

2015's resolution?

Figure you'd nail your goals if you just had more willpower? Not so, say experts—the key to success is self-compassion

Move over, willpower: The latest psychology research proves that self-discipline isn't as critical to achieving your resolutions as treating yourself kindly is. "Most of us believe that self-criticism keeps us in line, but that harsh, judgmental mindset is actually unmotivating," explains Kristin Neff, Ph.D., a self-compassion researcher at the University of Texas at Austin. "It erodes our self-confidence and makes us lose faith in our ability to achieve our goals. Eventually, we start to fear failure and stop trying altogether."

Self-compassion, on the other hand, encourages us to forgive ourselves and forge ahead—even if we slip up. "When we offer ourselves unconditional acceptance and support, we give ourselves the emotional resources to feel safe taking risks," affirms Neff. "In this frame of mind, we behave better, stick to our goals more and pick ourselves up and try again." Indeed, a study in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* found that people who treated themselves kindly after failing a test spent 25 percent more time honing their skills and achieved higher scores on the next round compared with their self-critical peers.

To make this new science work for you, try incorporating a few supportive mantras into your internal dialogue. "Self-talk becomes a habit," notes Jo Anne White, Ph.D., coauthor of *The Woman's Handbook for Self-Empowerment*. "When we start changing what we say to ourselves, we rewire our brain, which improves our self-image and self-confidence." Here, four mantras to help you usher in success.



Go easier on you

To create an oasis on hectic days...

“I am calm, confident and in control”

“Beating up on ourselves because we don’t have all the answers or we don’t feel in control steals physical and emotional energy away from our ability to focus and problem-solve,” cautions Beverly D. Flaxington, author of *Self-Talk for a Calmer You*. To regain your composure, she recommends taking two minutes to repeat, “I am calm, confident and in control.” “Things can be swimming all around you, but this mantra brings you back to right now,” assures Flaxington. “It helps you take a step back from, *This feels insurmountable*, and reminds you, *I can do one thing, I can take one step*. It’s about knowing you have the resources and you’re okay exactly where you are—you’ve got the skills and the ability to get where you need to go.”

To stop feeling not good enough...

“May I accept myself just as I am”

When we’re our own worst critic, we tend to magnify every flub and shrug off our triumphs. The key to repairing this distorted sense of self, says Linda Graham, MFT, author of *Bouncing Back*, is stopping for a second to say, “May I accept myself just as I am.” “These words provide the antidote to the shame response—that impulse to contract, collapse, shut down and hide,” observes Graham. “The mantra helps us stand up straighter and breathe again: *Oops, that was wrong, but I love myself anyway*. Self-compassion gives us a space to nurture and nourish ourselves so we can regroup and shift to a larger, kinder perspective—one that allows us to respond differently to our missteps.”

To find the strength to try again...

“Every day, I get better and better”

Too often, one slipup (like skipping a walk) gives way to an avalanche of self-recrimination until the regrettable event becomes a statement on your character (“I can’t stick with a workout routine”). “What we say goes into our subconscious minds and perpetuates beliefs about what we’re capable of,” explains White. To keep these beliefs from taking root, she advises replacing the “*I can’t*’s” in your self-talk with “*Every day, I get better and better*.” “We’re going to slip up, that’s human nature; we are constantly evolving and we don’t have to be everything at this moment,” reassures White. “These words remind us we are not static—we’re capable of self-evolution, we have the capacity to grow, change and embrace ourselves in new ways.”

To let go of past failures...

“If we associate our inherent value with how well we perform, then we have a very subjective sense of self that we aren’t able to own,” says Jennifer Rothschild, author of *Self Talk, Soul Talk*. Keep the distinction clear by repeating, “Who I am and what I struggle with are not the same thing.” “If I

struggle with anger, it doesn’t mean I’m a hotheaded woman. It means I’m a flawed woman who is doing her best and God loves me just how I am,” Rothschild explains. “Ultimately, ours is the first, most frequent and last voice we hear every day. I’m not going to define myself by the temporary thing.”

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