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<b>Title of Activity or Resource:</b>	Puzzle Talk
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<b>Type of Activity or Resource:</b>	Partner Activity – Introduction to Self-Talk
<b>Objective:</b>	To discover how negative and positive self-talk influence what we believe to be true about our selves and our behavior.
<b>Recommended Age Group:</b>	Adult or Middle School to High School Students
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	Three easy youth puzzles per pair of participants. * Paper and pen.
<b>Time:</b>	15 minutes: 5 minutes to explain. 5 minutes to complete activity. 5 minutes to reflect.
<b>Additional Notes:</b>	*Inexpensive puzzles may be purchased through vendors such as windycitynovelties.com, orientaltrading.com, or local party outlets. (See sample pictures on page 3.)

# Puzzle Talk:

## An Introduction to the “Whispering Self”

Shared by Joan Fretz

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### Introduction:

Each of us is continuously talking to ourselves in response to our experiences and feelings. This “whispering self” (Purkey, 2002) may tell us positive messages when we are feeling successful, or negative messages when we are struggling with a task or doubting our abilities. Negative whispers like “I’ll never be able to do this!” can discourage us from seeing ourselves as able, valuable and capable. Positive messages such as “I’m doing better.” and “I just have to stick with it.” can encourage and signal us to put forth more effort and believe in our ability to succeed at a task.

Today we’ll use puzzles to illustrate how the “whispering self” narrates and illuminates our beliefs and feelings during an activity.

### Process:

Participants select a partner to work with. One will be the puzzler solver and the other will be the observer. The puzzle solver receives three simple puzzles to work with for a total of 5 minutes. While working with the puzzles, the puzzle solver is asked to say out loud anything that comes into his or her mind. The observer listens carefully to everything that their partner is saying while doing the puzzles and writes it down.

The facilitator states, “You have five minutes to work with the puzzles” and sets a timer. (Avoid setting a goal or direction such as “Try to do all three.” It is interesting to see what self-imposed pressures or goals the puzzle solvers will choose for themselves.)

The facilitator reminds the puzzle solvers to speak out loud any thought that comes into their minds. You will hear positive comments and strategies like, “I’m really good at this one!” and “It’s going better now.” Or, “I’m going to do this one first because I think it’s the easiest one.” You’ll hear negative comments also, like “I stink at puzzles!” or “I can’t even finish the one that I thought was easy.” The observer writes down every comment their partner says.

At the end of the five minutes, the facilitator asks the observers to share some of the positive (blue) comments their partners said. Then ask for some of the negative (orange) comments they heard. Ask the puzzle solvers to share some of the decisions they made or impressions they had, such as “Which puzzle did you decide to do first and why?” and “Did you think you were supposed to complete all three?”

Next, ask the participants to reflect on how negative whispers impact our beliefs about our ability, intelligence and choice of behavior. Talk about how positive whispers support our belief in our abilities and lead us to persevere in the face of obstacles.

Share or create a list of negative messages with the group and ask them to rewrite them as positive messages:

### Negative

“I’m never going to be able to do this.”

“I shouldn’t go because no one likes me.”

“I always say the wrong thing.”

“I can’t ask a question because everyone will think that I’m stupid.”

### Positive

“It might be hard, so I’m going to give it my best shot.”

Try the Puzzle Talk activity with students. Reinforce that people who are confident and put forth effort even when they experience difficulty or failure, know that failure is just a signal to try a different strategy and anyone can get better at something if you work at it.

### Enjoy reading more about self-talk and the whispering self:

Purkey, W. W. (2000). *What Students Say to Themselves: Internal Dialogue and School Success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Purkey, W. W. & Stanley, P. H. (2002). *The Inviting School Treasury*. Greenville, NC: Brookcliff Publishers.



### Each puzzle solver received:

- two cardboard animal puzzle pieces mixed together in a zip lock bag,
- one plastic geometric shape puzzle (in a zip lock bag) with which they were asked to make a square, and
- one cube puzzle for which they were given no directions.

Puzzles purchased at :  
[www.windycitynovelties.com](http://www.windycitynovelties.com)