

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POSITIVE SELF-TALK THERAPY IN REDUCING ANXIETY AMONG ADOLESCENTS WHO EXPERIENCE EMOTIONAL ABUSE: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Anxiety is one of the psychological problems commonly experienced by adolescents, particularly among those who have been exposed to emotional abuse. Emotional abuse, including insults, threats, yelling, rejection, humiliation, intimidation, and persistent invalidation, can shape negative internal schemas, reduce self-esteem, and intensify fear, insecurity, and avoidance. Recent international studies published after 2023 indicate that childhood maltreatment and emotional abuse are consistently associated with adolescent anxiety, psychopathology, impaired emotion regulation, and heightened psychological distress (Hashim et al., 2024; Baldwin et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). This literature review examines the potential effectiveness of positive self-talk therapy in reducing anxiety among adolescents who experience emotional abuse. The review was conducted by identifying and synthesizing scientific articles, international journals, national journals, and official reports relevant to positive self-talk, adolescent anxiety, emotional abuse, coping, cognitive restructuring, and emotion regulation. The findings suggest that positive self-talk therapy may help adolescents recognize negative internal dialogue and replace it with more rational, supportive, adaptive, and goal-oriented statements. The mechanism of change is closely related to cognitive reframing, self-compassion, affect labeling, and emotion regulation, all of which are important protective processes in adolescent mental health. Therefore, positive self-talk therapy may serve as a simple, low-cost, school- and community-based psychosocial intervention to support adolescent mental health. However, further empirical studies using stronger designs, such as randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs with control groups, are needed to test its effectiveness specifically among adolescent victims of emotional abuse.

**Keywords:** positive self-talk, self-talk therapy, anxiety, adolescents, emotional abuse, literature review, emotion regulation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Adolescence is a developmental period that is vulnerable to psychological problems because individuals experience physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes simultaneously. During this stage, adolescents begin to form their identity, build social relationships, develop autonomy, and face various pressures from family, school, digital media, and peers. These conditions may trigger anxiety, especially when adolescents do not receive adequate emotional support. From a developmental perspective, anxiety among

adolescents cannot be understood merely as an individual symptom; rather, it needs to be viewed as the result of interactions among personal experiences, family relationships, school climate, social pressures, and adolescents' ability to manage their thoughts and emotions.

One factor that may increase the risk of anxiety among adolescents is the experience of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse may include insults, threats, rejection, yelling, intimidation, humiliation, emotional neglect, and treatment that makes adolescents feel unloved and worthless. Although it does not leave physical wounds, emotional abuse can have profound psychological consequences. Hashim et al. (2024), through a systematic review and meta-analysis published in *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, emphasized that childhood emotional maltreatment is an important risk factor for adolescent psychopathology and is often given less attention than physical or sexual abuse.

Experiences of emotional abuse may shape negative thinking patterns among adolescents, such as feeling worthless, incompetent, easily blamed, afraid of rejection, and undeserving of affection. These thinking patterns can intensify anxiety, reduce self-confidence, and hinder adolescents' ability to establish healthy social relationships. Baldwin et al. (2024), in *JAMA Psychiatry*, showed that subjective experiences and memories of maltreatment are strongly associated with psychopathology. Thus, cognitive interventions that target schemas, interpretations, and internal dialogue become highly relevant.

In this context, positive self-talk therapy becomes important. Self-talk refers to an individual's internal dialogue with oneself, either in positive or negative forms. Positive self-talk helps individuals transform negative thoughts into statements that are more rational, supportive, realistic, and constructive. Among adolescents who have experienced emotional abuse, this technique can help transform thoughts such as "I am worthless," "I am always wrong," or "No one cares about me" into healthier thoughts such as "I still have self-worth," "I deserve to feel safe," and "I can learn to face this situation gradually." Mulawarman et al. (2024) emphasized that positive self-talk among adolescents has cognitive, affective, rational, motivational, and goal-oriented functions; therefore, it can be positioned as a psychosocial technique closely related to the principle of cognitive restructuring.

Several recent studies also strengthen the urgency of self-talk- and emotion-regulation-based interventions. Yosep et al. (2025), in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, found that positive self-talk journaling interventions helped improve the psychological well-being of children and adolescents in high-pressure contexts. Chen et al. (2025) also showed that the relationship between childhood trauma and adolescent anxiety is influenced by emotion regulation pathways, particularly cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Thus, self-talk therapy should not be understood merely as an exercise in repeating positive sentences, but as a process that helps adolescents reconstruct ways of thinking, interpret experiences, and regulate emotional responses more adaptively.

Based on this background, this literature review aims to examine the effectiveness of positive self-talk therapy in reducing anxiety among adolescents who experience emotional abuse. The review is also intended to strengthen the theoretical and empirical foundations

of self-talk intervention as an applicable approach for school social workers, counselors, child support workers, families, and adolescent mental health services.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a literature review method. This method aims to identify, examine, compare, and synthesize previous research findings related to the influence of positive self-talk therapy in reducing anxiety among adolescents, particularly adolescents who experience emotional abuse. A literature review was selected because the topic of positive self-talk among adolescent victims of emotional abuse still requires conceptual and empirical mapping before being developed into more specific experimental research.

The data sources in this study were obtained from scientific articles, national journals, international journals, official institutional reports, and previous research findings relevant to the topic of the review. Literature was searched through several databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Sage Journals, Wiley Online Library, SpringerLink, Frontiers, ResearchGate, Garuda, and other national journal portals. International articles published from 2024 onward were prioritized so that the manuscript could be strengthened by recent developments in adolescent mental health research.

The keywords used in the literature search included: positive self-talk, self-talk therapy, adolescent anxiety, anxiety symptoms, emotional abuse, emotional maltreatment, childhood maltreatment, emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal, coping, self-compassion, kekerasan emosional, kecemasan remaja, terapi self-talk, and adolescent victims of emotional abuse. The search was conducted by combining Indonesian and English keywords to obtain broader and more relevant findings.

The inclusion criteria in this study consisted of articles discussing self-talk therapy or positive self-talk, adolescent anxiety, emotional abuse, maltreatment, emotion regulation, coping, or psychological interventions related to anxiety management. The articles prioritized were publications from 2020 to 2026, available in full text or with sufficient abstracts, and directly relevant to the research topic. To strengthen the recency of the manuscript, this review added 10 international journals published after 2023 as the basis for theoretical and empirical arguments.

The exclusion criteria included articles that were not fully available, were irrelevant to the focus of the review, did not present a clear research method, were merely opinion-based without scientific foundation, or were unrelated to adolescents, anxiety, emotional abuse, self-talk, and emotion regulation. The data obtained were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach by comparing, categorizing, and interpreting findings from various previous studies.

**Table 1. Literature Review Method Framework**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Description</b>
Type of study	Literature review
Data sources	Journal articles, official reports, and previous research findings
Search databases	Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Sage Journals, Wiley Online Library, SpringerLink, Frontiers, ResearchGate, Garuda
Publication years	2020–2026; the main strengthening used 10 international journals published after 2023
Article languages	Indonesian and English
Keywords	Positive self-talk, self-talk therapy, anxiety, adolescent anxiety, emotional abuse, emotional maltreatment, childhood maltreatment, emotion regulation
Inclusion criteria	Full-text articles or articles with sufficient abstracts relevant to self-talk, adolescent anxiety, emotional abuse, emotion regulation, and psychological interventions
Exclusion criteria	Incomplete, irrelevant, non-scientific articles or articles without a clear method
Analysis technique	Descriptive qualitative analysis with thematic synthesis

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Literature Review Findings**

The review findings show that anxiety among adolescents is a prominent mental health issue and is closely related to unsafe socio-emotional experiences. Emotional abuse experienced within the family, school, or social environment can shape negative beliefs about the self, others, and the future. Within a cognitive framework, these negative beliefs become the basis for anxious automatic thoughts, excessive vigilance, feelings of insecurity, and avoidance behavior.

International literature published after 2023 shows that childhood maltreatment and emotional abuse are strongly associated with various mental health problems. Hashim et al. (2024) stated that emotional maltreatment is significantly related to adolescent psychopathology. Baldwin et al. (2024) found that subjective experiences of maltreatment were strongly correlated with psychopathology, while Grummitt et al. (2024) showed that maltreatment contributes to the burden of mental disorders and suicide risk in the population.

From the perspective of psychological mechanisms, anxiety among adolescent victims of emotional abuse is not only triggered by abusive events but also by the way adolescents interpret those experiences. Chen et al. (2025) emphasized that childhood trauma is

associated with adolescent anxiety through emotion regulation pathways, particularly cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. This finding is important because positive self-talk therapy works by helping adolescents reassess negative thoughts in a more rational and adaptive manner.

Positive self-talk therapy is a technique that helps individuals recognize the content of their internal dialogue, test the accuracy of negative thoughts, and replace them with more realistic and supportive statements. Among adolescents who experience emotional abuse, this technique can be directed toward three main targets: restoration of self-esteem, reduction of negative automatic thoughts, and enhancement of emotion regulation.

Several recent studies on self-talk demonstrate the potential benefits of this intervention. Mulawarman et al. (2024) found that positive self-talk among adolescents can be developed through repeated practice, mental rehearsal, modeling, and habituation of goal-oriented internal dialogue. Yosep et al. (2025) showed that positive self-talk journaling improved psychological well-being among children and adolescents in high-pressure situations. Wu et al. (2026) also showed that self-talk may play a role in preventing adolescent self-injury by reducing negative emotions, increasing psychological distance, strengthening self-control, and supporting adolescent mental health.

**Table 2. Strengthening from 10 International Journals Published After 2023**

No.	Author/Year	Journal	Focus of Study	Main Findings	Relevance to the Manuscript
1	Hashim, Alimoradi, Pakpour, Pfaltz, Ansari, Asif, & Iqbal (2024)	Trauma, Violence, & Abuse	Emotional maltreatment and adolescent psychopathology	Childhood emotional maltreatment is a significant risk factor for adolescent psychopathology.	Strengthens the relationship between emotional abuse, anxiety, and adolescent psychological problems.
2	Baldwin, Coleman, Francis, et al. (2024)	JAMA Psychiatry	Prospective and retrospective measures of maltreatment and psychopathology	Subjective/retrospective experiences of maltreatment show strong associations with psychopathology.	Supports the importance of cognitive interventions that target schemas and internal dialogue.

No.	Author/Year	Journal	Focus of Study	Main Findings	Relevance to the Manuscript
3	Grummitt, Baldwin, Lafoa'i, Keyes, & Barrett (2024)	JAMA Psychiatry	Burden of mental disorders caused by childhood maltreatment	Maltreatment contributes to the burden of mental disorders and suicide risk.	Emphasizes the urgency of prevention and psychosocial intervention for victims of abuse.
4	Chen, Xiao, et al. (2025)	Psychiatry Research	Childhood trauma and adolescent anxiety	Childhood trauma is associated with adolescent anxiety through emotion regulation pathways.	Explains the emotion regulation mechanism relevant to self-talk therapy.
5	Yosep, Fitria, Mardhiyah, & Hikmat (2025)	Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health	Positive self-talk journaling among children and adolescents	Positive self-talk-based journaling interventions improve psychological well-being.	Strengthens evidence for self-talk as a simple and applicable intervention.
6	Mulawarman, Antika, Hariyadi, et al. (2024)	Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy	Positive self-talk among adolescents	Positive self-talk has cognitive, affective, rational, motivational, and goal-oriented functions.	Serves as the main conceptual basis for self-talk therapy among adolescents.
7	Wu, Zhu, Yeo, Xu, Wu, & Lu (2026)	Health Education & Behavior	Self-talk and prevention of adolescent self-injury	Positive self-talk can reduce negative emotions, improve self-control, and reduce the risk of self-harming behavior.	Strengthens the protective function of self-talk against adolescent emotional problems.

No.	Author/Year	Journal	Focus of Study	Main Findings	Relevance to the Manuscript
8	Nguyen, et al. (2025)	Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology	Self-compassion, emotion regulation, and adolescent mental health	Emotion regulation and self-compassion play important roles in adolescent anxiety and depression symptoms.	Supports the integration of self-talk with self-compassion and emotion regulation.
9	Thingbak, Capobianco, Wells, & O'Toole (2024)	Journal of Affective Disorders	Metacognitive beliefs, anxiety, and depression in children/adolescents	Metacognitive beliefs are associated with anxiety and depression in children and adolescents.	Shows that thoughts about thoughts need to become a target of intervention.
10	Szota, et al. (2025)	Journal of Adolescent Health / mental health literacy literature	School-based mental health literacy interventions	School-based interventions improve mental health literacy and readiness to seek help.	Supports the application of self-talk therapy in school settings and adolescent counseling services.

## Discussion

The review findings indicate that adolescents who experience emotional abuse have a higher risk of anxiety. Emotional abuse in the form of insults, threats, rejection, yelling, humiliation, and bullying can shape negative perceptions of the self. Adolescents who continuously receive negative emotional treatment may internalize these experiences into beliefs that they are worthless, incapable, unloved, or always at fault. These negative beliefs then develop into anxious thinking patterns. Therefore, interventions that merely calm symptoms without addressing negative internal dialogue may be insufficient for adolescent victims of emotional abuse.

Anxiety among adolescent victims of emotional abuse does not only arise as a temporary response; it can become a persistent psychological pattern if left untreated. The findings of Baldwin et al. (2024) strengthen the view that subjective interpretation of maltreatment experiences plays an important role in the emergence of psychopathology. Accordingly, positive self-talk therapy is relevant because it helps adolescents change the personal meaning of negative experiences and build healthier self-schemas.

Positive self-talk works through cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Cognitively, self-talk helps adolescents identify negative automatic thoughts, examine evidence that supports or weakens those thoughts, and then replace them with more balanced statements. Emotionally, self-talk provides internal support so that adolescents feel calmer, more in control, and more capable of facing situations that trigger anxiety. This technique is consistent with the principle of cognitive reappraisal, namely the ability to reinterpret situations more adaptively so that the intensity of negative emotions can decrease.

Among adolescents who have experienced emotional abuse, self-talk statements need to be designed carefully. Statements that are too general, such as “I will definitely be happy” or “everything is fine,” may feel unrealistic to victims. Recommended self-talk statements are those that are validating, realistic, and gradual, such as: “I am learning to feel safe,” “Bad experiences do not define my self-worth,” “I deserve to be treated well,” and “I can ask for help when I feel anxious.”

From a social work perspective, positive self-talk therapy can be developed as part of micro- and mezzo-level interventions. At the micro level, social workers or counselors can help adolescents recognize negative thoughts, develop self-talk cards, keep self-talk journals, and practice positive statements in anxiety-triggering situations. At the mezzo level, schools and families can create environments that reinforce positive messages instead of shaming or blaming children. Thus, self-talk therapy needs to be understood as an intervention situated within an ecosystem of social support, not merely as an individual exercise separated from family and school contexts.

Nevertheless, the review findings also reveal several limitations. Most studies on self-talk therapy still discuss adolescent anxiety in general and have not specifically examined adolescent victims of emotional abuse. In addition, several self-talk studies still use pre-experimental or quasi-experimental designs with limited samples. Future studies need to employ randomized controlled trials, control groups, larger sample sizes, valid and reliable anxiety instruments, and clear measures of emotional abuse experiences.

Overall, this literature review shows that positive self-talk therapy has the potential to become a simple, affordable, easy-to-apply, and relevant psychological intervention to help reduce anxiety among adolescent victims of emotional abuse. However, in cases of severe anxiety, complex trauma, self-harm, or suicide risk, self-talk therapy should not be used as the only intervention; rather, it needs to be combined with professional assistance from psychologists, counselors, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, or child protection services.

### **Conceptual Model of Positive Self-Talk Therapy Intervention**

Based on the review findings, the conceptual model of the intervention can be formulated as follows: emotional abuse shapes negative automatic thoughts and low self-schemas; these negative thoughts increase anxiety through fear, shame, insecurity, and avoidance; positive self-talk therapy helps adolescents recognize, challenge, and replace

negative thoughts with more realistic statements; changes in internal dialogue then strengthen self-esteem, positive coping, emotion regulation, and the courage to seek help.

**Table 3. Application of Positive Self-Talk among Adolescents Who Experience Emotional Abuse**

Triggering Situation	Negative Thought	Recommended Positive Self-Talk	Psychological Goal
Being yelled at or humiliated by parents/teachers	I am always wrong and useless	I may have made a mistake, but I still have worth and can improve it	Restore self-esteem and reduce shame
Being mocked by peers	No one likes me	Not every judgment from others determines my self-worth	Reduce dependence on external validation
Feeling anxious in class	I will definitely fail	I can try slowly and ask for help if needed	Increase courage to face academic situations
Remembering emotional abuse experiences	I am not safe	Right now, I am learning to build a sense of safety and seek support	Improve emotion regulation and a sense of safety
Fear of telling others about the problem	No one will believe me	I deserve to be heard and can choose a safe adult	Encourage help-seeking behavior

## CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that emotional abuse contributes to the emergence of anxiety among adolescents through the formation of negative thoughts, low self-esteem, insecurity, and less adaptive coping styles. Positive self-talk therapy plays a role in helping adolescents transform negative internal dialogue into statements that are more positive, rational, supportive, realistic, and adaptive. Evidence from international journals published after 2023 shows that the relationships among maltreatment, anxiety, psychopathology, emotion regulation, and self-talk have an increasingly strong empirical foundation.

Therefore, positive self-talk therapy can be considered an applicable early intervention in school, family, community, and adolescent counseling services, particularly to help adolescent victims of emotional abuse rebuild self-esteem, a sense of safety, and the ability to manage anxiety. However, its effectiveness among victims of emotional abuse still needs to be tested through stronger empirical studies using experimental designs, control groups, valid instruments, and professional assistance that observes the principles of child protection and trauma-informed care.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For schools, positive self-talk therapy can be integrated into guidance and counseling services, student psychosocial well-being programs, and character-strengthening activities while maintaining students' confidentiality and psychological safety.

For school social workers and counselors, this intervention can be used as an initial technique to help adolescents recognize negative thoughts, formulate realistic self-talk statements, keep emotion journals, and practice positive coping strategies.

For families, it is important to reduce communication patterns that belittle, yell at, shame, or negatively label children, because the language received by children can become internal dialogue that affects their anxiety.

For future researchers, quasi-experimental studies or randomized controlled trials are needed to examine the effectiveness of positive self-talk therapy among adolescent victims of emotional abuse using larger samples and standardized anxiety instruments.

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