

DISTANCED SELF-TALK

One way to create distance when you're experiencing chatter involves language. When you're trying to work through a difficult experience, use your name and the second-person "you" to refer to yourself. Doing so is linked with less activation in brain networks associated with rumination and leads to improved performance under stress, wiser thinking, and less negative emotion.

Dr. Ethan Kross

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UH-OH



**TRY DISTANCED
SELF-TALK**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

IMAGINE YOU ARE ADVISING A FRIEND

Another way to think about your experience from a distanced perspective is to imagine what you would say to a friend experiencing the same problem as you. Think about the advice you'd give that person, and then apply it to yourself.

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**IMAGINE YOU
ARE ADVISING
A FRIEND**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

BROADEN YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Chatter involves narrowly focusing on the problems we're experiencing. A natural antidote to this involves broadening our perspective. To do this, think about how the experience you're worrying about compares with other adverse events you (or others) have endured, how it fits into the broader scheme of your life and the world, and/or how other people you admire would respond to the same situation.

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**LOOK AT IT
FROM A BROADER
PERSPECTIVE**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

REFRAME YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A CHALLENGE

A theme of this book is that you possess the ability to change the way you think about your experiences. Chatter is often triggered when we interpret a situation as a threat something we can't manage. To aid your inner voice, reinterpret the situation as a challenge that you can handle, for example, by reminding yourself of how you've succeeded in similar situations in the past, or by using distanced self-talk.

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REFRAME YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A CHALLENGE

TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF

REINTERPRET YOUR BODY'S CHATTER RESPONSE

The bodily symptoms of stress (an upset stomach before a presentation) are often themselves stressful. Remind yourself that your bodily response to stress is an adaptive evolutionary reaction that improves performance under high-stress conditions. In other words, your sudden rapid breathing, pounding heartbeat and sweaty palms are there not to sabotage you but to help you respond to a challenge.

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**REINTERPRET
THE CHATTER
RESPONSE**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

NORMALISE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Knowing that you are not alone in your experience can be a potent way of quelling chatter. There's a linguistic tool for helping people do this: Use the word "you" to refer to people in general when you think and talk about negative experiences. Doing so helps people reflect on their experiences from a healthy distance and makes it clear that what happened is not unique to them but characteristic of human experience in general.

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**NORMALISE YOUR
EXPERIENCE**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

ENGAGE IN MENTAL TIME TRAVEL

Engage in mental time travel. Another way to gain distance and broaden your perspective is to think about how you'll feel a month, a year, or even longer from now. Remind yourself that you'll look back on whatever is upsetting you in the future and it'll seem much less upsetting. Doing so highlights the impermanence of your current emotional state.

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**MENTAL
TIME TRAVEL**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

CHANGE THE VIEWPOINT

Visualize the event in your mind from the perspective of a fly on the wall. Try to understand why your "distant self" is feeling the way it is. Adopting this perspective leads people to focus less on the emotional features of their experience and more on reinterpreting the event in ways that promote insight and closure. You can also imagine moving away in your mind's eye, like a camera panning out until the scene shrinks to the size of a postage stamp.

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**LOOK IN FROM
A DISTANCE**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

WRITE EXPRESSIVELY

Write about your deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding your negative experience for fifteen to twenty minutes a day for one to three consecutive days. Really let yourself go as you jot down your stream of thoughts; don't worry about grammar or spelling. Focusing on your experience from the perspective of a narrator provides you with distance from the experience, which helps you make sense of what you felt in ways that improve how you feel over time.

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**WRITE
EXPRESSIVELY**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

ADOPT A NEUTRAL PERSPECTIVE

If you find yourself experiencing chatter over a negative interaction you've had with another person or group of people, assume the perspective of a neutral, third-party observer who is motivated to find the best outcome for all parties involved. Doing so reduces negative emotions, quiets an agitated inner voice, and enhances the quality of the relationships we share with the people we've had negative interactions with, including our romantic partners.

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**FIND THE
NEUTRAL
THIRD PARTY**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

CLUTCH A LUCKY CHARM OR EMBRACE SUPERSTITION

Simply believing that an object or superstitious behaviour will help relieve your chatter often has precisely that effect by harnessing the brain's power of expectation. Importantly, you don't have to believe in supernatural forces to benefit from these actions. Simply understanding how they harness the power of the brain to heal is sufficient.

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**HOLD A
LUCKY CHARM**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

PERFORM A RITUAL

Performing a ritual - a fixed sequence of behaviours that is infused with meaning – provides people with a sense of order and control that can be helpful when they're experiencing chatter. Although many of the rituals we engage in (for example, silent prayer, meditation) are passed down to us from our families and cultures, performing rituals that you create can likewise be effective for quieting chatter.

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**PERFORM A
POSITIVE RITUAL**

**TOOLS TO
HELP YOURSELF**

EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE NEEDS

When people come to others for help with their chatter, they generally have two needs they're trying to fulfil: They're searching for care and support (emotional needs), and concrete advice about how to move forward and gain closure (cognitive needs). Concretely, this involves not only empathically validating what people are going through but also broadening their perspective, providing hope, and normalizing their experience.

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**ADDRESS BOTH
EMOTIONAL AND
COGNITIVE NEEDS**

**TOOLS FOR
GIVING SUPPORT**

PROVIDE INVISIBLE SUPPORT

One approach involves covertly providing practical support, like cleaning up the house without being asked.

Another involves helping broaden people's perspectives indirectly by, for example, talking in general terms about others who have dealt with similar experiences (for example, "It's amazing how stressful everyone finds parenthood") or by soliciting advice from someone else but without signalling that the questions are meant to help the person in need.

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**PROVIDE
INVISIBLE
SUPPORT**

**TOOLS FOR
GIVING SUPPORT**

I AM BATMAN

Tell them to pretend they're a superhero. This strategy, popularized in the media as "the Batman effect", is a distancing strategy that is particularly useful for children grappling with intense emotions. Ask them to pretend they're a superhero or cartoon character they admire, and then nudge them to refer to themselves using that character's name when they're confronting a difficult situation. Doing so helps them distance.

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**GET THEM TO
PLAY A
CHARACTER**

**TOOLS FOR
GIVING SUPPORT**

AFFECTIONATE TOUCH

Feeling the warm embrace of a person we love, whether that be holding someone's hand or sharing a hug, reminds us at the conscious level that we have supportive people in our lives whom we can lean on – a chatter-relieving psychological reframe. Affectionate touch also unconsciously triggers the release of endorphins and other chemicals in the brain such as oxytocin that reduce stress. Of course, for affectionate touch to be effective it has to be welcome.

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**TOUCH THEM
AFFECTIONATELY,
BE RESPECTFUL**

**TOOLS FOR
GIVING SUPPORT**

BE A PLACEBO

Other people can powerfully influence our beliefs, including our expectations about how effectively we can deal with chatter and how long it will last. You can utilize this interpersonal healing pathway by providing the people you're advising with an optimistic outlook that their conditions will improve, which changes their expectations for how their chatter will progress.

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**BE SOMEONE'S
PLACEBO**

**TOOLS FOR
GIVING SUPPORT**

A BOARD OF CHATTER ADVISERS

Finding the right people to talk to, those who are skilled at satisfying both your emotional and your cognitive needs, is the first step to leveraging the power of others. While a colleague may be skilled at advising you on work problems, your partner may be better suited to advising you on interpersonal dilemmas. The more people you have to turn to for support in any particular domain, the better. So build a diverse group of confidants you can turn to for support in the different areas of your life.

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**BUILD A
BOARD OF
ADVISERS**

**TOOLS FOR
RECEIVING SUPPORT**

SEEK OUT PHYSICAL CONTACT

You don't have to wait for someone to give you affectionate touch or supportive physical contact. Knowing about the benefits they provide, you can seek them out yourself, by asking trusted people in your life for a hug or a simple hand squeeze. Moreover, you need not even touch another human being to reap these benefits. Embracing a comforting object, like a teddy bear or security blanket, is helpful too.

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**ASK FOR
PHYSICAL
CONTACT**

**TOOLS FOR
RECEIVING SUPPORT**

LOOK AT A PHOTO

Thinking about others who care about us reminds us that there are people we can turn to for support during times of emotional distress. This is why looking at photos of loved ones can soothe our inner voice when we find ourselves consumed with chatter.

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**LOOK AT A
PHOTO OF A
LOVED ONE**

**TOOLS FOR
RECEIVING SUPPORT**

PERFORM A SHARED RITUAL

Although many rituals can be performed alone, there is often added benefit that comes from performing a ritual in the presence of others (for example, communal meditation or prayer, a team's pregame routine, or even just toasting drinks with friends the same way each time by always saying the same words). Doing so additionally provides people with a sense of support and self-transcendence that reduces feelings of loneliness.

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**PERFORM
A RITUAL
WITH OTHERS**

**TOOLS FOR
RECEIVING SUPPORT**

AVOID PASSIVE SCROLLING

Voyeuristically scrolling through the curated news feeds of others on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms can trigger self-defeating, envy-inducing thought spirals. One way to mitigate this outcome is to curb your passive social media usage. Use these technologies actively instead to connect with other people at opportune times.

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**MINIMISE
PASSIVE USE OF
SOCIAL MEDIA**

**TOOLS FOR
RECEIVING SUPPORT**

USE SOCIAL MEDIA PROPERLY

Although social media can instigate chatter, it also provides you with an unprecedented opportunity to broaden the size and reach of your chatter support network. If you use this medium to seek support, however, be cautious about impulsively sharing your negative thoughts. Doing so runs the risk of sharing things that you may later regret and that may upset others.

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**USE SOCIAL MEDIA
TO FIND SUPPORT**

**TOOLS FOR
RECEIVING SUPPORT**

CREATE ORDER AROUND YOU

When we experience chatter, we often feel as if we are losing control. Our thought spirals control us rather than the other way around. When this happens, you can boost your sense of control by imposing order on your surroundings. Tidying up your work or home spaces, making a list, and arranging the different objects that surround you are all common examples.

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**CREATE ORDER
IN YOUR
ENVIRONMENT**

**TOOLS FOR
YOUR ENVIRONMENT**

RECHARGE IN NATURE

Spending time in green spaces helps replenish the brain's limited attentional reserves. So go for a walk in a tree-lined street or park when you're experiencing chatter. If that's not possible, watch a film clip of nature on your computer, stare at a photograph of a green scene, or even listen to nature sounds. You can surround the spaces in which you live and work with greenery to create environments that are a boon to the inner voice.

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**GET SOME
GREEN TIME**

**TOOLS FOR
YOUR ENVIRONMENT**

AWE-INSPIRING EXPERIENCES

Feeling awe allows us to transcend our current concerns in ways that put our problems in perspective. Of course, the experiences that provide people with awe vary. For some it is exposure to a breathtaking vista. For someone else it's the memory of a child accomplishing an amazing feat. For others it may be staring at a remarkable piece of art. Find what instils a sense of awe within you, and then seek to cultivate that emotion when you find your thoughts spiralling.

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**SEEK OUT
AWE-INSPIRING
EXPERIENCES**

**TOOLS FOR
YOUR ENVIRONMENT**