

Ep #34: Shifting Negative Self-Talk



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sarah Michelle

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hey friends, so this episode was not on my original agenda but I'm throwing it in here because I have this feeling in my heart that some of you really need to hear this today.

The end of August was a big graduation season again and we have so many of you out there either starting to prepare for boards or getting super close to actually taking your exam. Which is wonderful because that means here soon all that hard work is going to pay off and you all are going to be celebrated in the student group as real deal nurse practitioners when you pass.

But to get to the point of passing there's a lot of mental work that needs to be done. And I'm not talking about content knowledge, I'm talking all about the hardest but also the most important part of boards, your anxiety management skills. That is mental work that has to be done ahead of time to make sure you are in the right mental space to take and pass your board exam.

A huge piece of anxiety management simply revolves around how you're talking to yourself. I know that sounds silly, but I have seen this play out time and time again. You can do every review course out there and still fail your exam. And I know plenty of students who fall into this category. If you are degrading yourself with tons of negative thoughts and self-talk during your board prep, because that's going to happen during your exam as well.

And so I thought I would do something a little bit different than I've ever done, and I really want to walk through some statements I have seen firsthand in our student community just in the last month. I would love to walk you through the negative self-talk I have been seeing and give you a clear and concise message to replace that negative self-talk with.

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Of course, I'm not going to call anyone out by name or anything like that, so don't worry if one of these comments came from you. In fact, if you hear one of our comments from our group, that is all the more reason to listen closely so you can manage your mind ahead of your exam day and put yourself in your very best position to pass this exam.

At the end of the day that's really what we're all working towards in that student group, putting each of you in your best spot to tackle this exam and become real deal nurse practitioners. We cannot possibly do that if we are beating ourselves up over and over again all along the way. And it's time to really gain some awareness of thoughts you've been telling yourself that maybe you didn't even notice. Because they have been ingrained in you for so long, they have just become a part of you at this point. And that's okay.

The awareness alone is huge because that is really the first step to being able to squash whatever that thought is and replace it with something a little bit kinder to yourself. Then you can take that replacement thought into your exam day with you when you're feeling anxious or overwhelmed and wanting to fall into those old thought loops again.

So, the first thought we're going to tackle is the quote, "I'm a shitty test taker." This is actually the quote that really made me want to sit down and give you guys this episode.

There are a couple of things here that I want to address. First of which is that if you've graduated from nurse practitioner school, you are not a shitty test taker. You have taken hundreds of exams in your life and you have performed well enough to graduate.

And so our fist battle here is realizing this is simply an opinion and in no way a fact. And you're going to see this theme in each of these thoughts we're going to discuss in this episode. They're all opinions, not hard facts like we treat them to be.

Second, I want you to think about what is going to happen when you get to a tough question on your exam and all of the sudden you find yourself

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saying that mantra in your head of, “I’m a shitty test taker.” Because when you berate yourself with that as you prepare, then it’s inevitably going to pop up when you’re stressed when you’re taking your exam too.

And so for this thought I think an easy way to shift and replace it is to tell yourself, “I know how well I have prepared for this moment, I can do this.” And I think this is a good replacement because it’s so true. It’s a fact.

You know the time and the work and the dedication that you put into nursing school, nurse practitioner school, and now your board preparation process. You have all the content knowledge that you need because you have been preparing for this moment for literally years. You’re not a crappy test taker because otherwise you wouldn’t have made it here in the first place.

You have figured out something that works and something that led you to this success. Then when you get one of those super tough exam questions you’re not going to let it derail you for your entire exam. You’re not going to get stuck and trapped in this thought because you are going to be able to tell yourself that you are prepared, and one question does not make or break you becoming a real deal nurse practitioner.

The next thought is one that I see pop up pretty frequently, which is, “I’m never going to feel ready to test.” Which usually means that the students doesn’t feel like they know enough. For many of you, you want to know it all. And while I very much appreciate that valiant effort, I am here to tell you that none of us will ever know it all. It is absolutely impossible.

Number one, because there is such a vast amount of medical knowledge out there. But number two, that medical knowledge evolves and shifts every day as we learn more about the world and the human body. It doesn’t matter if you’re a nurse practitioner, or a physician, or a physician’s associate, or whatever else, none of us know it all and we are all doing the best we can every single day in practice.

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And here's the other thing, your exam doesn't expect you to know it all either. I know when you're doing board prep you feel like it does, but it doesn't because you're not expected to get 100% on the exam, right? No, you're not. And so a great way to turn around, "I'm never going to feel ready to test," is to say to yourself, "I'm not expected to know it all, I only have to correctly answer about 70% of the exam to pass and do this."

That way when you come to those tougher questions, you're not flustered. You're not getting trapped in this thought loop of, "Oh my gosh, I missed one question, now I'm going to fail," and all this stuff because that is not the case. It was only one question you didn't know and it does not determine your success if you can keep that anxiety and that mindset in check.

Another thought I've seen in our group in this last month is, "This exam is impossible." And I'll be the first to tell you, if you walk into your exam saying, "This exam is impossible," then it's going to be. It's going to make you feel flustered and anxious, and it's going to wreak havoc on your brain.

We want as much control over our brains and our emotions as humanly possible on exam day, period. The only thing that we have true control over on our exam day is how we prepare. Being kind to ourselves and working on our exam day mindsets is indeed part of excellent board preparation.

And so with this one, you could really replace it with any of the ones we previously mentioned. But we could also add in a phrase like I'm going to do the best I can, or I am ready for this exam. Or another one, this exam is manageable when I control my anxiety. Whatever feels most aligned with you is what I want you to be telling yourself.

And the more you tell yourself these positive thoughts, the more they are going to sink in, which is why I highly encourage you to try to adopt them while you're studying instead of the two or three days before you test. At that point, it can be tough to convince yourself and your brain that this positive thought is reality.

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But if you've been telling yourself for six to eight weeks, "I'm ready for this exam," then when your day comes, you're going to be ready. And I also want to take some time to talk about my favorite of all of our possible affirmations. And this is one that you can use to replace any and all of these negative thoughts you may have been having.

And that affirmation is, and it will likely always be my favorite and it is, "You will pass." It is my favorite thing in the world. When students come to me and they tell me, "Sarah, as soon as I got into my exam, the first thing I wrote down on my scrap sheet was you will pass and I came back to it whenever I needed it."

Because what that says to me is that the student had faith in themselves. That student knew deep down they could do this if they kept themselves and their anxiety in check. You will pass is truly like all of our affirmations in one. You will pass says you're not expected to know it all. You will pass says I'm going to do the best I can. And you will pass definitely says that you are likely ready to take this exam.

It can be such a powerful point to come back to. And it was the ultimate little tool that helped me during even my own exam. I sat down at the computer, and it was the very first thing I did. I wrote down, you will pass in all capital letters at the top of my scrap sheet. At the end of the day, I always had the knowledge but I didn't always have the confidence. And that affirmation of you will pass gave me that confidence boost that I needed along the way.

And so to close out this episode, I want to affirm and validate for you that you do have the necessary knowledge base, and you absolutely have what it takes to pass this exam. You truly, genuinely do. And so stop beating yourself up the entire way through your board preparation process.

You do not have to be so hard on yourself. Your mind deserves that kindness and it will thank you for profusely when your exam day comes and you're not pulling your hair out. You will be able to walk into your exam with

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a few normal nerves, that's okay. But with the belief and the faith that you have what it takes to be successful and become a nurse practitioner.

We are beat up enough by others out in the world, and so we really need to grant ourselves the grace to be kind to our own brains and our own bodies, especially before such a big life event where you are going to be making a massive career change and shift.

And I also want to be super duper clear that if you've been telling yourself some of these negative thoughts that we've talked about in this episode, you haven't been doing it wrong. I did the same thing before my board exam. But the difference is, you now have the awareness that you need to overcome those thoughts.

Every time that you catch yourself slip up a little bit, and it's going to happen, be gentle and just reframe it. You have all the replacements you need. And it will seriously make a world of difference, not only on your exam day, but during your studying process as well. And that's it for this week, guys.

As an extra bonus friends, if you're looking for support no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities, we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit stressfreenp.com. See you next week.