re-wire your thinking by writing about the same situation, but this time, list the beliefs or thoughts that you might choose to engage in instead, and the new feelings that would result.

SITUATION	POSSIBLE "TENDER" THOUGHT CHOICES	FEELINGS/EMOTIONS The fruits of tender thoughts and beliefs
<i>Example: I shouldn't have eaten two big bowls of ice cream late last night.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beating myself up over it does my spirit no good.</li> <li>- Today I'm back on my diet.</li> <li>- I obviously needed some self-nurturing. How can I take care of myself in more kind and loving ways today?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- self-love</li> <li>- forgiveness</li> <li>- inner peace</li> </ul>

# Ready to Spring Clean?

This week, commit simply to being aware of the way you talk to yourself. While transformation doesn't appear overnight, changing negative thought patterns starts by first becoming mindful of the way you currently think. *"Oh, there it is, I'm thinking like a victim."* *"Wow, that sure is an awfulizing message I am telling myself!"*

## Try this!

1) Use the log below for recording your toxic self-talk, without judging, simply committing to a state of awareness at this point. Don't worry yet about making big changes! You'll be surprised to see what changes when you simply become more aware. Sample log:

Date/Time	Self-Talk	B, A, D or S?
Sat, 9:00am	<i>When they find out I'm a fraud, I'll probably get fired.</i>	<i>Awfulizing</i>
Mon, 10:00pm	<i>I "should" have exercised today; I can't ever stick to my plan.</i>	<i>Shoulding</i>
Tues, 3:00pm	<i>Sarah's blond hair is so much prettier than my dark brown hair, I wish I could trade.</i>	<i>Belittling</i>
Thurs, 8:00am	<i>I hate my job, but I don't have any alternatives, I'm just stuck.</i>	<i>Deceiving</i>

Your log:

Date/Time	Self-Talk	B, A, D or S?

2) Once you have become more familiar with your negative self-talk, make a practice of disputing your own words as if they were being uttered by an external person who you don't like, maybe even a rival. You wouldn't put up with criticism and put-downs from others, would you? Would you dish out to others the things you say to yourself? After doing this for several days, begin implementing new thoughts when you find yourself caught up in cluttering, stifling thoughts. Counter the toxic thought by immediately writing down the tender alternative.

Date/Time	Situation	Tender Thought Choice

3) Either each morning when you rise or each evening just before bed, read your tender statements out loud. The brain is much more receptive and non-resistant at these times of day.

As you make an effort to change your self-talk, something magical will begin to happen. You'll find that tender thoughts will come more naturally, and toxic thoughts will eventually be swept away by your new ways of thinking. Over time, your internal dialogue will positively evolve and become better aligned with who you are today, and who you want to be. Whatever dreams and aspirations you may have, however big or small, de-cluttering your self-talk is a wonderful way to make space in your life for them to happen.

## Congratulations!

You have taken the first step in changing your life by changing your self-talk. While this is not a change that can happen overnight, I think you'll be surprised at the shifts that will occur when you are committed to awareness and start exercising your options. We are such a creative, intelligent species and our ability to think deeply, examine ourselves and reason, sets us apart from all of the other species. What would our lives become if we used our thought powers for creating good? The mind is a terrible thing to waste!

## What's the next step?

So, what did you find out? Did this workbook create any feelings, inclinations or "a-ha" moments for you?

I'm always interested in hearing from you! Feel free to call me at 214-823-LIFE (5433) or email [michele@michelewahlder.com](mailto:michele@michelewahlder.com). Let me know what you have found out about yourself by administering this evaluation. And don't forget, I would be happy to offer you a 40-minute coaching session at no charge to delve into these or other topics, and to determine if coaching is right for you.

All my best,

*Michele Wahlder*

[www.michelewahlder.com](http://www.michelewahlder.com)



*together,* WE CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN.™