

Family Transitions Coaching

Creating Balance, Resilience, & Fulfillment

The Role of Self-Talk in Surviving Transitions

By Ellen Neiley Ritter, Ph.D.

Ever hear the saying "the power of positive thinking"? There may be a great deal of support for this cliché, especially when it comes to dealing with painful life transitions, those times which challenge our sense of ourselves and our purpose in life. How we perceive events and what we tell ourselves about those events can have an incredible impact on our actions and even our psychological health.

As an example, those suffering from depression are far more likely to show a negative thinking pattern – they are less likely to remember positive memories and experience most interactions as a confirmation of their negative thoughts about themselves and the world. Often, when something goes wrong, those suffering from depression will take it as an indication that they "are worthless", that "the world doesn't like them", or that they "can't do anything right". Interestingly, as the depression lightens, so does the frequency of negative thoughts.

So what does this mean for those dealing with Empty Nest? How can this help you get through this difficult transition? During the coming day or so, try to pay attention to what you say when thinking about your child leaving and about your future. Listen not only to the words you say but also to the thoughts that pop into your head and heart. That internal voice, often called your Gremlin, appears during difficult times, raising self-doubts and influencing how we respond to circumstances in our lives.

Battling the Gremlin isn't easy but being able to can make a significant difference in how you approach and survive during difficult events in your life. The first step is becoming aware of what it says. Does it question whether you can handle difficulties? Does it bring up feelings of being abandoned, past pains of "failing", or make your worry about what others think? The Gremlin's input is often so subtle that we are barely aware that these are just our own self-doubts and so we assume that what it is saying is based in reality or fact. What's important to remember, as you listen, is that these thoughts are yours and as such, are something you can change. How?

The next step is countering those negative thoughts. Do you find yourself saying "I've lost my child forever."? Think how different you would feel if you said to yourself "I haven't lost my child as I am still her mother but our relationship is changing. It's hard to adjust to now but I can do it and our new relationship may be even better."

Instead of saying "This transition is going to kill me" it's probably more realistic and positive to say "This is a really difficult time and I feel sad. But I can get through this time. I have gotten through other difficult times" .

Instead of telling yourself "The only thing that gave my life meaning was being a parent", congratulate yourself for being a good parent and begin to remember other things which have given your life meaning or things you may want to pursue once you are through this difficult transition. Positive thinking may help you to realize that "Parenting gave my life meaning for the past 20 years, and will continue to be an important part of my life. But, I now have the time to create my next life to do things for myself. I deserve it because I was a good parent."

See if that feels different. It may take a while, but this simple change in our self-talk can begin to make a difference, can help you survive and actually flourish during times of transition. And if the sadness is so prevalent that you can't even begin to see the other side, you might consider talking with a coach or counselor who can work with you, provide you with the tools to reframe your perceptions and begin to see that Empty Nest is not an ending but rather a time of change and potential.

As a professional transitions coach, Ellen Neiley Ritter, Ph.D. is committed to helping individuals and families to not only survive but thrive difficult transitions. Ellen works with her clients to increase their resilience, combat the negative thinking, and create lives filled with purpose and happiness. To learn more about coaching or sign up for your complimentary coaching session, please visit our website at www.familytransitionscoaching.com .