

# VERONICA WALSH CBT SKILLS

## Visualisation & self-talk mantras.

### **New self-talk tips for anxiety and social-anxiety:**

Some of us are not 'calm', and so what. Some of us are always on. Some of us are not low-heartbeat people, we're high adrenaline people. We have 'hearts that beat like a hummingbird' (that's how Conan O'Brien delightfully describes himself - with zero apology, and he doesn't call it anxiety. He says his business partner is the opposite to him and 'has a heart that beats about 5 times a minute, so he'll live to be 160, like a turtle'. I love that. Use it to remind yourself that: "There are worse things to be. My stress is a disorder, and it's nobody's business but mine. So what if I'm hyper-present and hyper-engaged? That can be a super-power as well as a nuisance". This is the kind of new self-talk that allows you to be happier, to understand and manage yourself.

### **Visualisation tips:**

Assign your *anxiety-self-talk* an identity - notice when it's yapping – then thought stop and correct it. It's a dramatic and negative version of you. It is not evil or bad - it's trying to help you, but it's a bit silly and simplistic, and gets the data wrong. Talk to it like it's a toddler. Or you in adolescence. Or picture a caveman-woman (cave-person?) version of you. Maybe a silent-movie-star version of you with big eyes and big dramatic gestures - and dial it down, talk to it gently, use a soothing tone, persuade it the drama is a bit ridiculous, tell it the real facts, be rational .

I tell some clients they're like a Ferrari or a Maserati, but they 'can't go at that speed in this zone', they'll get into trouble. Some others have a Hulk Smash Things mode - that's not going to work out well.

Others name and tame their feelings 'oh, here's rage - dial it down buddy' - oh here's jealousy, yuk, shake it off'. Feelings are not facts. Reframe. Visualisation and designing new self-talk works, your brain likes it.

**Check out these mantra examples – highlight and 'take what you need' here, and edit them to be in your own style of language, to build a thought stopping and self regulation toolbox...**

Notes and key ideas:

Nope. Not today little neanderthal. I know you're trying to help, but you're getting it wrong. That's not true. It's inaccurate. Thinking that way costs me too much.

(Visualise the 'paper tigers', and remind them they're just paper, and not worth the paper they're fashioned from). Shoo fake tiger! \*roll eyes

If I, as a fallible human, have some distorted thinking and drama, so might others. People are not their behaviours, they can *behave* badly sometimes, but it doesn't literally mean they *are* bad. Let it go. Be present.

Oops, here's my trippy nervous system revving up again. I'm ok, it's ok, Breathwork time! breath slowly in, hold, then slowly out. If I regulate the oxygen it will regulate the adrenaline and cortisol.

Here she is – the messy bitch who lives for the drama. Look, I love you little one, and I'll call on you if the apocalypse or zombie plague comes, but right now you're not really helpful.

Oh here you go - 'comparing and rating' again, knock it off, what other people have or what they do is nothing to do with me, I do my best and have value and my own journey and purpose.

Just because I 'feel' bad doesn't make it bad. I have all the feels all the time because my stress is a disorder – I can name and tame my feelings. What is the appropriate emotional response to this situation? I will aim for that instead.

**Make notes of your own ideas here...**

There you go, mind-reading again. These are my thoughts not theirs. I'm just guessing, and I'm not very good at it because I have a stress disorder. I do not have mind reading skills. I go for negative guesses but actually I have no idea how they're evaluating me. Or even if they're bothered evaluating me to the extent that I'm imagining. It's just as likely they're caught up with their own stuff and are in their own moment. I could make ten guesses about what people are thinking, but they're just guesses. Even if somebody does think little of me, I don't have to agree with them.

Hey, that's a little over-dramatic don't you think? When I listen to you I get pumped up. Dial it down little monkey.

I am not my behaviour. My behaviour is something I do sometimes. I can BE Quiet. I can BE uncomfortable. I can BE awkward. Somewhat sometimes. And so what, it's nobody's business but mine. I'm doing my best. I am of value. The anxiety is not literally me. Others don't really know me, and that's ok. They don't have the complete picture. I'm a work in progress. I can reinvent myself any time through *learning and doing*.

I've had a bad experience with this person(s) before - but that doesn't have to determine my destiny with them. And it doesn't mean I can't be part of this social group. I can activate my inner buddha and give without demanding to get, I can love without demanding to be loved, for me, for my lived experience, not necessarily for them.

I can show respect to everybody simply because we're all humans doing our best in this moment, based on what we're thinking and feeling at time.

Buddha says 'with our thoughts, we make our world' – I have the power to remake my world, endlessly, as a philosophy for living.

I can learn to be more present – to focus on what is rewarding and stimulating about any social situation. I am good enough - I don't have to perform – I can be the quiet smiley person if I feel like it. And I can still mindfully enjoy the conversation – the drinks – the food – the music, whatever is going on. I can listen, and if my brain sparks associations with something I might contribute to the conversation -if I feel physically safe and okay, I will contribute. If I'm shaky I probably won't, and that's okay. The experience is still mine either way..

My stress is a disorder, and it's nobody's business but mine. I'm ok, it's ok. \* Breathe it down...

Try an 'abstract rational thinking' exercise - jump into the shoes of somebody who upset you. Objectively riff through a few scenarios where they feel righteous and justified in what they are doing. They have agency - they're allowed to make their own choices. You don't have to like it, you can be sad and disappointed, that's normal, you can be annoyed, that's normal – but it is irrational to demand that they not think and feel and behave the way that they do. And if you have rage you won't be able to communicate effectively - attempt to understand the *other humans*, show them the kindness and patience you would like for yourself..

Uh-oh, here's Hulk. Get lost big guy, you get me into trouble.

Oy vey, here's Low Frustration Tolerance again. Look, that's ridiculous. It's not helpful to keep thinking 'I cannot, and will not, and should not have to tolerate this thing I find frustrating'. I can because it's just reality. Dial it down. Know what you can control and what you cannot control. Be cool.

What if I work on being present and listening. And give myself a break from what I think are 'rules' for social performance? I'd PREFER it if I was cool and comfortable socially all the time .... but I don't demand it, because that would be silly and unrealistic. My stress is a disorder, that's not a crime, it's a science thing, and I'm working on it.

Feelings are not facts - just because I feel fear doesn't mean it is a bad dangerous situation. It's just my trippy nervous system messing with my data. It will regulate over time as I learn to breathe it down and be present.

I'm allowed to be sad and disappointed when people don't respond to me the way I'd prefer – but despair and depression and anxiety and anger is a bit over the top. I'm doing my best. I get another shot every day with the other humans!

Ah stop it you little busy-body. That's not rational. Stay out of it. \*reframe

Oops, there my sizzling adrenaline goes again, for no reason at all. I'm accidentally in Maserati Mode! \*breathe it down

Ok - trippy time - get some acting skills. Focus and listen. Move yourself into a different space.