



CONTINUING EDUCATION THAT MAKES A CHANGE

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When you are done with the course, take the posttest. When you pass the posttest (70% or higher) and pay the course fee (\$10 per unit), you will be issued a CEU Certificate of Completion.

Enjoy!

Course Name:	Life's Law #4: Control your own self-talk
Course Number:	LL4
CEU:	2.0
Instructor:	Philip Copitch, Ph.D.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. You will study Life’s Law #4.
2. You will read real life examples of how to work with angry young adult patients.
3. You will study ways to keep defensive walls down.
4. You will experience story telling as a therapeutic tool.
5. You will see ways to open up a discussion with a teen or young adult patient.

SUGGESTED PREREQUISITE COURSES

None

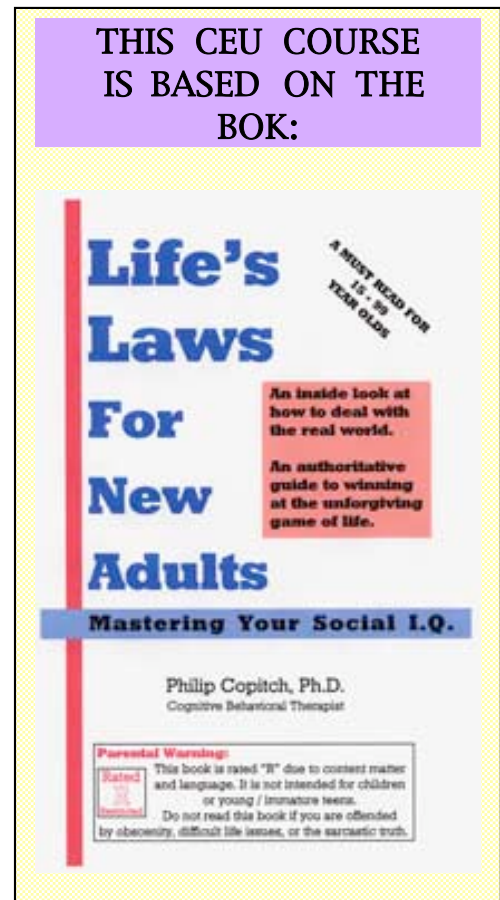
Introduction

I have developed ten life laws that I teach to teens and young adults to help them navigate the rough waters of young adulthood. I have found, over the years, that these life laws help my patients have directional posts that guide them outside of our therapy sessions. It is my intent for the young adult to have a framework to build their social skills on. I tend to “teach” one life law a week. (Based on the individuals abilities.) I find that my patients quickly begin to implement change and self control into their lives. In this CEU course we will look at Life’s Law #4: Control your own self-talk.

In my treatment of angry and “misunderstood” teens and young adults I take a cognitive behavioral approach and find that they appreciate my nonjudgmental frankness.

We are going to look at how to get teens and young adults to listen to you in an open minded way. The goal is to talk with your patient, not at them. This sounds easy but unfortunately it is difficult. Over the years I have found that if I explain a needed concept to someone in a relaxed story format, it keeps their defensive walls down and lets them emotionally participate in the learning process. By sprinkling my conversation with humor and a little “I think it’s like this, what do you think” humility, I find that my teen and young adult clients readily play of my stories and seriously challenge their own ways of dealing with their world.

The following is the way I introduce patients to the fact that they need to be aware of their own thoughts, and how their thoughts influence their behavior. It is not uncommon for patients to possess no awareness that their thoughts are influences on themselves or others.



LIFE'S LAW #4: CONTROL YOUR OWN SELF-TALK

Self-talk is shrink speak for the stuff that goes on in our heads that only we can hear. It is that internal dialogue that we keep with ourselves. Most of us do not really think about how we talk to ourselves—it just happens. But, self-talk is really important to understand if you wish to win in the game of life.

It's not by chance

There are hundreds or even thousands of ways to say almost anything. A simple statement like, “I’m going to the store,” can be said:

I’m history on the way to the store.
Let me take leave of you. I am off to the store.
I don’t want to go ... but I have to go to the store.
How come I have to go to the store?

It isn’t by chance that you state things in a particular way. It is shaped by experience. Through interactions with others and education we learn to communicate. This probably is no secret to you. But, how about how you talk to yourself? This too is shaped by experience and education.

Aaron told me that he hated math. He was a “C” student in math because he hated it so much.

Dr. Phil: How do you know that you hate math?
Aaron: I don’t know, I just do.
Dr. Phil: Do you hate money?
Aaron: No man, I work hard for my money.
Dr. Phil: If you got ripped on your paycheck, would you explain the mistake to your boss and get the right amount?
Aaron: Sure would. That happened to me once. Eighteen dollars. I got it the next pay period.
Dr. Phil: Sounds to me that you like math when it has a dollar sign in front of it.

Aaron: I guess I like that kind of math.
Dr. Phil: But you just said you hated math.
Aaron: Yeah, I guess I do ... but not money math.

Without realizing it, Aaron tells himself over and over that he doesn't like math. But really, he doesn't like some math. I bring this up because Aaron is constantly cutting himself down in his own mind. A little cut, over and over. I would think it is hard for Aaron to get motivated to go home and choose to do math homework when he *knows* that he hates math. But, it might be a little easier for Aaron if he hated some math, but not all math. Telling himself the truth, that math wasn't 100% negative, would help him to deal with math homework.

Self-talk is powerful. It comes from inside you. It comes from your past. It is a CD playing a familiar tune. If the tune is negative, it is hurtful in a negative way. If the tune is positive, it is helpful in a positive way.

Unfortunately, we are hard-wired to remember the negative better than the positive. Our brain lays down stronger negative memories than positive ones. Most people find that they can remember the negative events, the painful ones of their youth, more clearly than their positive memories.

It is common for people to recall in vivid detail the fall from a bike that sent them to the hospital. They can recall the street, the hospital, the words the doctor said. "You'll need a cast on that. That's one of the worst breaks I've ever seen." These same people probably can't tell you much about their fourth grade teacher or classmates.

He who can not communicate his ideas, stands at the same level as he who has no ideas.

Pericles

Greek statesman

This makes perfect sense from the evolutionary understanding of memory. It is more important for a person to learn from a life threatening injury so that type of situation can be avoided. If we don't learn from danger, we limit our chances to be around to carry on the species. We are hard wired to survive.

Our society tends to look at stuff from the negative. The sky is "partly cloudy" versus "partly sunny." We control our traffic intersections with "stop lights" versus "go lights." Negativity is powerful and easier to remember. We tend to talk to ourselves through negative thoughts. "I lost only one pound this week" versus, "I enjoyed a brisk walk four times this

week. Next week I will walk five days out of seven. One pound a week is pretty good. In one hundred and twenty-seven weeks I'll be invisible!"

Self-talk can be implanted

A lot of our self-talk is accidentally implanted. It is given to us by others we feel are powerful in our lives. Moms, dads, teachers, friends, to name a few, give us information about ourselves that we lay down as powerful memories.

"My mother always said I was evil, that's why I dropped out of school." Judith told me.

- Dr. Phil: Evil? That sounds mean.
- Judith: I don't think she was mean, she just worried about me a lot.
- Dr. Phil: What does evil mean to you?
- Judith: I don't know ... I haven't really thought about it much. But when I really screw up I can feel my mom hating me. I can feel it in my chest. I cry and want to hide. I feel a weight on my chest and I just ball like a baby. I'm not evil. I just feel really bad at times.
- Dr. Phil: What is the most evil thing you have done?
- Long pause and tears started to flow:
- Judith: I hurt my mom by having sex when I was a sophomore.
- Dr. Phil: Did your mom find out?
- Judith: No way. I'd never tell her. She would hate me.
- Dr. Phil: How did it hurt your mom if she doesn't know?
- Judith: I don't know, I just feel evil. You know, dirty and bad.
- Dr. Phil: When did this happen, last year or back in high school?
- Judith: Last year. I thought I loved him.

What Judith has shown us is that self-talk is usually experienced as a feeling. It is not a logical reaction to our thoughts. We feel the power of the internal dialogue at our core, and because of this it is more powerful. Most of the time we are not really aware of the self-talk. It is intermixed with the non-emotional thoughts of our mind, but self-talk tends to be emotionally charged. Negative self-talk sneaks into our consciousness and plants a negative emotional *mind mine*. Awkward words, but it is like a land mine in your mind. An emotional booby trap that triggers an emotional reaction. It comes from deep inside and most of the time we don't see it coming.

Concerning interpretation of ones own thoughts

In the following section we open up the discussion concerning interpretation of ones own thoughts. Most new adults enjoy this insight, however, depressed patients tend to be very hard on themselves for not already knowing this information. Leave lots of time in your session for a full discussion. Depressed patients tend to spend a lot of time out of session ruminating on this topic.

Self-talk is more believable

Self-talk is the interpretation of a situation rather than the situation. This interpretation influences our emotions, behaviors and even our physiology. Because self-talk comes from inside, it avoids most of the filters that we learn to use to evaluate our environment. We take the self-talk thought as a fact. A fact with emotional baggage. Sometimes we don't even see the baggage, we combine that with the fact, making it an even bigger fact.

Let me share an example of how dangerous negative self-talk can be. Over a one year period of time I went through three toilet seats at my office. The reason was that Kim would break them. She didn't mean to. It was just the laws of physics. Kim was a very tall woman who weighed over five hundred pounds. What was most remarkable about Kim was not her weight, it was her sense of humor. She was wonderful to be around. She had loads of friends, many since high school. When she came to my office it was because one of her friends was raped and Kim was her support system.

One day, before her friend's session, Kim asked to use the rest room. When she came back she boldly said, "I'm sorry." She handed me a twenty dollar bill. "I cracked the toilet seat. Buy yourself another one on me!"

"Does this happen often?" I asked.

"When money is tight, I can't afford to pee."

This led to a conversation about her weight. She told me that she had a thyroid problem and had just learned to live with her condition. She was very open about the troubles her size caused her. When I asked how she knew she had a thyroid problem she surprised me with her answer. "My mom told me when I was in sixth grade."

I suggested that she get a complete physical and her thyroid checked.

A few months later, Kim called and asked for an appointment. She told me, "I had my thyroid checked. It's fine. I'm as healthy as a horse, but bigger, and I need to deal with my anger."

"Anger?" I asked.

"I think that's the feeling I'm going through. I'm furious with my mother for telling me that I was 'big boned' and that I had 'a thyroid problem.'"

Kim had given herself permission to eat anything she wanted to because she believed her weight wasn't under her control. When she found out that the self-talk wasn't correct, her personal belief system was changed forever.

The *talk* part of self-talk can often come from others, but because it is heard from within, it is given substantially more power by each of us.

Personal responsibility and self-control

The next section brings up the self-responsibility issues of Life's Law #3. You may find that a homework assignment will assist your patient in organizing this concept. I often ask patients to keep a list between sessions of their self-talk that surprised them.

You must control your self-talk to control yourself

Thoughts that emanate from within are often stimulated by some external event. This makes your self-talk very powerful. So, if for example, your parents have called you stupid for twenty years, I suspect that when you are feeling upset or nervous you call yourself "stupid."

I have met hundreds of intelligent people who verbalize statements like the following:

I'm blond today!
I've never been any good with numbers.
I can be such an air head!
My brain just doesn't work today.
I have a terrible memory.
I have shit for brains!
I guess I'm hyperactive or something.

If people are willing to verbalize statements like this about themselves, I can only imagine what they are willing to say to themselves in the privacy of their own thoughts.

I have a sign in my den that states, *Question Authority*. I believe that it is important to question what others tell me. I'm not talking about being rude, I'm talking about being inquisitive. I take this belief personally. I also question what I tell myself. Again, not to be rude, but to be inquisitive. Any thought that is worth having is worth questioning. Now don't take this literally. If you question everything, you won't get anything done. You'll sit on the bed in the morning questioning yourself silly.

It is important for us to be honest with ourselves, to question ourselves, to force ourselves to be personally accountable for our beliefs.

This internal dialogue is the starting point of an educated mind. A mind that seeks knowledge. I challenge you to question authority, yours and others. When questioning others who have power over you, I suggest you question carefully and with appropriate respect. If you come off as a jerk, others with power may enjoy squashing you like a bug. I suggest that you calmly ask, "How come?" if you really want to learn. If you show that you are curious about how someone arrives at a decision, most people are comfortable within themselves to tell you what lead them to their choice. If you attack this very same person, they will defend their decision, good or bad, to the bitter end. This will often be to your detriment.

Questioning yourself can also lead to bitter resistance to change. Ask yourself, "How come?" This may lead you to thoughts that you do not like about yourself. But, without questioning yourself you will never have an opportunity to know your own beliefs.

This next section is complicated the first time through. This CEU course is 2 hours long giving you ample time to play with the following XYZ formula.

Haim Ginott, Ph.D. was an amazing psychologist who devised a procedure for helping us to deal with conflict. He recommended a formula called XYZ. Like in math, x, y, and z are placeholders that need to be filled in with information from somewhere else. It works like this:

When you're dealing with an emotionally charged situation you ask yourself—

When x.
It made me feel y.
I wish I did z.

By filling in the formula you get insight into your own thoughts and belief system. It is important that you keep each part of the formula singular. You need to really think about the most important single answer for x, y, and z.

Let's look at how this works.

Before the XYZ formula:

You're in class and the teacher states, "Class, by next Tuesday you need to read Chapter Seven and the first 39 pages of Chapter Eight. That's 140 pages by next Tuesday."

-The class moans and groans. People start to pack up their stuff and scurry out the door. Your head is racing. Your thoughts start to race:

One hundred and forty pages! I can't believe I have to do 140 pages. Is he nuts? There is no way I can do 140 pages. This is bull. The book is boring. Is this teacher an idiot? One hundred and forty pages! This weekend I have to deal with Robert coming over. One hundred and forty pages and Robert! I won't do it. I don't deserve this. I can't take this any more. Why do I have to deal with all this shit? I can't. I'm never getting this done. If I blow this class I'm screwed. I need this stupid class to graduate. I can't hear how I didn't finish. Mom will drone on forever about how I ruined her life. I can't do this. I don't deserve this! I have to get out of here. My chest is pounding. Screw it all. My head hurts. I'm going to Pat's house. He better have weed. I don't deserve this shit!

After the XYZ formula:

You're in class and the teacher states, "Class, by next Tuesday you need to read Chapter Seven and the first thirty-nine pages of Chapter Eight. That's 140 pages by next Tuesday."

The class moans and groans. People start to pack up their stuff and scurry out the door. Your head is racing. Your thoughts start to race:

One hundred and forty pages! I can't believe I have to do 140 pages. Is he nuts? What's that stupid formula? Oh yeah, XYZ:

When x.
It made me feel y.
I wish I did z.

When I got the one hundred and forty pages!
It made me feel overwhelmed.

I wish I could control my overwhelmed, self-talk bullshit, so I can figure out a way to deal with this.

I can do this, It can't be impossible. Seven days until the next class. Seven goes into 140? I kind of hate math, ... 20 times. Twenty pages a day. I can do 20 pages, even if this book is as boring as watching paint dry.

By using the formula and keeping the problem singular you are able to prevent it from getting out of hand. The hardest part is respecting that you are in control of your own self-talk.

By recognizing—then controlling your own self-talk—you become a powerful force.

Jay tried the XYZ formula but found that it didn't work for him:

Jay: I did the XYZ with the problem with my boss but it didn't work for me.

Dr. Phil: Did you stay focused on one problem at a time?

Jay: I think so.

Dr. Phil: Did you truly question your own thoughts?

Jay: I guess.

Dr. Phil: Teach me what you did.

Jay: I was really pissed with my boss for showing off his power. I really hate it when he treats me like I'm an idiot. Like his slave.

Dr. Phil: Makes sense, what did you do?

Jay: I wanted to quit. I walked off to the bathroom to cool down. I played the XYZ game and it didn't work for me. I didn't figure out the problem.

Dr. Phil: Play it out loud for me. What was x?

Jay: I calmed my thoughts down and said to myself, when Barry treats me like his slave (x). It makes me feel like quitting (y). I wish I could quit (z). But that's the problem. I can't quit 'till the end of the semester. I need the job.

Dr. Phil: I'm not sure if you really answered the y part honestly.

Jay: Sure I did, I wanted to quit.

Dr. Phil: Quit? Or get treated with more respect?

Jay: Barry is a bastard. I really want to come back in five years and show him that I have made it—but he is still the manager of a rat hole restaurant.

Dr. Phil: Sounds like you want to be done with this part of your life. You're tired of being a poor college student who has to flip burgers.

Jay: Kind of. I kind of like my job. I wouldn't want to do it for a real job. You know, I can do better.

Dr. Phil: Is it a fake job?

Jay: Not fake, just what I have to do to get through school.

Dr. Phil: Kind of like a stepping-stone to your next...

Jay: Yeah. I don't like the way Barry treats the college students. He is a real prick. Power hungry.

Dogma does not mean the absence of thought, but the end of thought.

Chesterton

Dr. Phil: Sounds like your XYZ formula has changed.

Jay: When Barry treats me like his slave (x). It makes me feel like he enjoys bossing me around (y). I wish I could stay focused on why I need this job (z). It is my stepping-stone. I won't be working for Barry forever and I will be moving on.

Dr. Phil: You sound more powerful.

Jay: When I'm rich, maybe I'll buy the restaurant just to boss Barry around. (With a big smile) Is it mean to have such thoughts?

Dr. Phil: When you feel safer—I suspect you won't need to step on others to feel good about yourself.

It takes practice during calm times to think about how to question your own thoughts. Enjoy questioning yourself. It is a form of mental chess that only gets better and clearer with experience. To run your life you need to control your own self-talk.

People can learn and grow

It is important to leave the patient with the understanding that they personally can learn and grow. I advise patients to take notes between sessions of their observations concerning life laws. This gives the patient much more than my time with them.

Posttest

When you're ready, take the posttest to obtain your CEU certificate. Your test consists of 5 multiple choice or true/false questions per Continuing Education Unit (3 CEU course = 15 questions).

