



# It's Not You and It's Not True: Taming your inner critic

## What is an inner critic?

Your inner critic is that little nagging voice you hear that makes critical comments about your appearance, makes you doubt your abilities, encourages you to engage in unhealthy coping mechanisms and then berates you for your 'bad habits'.

It's every harsh thought you have about yourself.

You can think of it as the little devil that sits on your shoulder...

## Where does the inner critic come from?

The important thing to know is that your inner critic **is not you and it is not true!**

The inner critic usually begins to develop in our early childhood years. It starts out as the critical words of teachers, the scathing taunts of a bully, societal views at large (i.e., "children should be obedient and quiet", "a woman should do all the work at home", "boys don't cry"), harsh remarks a parent makes to you or...GET THIS...the critical remarks a parent makes about themselves.

Yes, we can even develop our inner critic by internalising the damaging narratives of our caregivers. These criticisms and negative opinions heard throughout our younger years, builds and snowballs overtime. Eventually, we internalise these narratives, and the critical voice of others morphs to sound exactly like your own.

## What does the inner critic do?

This inner critic chips away at our confidence, our self-esteem, and our self-worth. The inner critic can be very sneaky. It may sometimes present to you as though it is trying to help. Perhaps encouraging you into unhealthy behaviours, habits and coping mechanisms and then turning right back around on you and berating you for the very behaviours it just encouraged.

Here's an example:

You've had a rough day. You're thinking to yourself "Man today was awful, I was so bad in that meeting, everyone there must think I'm a total idiot" (You can see the inner critic at work clearly here, filling you with self-

doubt about your performance).

Now, here is where the Inner Critic changes tact. It gets sneaky, manipulative...even sounding sweet and supportive. Now you're thinking this: "It's been tough, I deserve a wine...Go on. I'll just have one glass."

So, you open a bottle and pour a glass...

Now the inner critic starts up again "Go on, have another glass. And then another..."

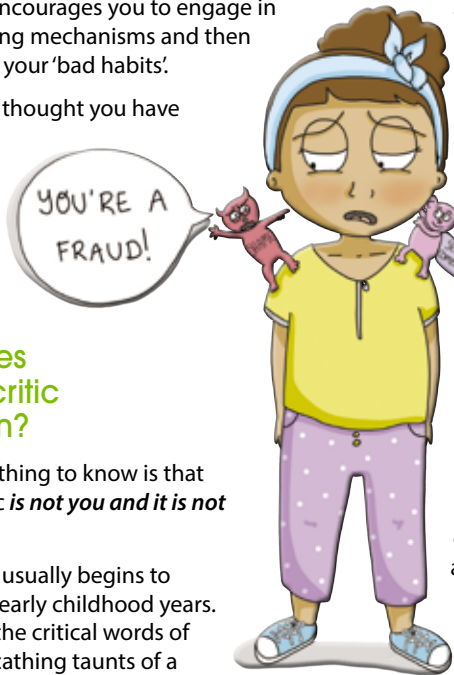
So, you do.

And now what does the inner critic do? It turns on you:

"I'm a loser! I have ZERO self-restraint. I'm going to become an alcoholic just like my mother. I should be ashamed of myself. I can't cope with anything."

Now you're feeling even worse than you were to begin with. Your inner critic baited you into your unhelpful coping mechanism and then used it as an opportunity to compound your self-criticism and shame.

It does much the same thing when it encourages you to procrastinate or skip out on commitments - then turns on you!



## How will I spot my inner critic?

You may first begin to notice your inner critic at work by paying attention to your emotions. When you notice a feeling of shame, anxiety, insecurity etc. begin to pay attention to your thoughts.

## What are you thinking in this moment?

You may just notice an unhelpful, critical internal narrative, full of unhelpful thinking styles.

## What can I do about my inner critic?

Change the "I" statements to "you" statements

Here is a confronting, but powerful place to start:

1. Write out your inner critic thoughts.
2. Change them from "I" statements to "you" statements.

Here are some examples:

- If you have the thought "Nobody likes me" you turn this '**I statement**' into a '**you statement**': "Nobody likes you".
- The '**I statement**': "I can't cope with stress" becomes the '**you statement**': "You can't cope with stress".
- The '**I statement**': "I'm not good enough" becomes the '**you statement**': "You are not good enough".

## HOW TO SPOT YOUR INNER CRITIC

NOTICE TIMES YOU ARE BEING HARD ON YOURSELF

← @journey-to-wellness

← CHECK IN WITH YOUR THOUGHTS WHEN YOU FEEL INSECURE

← OBSERVE MOMENTS YOU SPEAK TO YOURSELF USING THE HARSH COMMENTS YOU HEARD FROM BULLIES OR PARENTS

→ NOTICE TIMES A SELF-CRITICISM IS ON REPEAT

→ MEDITATE OR PRACTICE MINDFULNESS TO NON-JUDGEMENTALLY OBSERVE YOUR THOUGHTS

Boy! That's confronting, isn't it? And that's the whole point... Changing your inner critic thoughts into 'you statements' helps you to see it as a **foreign** and **alien** point of view. It creates distance between YOU and the thought and helps you to see how harsh it really is.

You would NEVER speak to a friend or loved one this way... and yet you tolerate it from yourself. You speak to yourself like this!

When it is framed in our mind as an internal 'I statement' it can so often either go unnoticed as internal chatter or we don't see as harshly. When we flip it to a 'you statement' you begin to truly see how you speak to yourself, and to realise it's time to let this go. This internal critic chatter is no longer serving you.

### Challenge questions

It is a powerful step on its own just learning to spot your inner critic and to know that **it is not you and it is not true**.

But we want to do more. We want to create change that impacts on, and boosts, your self-worth. Let's go a little further. Let's challenge and push back against that unhelpful narrative.

When you notice an inner critic thought, use these questions to help you challenge it:

- Is this thought really true?
- Where has this thought possibly come from?
- Where have I heard this before?
- Who has said this to me in my past or, who has spoken about themselves this way in front of me?
- What is some evidence that this is NOT true?
- If my friend had this thought, what would I say to them?
- What is another way to view this?
- Am I only paying attention to the negative?

### Replacement thoughts

Now that you have spotted your inner critic and asked yourself some challenge questions, you can come up with a more balanced, compassionate, and realistic thought to put in place of the inner critic thought.

When you challenge your thoughts and come up with 'replacements' there are some key things to remember:

1. Be realistic. Don't change the thought "I am useless" to "I am amazing at everything I do". It probably isn't true, and you simply won't believe it!
2. Be compassionate. If you are harsh and critical of yourself, try bringing in the same compassion that you would show to others. e.g., "I am terrible at sticking to commitments" becomes "I've had a lot on my plate lately, I'm going to slow down and cut back on things that are not absolutely necessary right now".
3. Be grateful. If you are really struggling with a thought and you just can't seem to find a way to challenge it, bring in a little gratitude. e.g. The thought "I am so unhappy with my weight, I hate my thighs and stomach" becomes "I am grateful to my legs for carrying me around each day and I am thankful to my stomach for digesting my food and helping me take in nutrients".

Here's another example to help you out:



#### Inner critic thought:

*I'm so useless*

#### New thought:

*There are so many things I am good at. I am a great baker, friend, listener and I'm good at project management. I'm working on the things that I'm not so good at.*

See how this new thought takes the global/black and white thinking style of the inner critic and breaks it down, using realism and compassion while still acknowledging a weak point. It's believable!

### What's the next step?

#### Practice!

Practice, practice, practice.

Get used to spotting your inner critic and challenging it.

You may also like to take a mindful approach when you notice your inner critic at work. Simply acknowledging its presence without judgement and allowing the thought to pass without buying into it and 'getting lost down the rabbit hole'.

Remember, you may have spent years of 'practice' listening to your inner critic and following its advice. So go easy on yourself if it takes a bit of repetition and elbow grease to become a more self-compassionate you!

If you'd like to dive deeper you can check out my courses on my website, [www.journeytowellness.online](http://www.journeytowellness.online), which cover anxiety, mindfulness and journaling with a self-worth course soon to be released. You'll also find resources and e-books. You can also grab my bestselling book Note to Self in all good bookstores.



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