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Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*. I'm Amy Morin, Editor-in-Chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a bestselling author of four books on mental strength.

You're listening to the "Friday Fix." Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that will help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is, we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys.

Now, let's dive in today's episode!

Today I'm talking about self-doubt. We all have it sometimes, but most of us weren't ever taught how to deal with it in a healthy way.

Well, today, I'm going to teach you how to respond to self-doubt in a way that you can actually turn it into an advantage.

That's because self-doubt doesn't have to be a bad thing. In fact, it might help you perform better than you would if you felt completely confident. But only if you know how to respond to it in a healthy way.

In fact, research shows that athletes who have a little bit of self-doubt outperform their completely confident competitors. That's likely because they've learned to embrace their self-doubt, rather than fight it.

The same has been found for students. Students who feel completely confident that they're going to pass an exam score lower than students who feel a little more doubtful.

Why is it that self-doubt helps sometimes?

Well, it has to do with effort and attention.

If you embrace a little self-doubt, you might try harder. You're also more likely to stay focused on the task while you're doing it.

Someone who feels overconfident might not prepare as well. They also might allow themselves to be a little more distracted when they're doing something. And, while they're busy daydreaming about their next vacation, your hint of self-doubt might help you keep your head in the game.

Of course, though, we've all had experiences with self-doubt that didn't end in victory.

And each time your self-doubt seems to be true, your belief that you just aren't capable can grow stronger. When you believe you can't do something, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If you step into a meeting thinking "no one is going to listen to me," you might be less likely to speak up. And if you do speak up, you might not say it like you mean it, which could then reinforce your fear that no one is listening to you.

But, you don't have to make your self-doubt come true.

Instead, you can learn to embrace your self-doubt without believing it is a fact.

Let's say you have to give a presentation next week. As you think about your presentation, you might start thinking things like, "Ugh, I'm going to look like an idiot," or "I have no business trying to teach people anything."

You might be tempted to start thinking everyone else who gives presentations feels confident. And your self-doubt is proof that you have no business doing it.

But believing that your self-doubt is proof that you can't succeed, makes things worse.

So, let's talk about how to deal with self-doubt in a healthy way at 3 different times: what to do when you still have time to prepare, what to do right before you have to perform, and what to do in the middle of your performance.

I'm using the word "performance" to describe whatever events you have self-doubt about. It could include anything from a job interview to a date, networking event, or a social gathering.

So, let's say you have two weeks before your event, and self-doubt is creeping in. Rather than buy into the fact that you aren't going to succeed, at this point, remind yourself you have a choice. You can use your time to either think about why you won't do well, or you can use that same time to prepare.

At this point, when you start imagining worst-case scenarios, ask yourself, *What can I do now that will help me do my best then?* That could include anything from studying for an exam to practicing interview questions with a family member. Now is your opportunity to take action that will help you later.

And, taking action now can help quiet the self-doubt that's running through your head.

But what about when it's too late to prepare? Let's say you're filled with self-doubt 10 minutes before your event? What do you do then?

You can allow your thoughts to keep going downhill and think of all the worst-case scenarios or you can look for evidence to the contrary.

If you're thinking about all the reasons why you're going to fail, take a minute to think of all the evidence that says you might succeed.

So, let's say you're about to give a big presentation at your company and you're starting to question whether you're going to be able to persuade people to listen to your ideas. In those 10 minutes before you get out there, you might remind yourself that you've been invited to give this presentation by someone who believed that you could do it. Or, you might remind yourself of a past presentation that went well.

You might even remind yourself that you're an overall amazing person who tends to perform well under pressure. Whatever it is, see if you can come up with at least a few examples of reasons why you might actually crush it.

Remind yourself that what you're about to do might go better than you expect. And, that can help you balance out all those thoughts that are trying to convince you that everything is going to go wrong.

Another strategy that can help you at this moment is to ask yourself, "What would I say to my friend right now?" If your friend walked up to you and said, "I'm giving a big presentation in 10 minutes and I know I'm going to blow it," you probably wouldn't start listing all the reasons why they're bound to fail. Instead, you'd probably give them some kind words of encouragement.

Try giving yourself those same kind words.

Finally, don't panic when you have self-doubt. Tell yourself it's simply your brain's way of making sure that you don't overestimate yourself and you don't underestimate the gravity of the challenge you're about to face. Your self-doubt is just warning you that what you're about to do is going to be tough. But, you can remind yourself that you've done tough things before and you can do this too.

Now, let's talk about what to do when you have self-doubt in the middle of your performance.

It can be helpful to create a mantra to repeat to yourself in advance. It's something that we talked about in Episode 119: "Why You Should Create a Personal Mantra."

A quick, little positive phrase to repeat to yourself can help drown out the self-doubt. Having a mantra ready to go can ensure that you'll have something to boost your confidence when you need it the most.

So, let's say you're giving that presentation and, in the middle of it, your brain starts saying things to you like, "No one is listening," or "You sound like an idiot."

If you already have a catchphrase ready-to-go like, "Smile and say it like you mean it," or "Just do your best." Repeat that to yourself as needed. And, that can help you refocus your attention where you need it the most, which is on your performance.

Keep in mind that most people don't talk about self-doubt. So, we all have a tendency to assume that other people feel more confident than we do, but that's not true. Self-doubt is normal.

As a therapist, I get to hear what people are really thinking. And I assure you that even people who look completely confident on the outside, experience self-doubt too.

So, those are some strategies that can help you stay mentally strong when you experience self-doubt.

Two weeks before your event, use your self-doubt as an opportunity to prepare. Ten minutes before your event, look for evidence that you'll succeed and talk to yourself like a trusted friend. And during your event, repeat a mantra that will help you stay on task and do your best.

Ultimately, accept that self-doubt is normal and it doesn't have to hold you back. Embrace it and turn it into an opportunity to perform at your best.

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Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*.

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