



SELF-LOVE

Toolkit

Questionnaire: How Strong Is Your Inner Critic

Answer yes or no to the following questions to determine how strong your inner critic is.

- Do you spend a lot of time worrying that you've made a mistake or done things wrong or not good enough?
- Do you feel that you should be perfect and never make mistakes?
- Do you have impossibly high standards by which you judge yourself?
- Do you have an incessant "voice" in your head telling you how you're doing things wrong and how you should be doing better?
- Do you spend a lot of time critiquing your appearance, abilities, performance or past?
- Does your self-worth depend on whether you've met your own or other people's standards?
- Do you constantly compare yourself to others to see if you measure up?
- Are you envious of other people's successes and achievements?

The more you've answered yes to, the stronger your inner critic.

Exercise: Identifying & Silencing Your Inner Critic

It doesn't matter what you've accomplished, how successful or how beautiful you are, or how much you've tried to build your self-confidence and self-esteem - if you have a mean, nasty, inner critic who criticizes you constantly or who discounts your achievements at every turn, your self-esteem will always be low.

Your inner critic has many roles. It's that negative inner voice that:

- Blames you for things that go wrong, regardless of whether it's your fault or not.
- Calls you names such as "stupid", "ugly" and "weak" and makes you believe that these names are true.

- Compares you to others - especially to their achievements and abilities and finds you wanting.
- Sets impossible standards of perfection.
- Demands that you be the best at everything and if you're not, then treating you like you're nothing.
- Beats you up for even the smallest mistakes.
- Keeps track of your failures and shortcomings, but never reminds you of your many accomplishments and strengths.
- Exaggerates your weaknesses by using words like "always" and "never." You always mess up at work. You never finish what you start.

Now most of us experience the inner critic as the "voice" in our head. And most of the time, we are completely unaware that it's even there. We usually only "hear" our inner critic loud and clear when we're about to try something new, when we make a mistake or when we're in a stressful situation.

When you make a mistake, you might hear your inner critic say something like *"What an idiot!"* or *"There you go again, messing up as always. Can't you get anything right?"*

Before giving a presentation at work, you might hear *"You should have prepared more. You're going to make a fool of yourself in front of all these people."*

Have you ever experienced that?

The first step is to start to become aware of your inner critic and what it's saying to you. The tricky part is that even when you do become aware of your inner critic, it seems like a natural and familiar part of you and its vicious attacks seem reasonable and justified.

But with every negative judgement, your inner critic weakens you and destroys any positive feelings you have about yourself. Your inner critic often appears as your own inner voice and you may feel that it's simply your own notions about what's right and wrong or what things mean.

But make no mistake about it. You were not born with an inner critic. It was programmed into you by your parents or caregivers in your early childhood and you've now carried this over into your adult life.

Exercise: Learn To Talk Back To Your Inner Critic

One of the most powerful ways to silence your inner critic is to talk back to it - literally.

You may feel uncomfortable or even downright silly when talking back to your inner critic, but just as you shouldn't let a bully or a tyrant relentlessly criticise you or put you down, you cannot allow your inner critic to wear away at your self-esteem.

Since your inner critic is formed by your caregiver's messages to you, it may feel as if you are talking back to your parents. That can be scary and intimidating, but the more you practice it, the stronger your true self will become and the weaker this mean, inner critic will become.

The list of phrases below are particularly effective in silencing your inner critic.

Choose whichever ones feel good to you, and that empower you.

- Thank you for sharing but I choose to believe (insert the new belief you want to develop).
- Shut up!
- Shut the fuck up! (For times when you want to feel more forceful)
- Get off my back!
- Get lost!
- This is the utter rubbish!
- That's a lie!
- These are the same lies my mother/father told me and I will no longer stand for it
- I don't believe you!
- No more put-downs!
- Go to hell!

Be as angry as you want to be and use profanity if you feel the need to. The stronger the counter-attack on your inner critic, the faster it will recede and the weaker it will become.

Exercise: The Mirror Technique

Here's a simple, fun exercise to help overcome your inner-critic's need for you to be perfect. Write the phrase "I am enough" and stick this to a mirror you use regularly. Over time, looking at this phrase repeatedly will condition your mind to believe that you are enough...enough to be loved and accepted just the way you are.

When your critical inner voice comes up, after silencing it, think about what you would say to your best friend if they had those critical thoughts about themselves. Now say that to yourself out loud and allow it to sink in. Give yourself grace, knowing that you're doing the best you can in this moment.

Keep doing this until this warm, nurturing voice is stronger than your inner critic.

Don't Allow Other People To Demand Perfection From You Either

It's highly likely that you're attracted to a perfectionistic partner as well. If you are with someone who is constantly complaining that you don't do things or that you never do enough, realize that it's that person who has the problem.

This person is never going to be pleased no matter what you do.

Get In Touch With Your Shadow Side

Another thing that will help clients to break free from the habit of always trying to be good and perfect is to own their dark side or shadow personality. Now this has nothing to do with rejecting their religious beliefs

or doing things that are morally or ethically wrong. Instead, it's about the client acknowledging that they have inherent good and bad in them.

Exercise: Owning Your Shadow

A powerful antidote to breaking out of the mold and trying to be good and perfect is to own your dark side or your shadow personality.

Don't worry, this doesn't mean doing anything bad, morally wrong or evil. It simply means that you're acknowledging that, as a human, you have both good and bad qualities, both light and dark.

1. List all the qualities that you dislike in others.
2. Go back through your list and underline or circle any qualities that you really despise.

The items you circled or underlined are your own shadow personality. What this means is that if you circled arrogance as one of the qualities that you just cannot tolerate, then it might be useful for you to examine where in your life, you may be displaying arrogance.

Not all criticisms of others are projections of undesirable traits that you possess but whenever your response to another person or trait involves excessive emotions or overreaction, you can be certain that something unconscious has been activated.

It's normal to get annoyed or upset when someone demonstrates a negative personality trait such as arrogance or greed. But in a true shadow projection, your reaction will far exceed the demonstration of the fault.

Exercise: Allow Yourself To Be Imperfect

Pay close attention to how often you monitor and censor yourself and how intently you focus on being "good" and "perfect."

- Try loosening the reins a little bit.
- If you're a workaholic, sneak out of work early or take a day off from work and go and do something fun.
- If you're a health fanatic, allow yourself one indulgence a week. Maybe buy some chocolate you've been longing for or eat something you've been craving that's off your diet plan.
- If you constantly monitor what you spend, ease up a bit once in a while and treat yourself to something amazing.

And most importantly, if you're always cheerful and sweet on the outside, even when you're not feeling that way on the inside, start letting people know how you really feel.

You don't have to be perfect in order to be worthy of love. You don't have to be perfect in order to be an amazing, strong and successful person.

So, stop trying to be perfect (which is an impossible goal that is doomed to fail) and start embracing and accepting yourself, your flaws as well as your positive attributes. When you make a mistake, forgive yourself, learn from it and move on, instead of obsessing about it.

Equally important, don't allow anyone else to constantly dwell on your mistakes or demand perfection from you either.