

Changing your critical self-talk

This exercise should be done over several weeks, and will eventually form the blueprint for changing how you relate to yourself long-term. Some people find it useful to work on their inner critic by writing in a journal. Others are more comfortable doing it via internal dialogues. If you are someone who likes to write things down and revisit them later, journaling can be an excellent tool for transformation. If you are someone who never manages to be consistent with a journal, then do whatever works for you. You can speak aloud to yourself, or think silently.

1) The first step towards changing the way to treat yourself is to **notice when you are being self-critical**. It may be that – like many of us - your self-critical voice is so common for you that you don't even notice when it is present. Whenever you're feeling bad about something, think about what you've just said to yourself. Try to be as accurate as possible, noting your inner speech verbatim. What words do you actually use when you're self-critical? Are there key phrases that come up over and over again? What is the tone of your voice – harsh, cold, angry? Does the voice remind you of any one in your past who was critical of you? **You want to be able to get to know the inner self-critic very well**, and to become aware of when your inner judge is active. For instance, if you've just eaten half a box of Oreo's, does your inner voice say something like “you're so disgusting,” “you make me sick,” and so on? Really try to get a clear sense of how you talk to yourself.

2) **Make an active effort to soften the self-critical voice, but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment** (i.e., don't say “you're such a bitch” to your inner critic!). Say something like “I know you're worried about me and feel unsafe, but you are causing me unnecessary pain. Could you let my inner compassionate self say a few words now?”

3) **Reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a friendly, positive way**. If you're having trouble thinking of what words to use, you might want to imagine what a very compassionate friend would say to you in this situation. It might help to use a term of endearment that strengthens expressed feelings of warmth and care (but only if it feels natural) For instance, you can say something like “Darling, I know you ate that bag of cookies because you're feeling really sad right now and you thought it would cheer you up. But you feel even worse and are not feeling good in your body. I want you to be happy, so why don't you take a long walk so you feel better?” While engaging in this supportive self-talk, you might want to try gently stroking your arm, or holding your face tenderly in your hands. Physical gestures of warmth can tap into the caregiving system even if you're having trouble calling up emotions of kindness at first, releasing oxytocin that will help change your bio-chemistry. The important thing is that you start acting kindly, and feelings of true warmth and caring will eventually follow.

Daily reflection: Noticing compassion

Before you go to bed in the evening, take a few minutes to complete this form to increase awareness of how you treated yourself today when you were suffering.

Please read each statement carefully before answering. For each day, rate how often you behaved in the stated manner over the previous 24 hours:

**Not at
all
1**

2

3

4

**Very
often
5**

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
1. When things went badly for me today, I saw the difficulties as a part of life that everyone experiences.							
2. I tried to be loving towards myself when I was feeling emotional pain.							
3. When I was feeling down or upset today, I reminded myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.							
4. When things were difficult today, I was tough on myself.							
5. I was intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.							
6. I was caring and tender toward myself today.							
7. I saw my failings as part of the human condition.							
8. When I was suffering, I was kind to myself.							
9. I was a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I suffered today.							
10. When I felt painful things today, I tried to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.							
11. I was disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.							
12. I was intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.							

Your Experience of Warm and Supportive Relationships

Please use this form so that we can get a better understanding of some of the warm and supportive relationships you may have had in the past and currently.

1. Who, if anyone, in your family (parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.), would you say treated you with warmth, kindness, or affection as you were growing up? How would you describe those people to someone who had never met them? How did they show you they cared about you?

2. As you grew up, did you ever have any excellent teachers, mentors, or coaches who really cared about you and wanted you to do well? If so, please write some about who those people were and the way they treated you.

3. Did you ever have friends or other people such as neighbors or acquaintances that were warm, caring, or supportive to you? If so, please describe those relationships.

4. Have you had pets or other animals that you loved and that you felt cared for you in return? What did it feel like to be cared for by that animal?

5. Did you have religious or spiritual experiences with a warm or loving God or other spiritual experience where you felt loved, connected, or part of something larger than yourself? If so, describe these experiences.

6. Did you ever have periods of life or situations where you felt you felt like they fit in or were valued, for example, as a summer camp, on particular vacations, at church, in a social group, or during particular activities (e.g., sports)? If so, please describe those experiences and how it felt to be a part of that experience.

7. Were there any other ways that you received feelings of warmth, comfort, love, or safety when you needed them?

8. Finally, how does it feel when you spend time thinking about and reflecting on these experiences you may have had or not had in the past? As you reflect on these experiences, what do you wish might have been different for you if anything?

