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### Be Kind to Yourself

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# Be Kind to Yourself

As a therapist and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, one of the things that surprises me when I talk to people is the way we talk to ourselves.

Many of us constantly barrage ourselves with words and thoughts we would never dream to speak out loud if they were directed at another person. If we wouldn't speak harshly to another person, why is it okay to speak harshly to ourselves inside our head?

The Bible assumes we love ourselves. That's why it contains statements such as *"love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:39). I don't think we're doing a good job loving ourselves when we constantly repeat phrases like, *"That was dumb"* or *"I'll never look like \_\_\_\_."* Sometimes we even pull others into our negative self-talk by thinking, *"No one will listen if I speak up,"* or *"What I have to say is stupid and they'll think I am incompetent."* When we do this, our brain interprets those messages the same as if the other person said those messages to us audibly. We believe them as if they came from the other person and can often treat that person as if they said it. We may often bring that up later in an argument, *"You think my opinions are stupid,"* when really those are our own thoughts we are projecting onto others. This can leave the other person hurt and confused by our reaction because we are speaking as if our thoughts came from their mouth.

When I am working with clients around this topic, I tell them to imagine they are trying to teach a six-year-old boy or girl to play basketball. When the child attempts to make a basket, what would happen if the adult teacher were to say statements like, *"You suck! You're never going to make a basket if you shoot like that. This is why no one wants to play with you!"* The child would be devastated. You would be devastated if you said things like that to a small child. The child quite likely would be unable to make the next basket because of the way they feel about what you said. You

could imagine they may never want to play basketball again.

Why, then, is it okay for you to say those things to yourself? It's not. Those words and phrases are not motivating. They are destructive and hurtful. Just like the example of a child playing basketball with a critical adult, your negative messages to yourself are also destructive and hurtful. These thoughts accumulate and often have lasting effects.

I am not saying that you can never try to improve your skills or analyze your actions. What I am recommending is that you stop the negative messages and replace them with, *"Well, that didn't work out well. What can I do differently next time so I don't have to feel badly?"* That's a much more gentle and motivating response. ■

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*Important Note: This article is not intended to take the place of therapy, medical advice, or to diminish the effects of mental or personality disorders.*

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