

Exercise: Changing Inner Critical Self-Talk

(adapted from Dr. Kristin Neff)

This exercise should be done over the course of 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 (like me) who never manages to be consistent with a journal, then do whatever works for you!

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 dialogue. 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, disappointed, angry? You want to be able to get to know the inner self-critic very well in order to become aware of when your inner judge is active. For instance, if you've just eaten half a box of chocolates, does your inner voice say something like “you're so disgusting,” “you ruined the day,” 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 unsettled, but you are causing me unnecessary shame and pain. Could you let my inner compassionate self say a few words?”
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. For instance, you can say something like: “__-your name-__, 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 now and are not feeling comfortable in your own body. I want you to be happy, so why don't you take a long walk to help you feel better?” The important thing is that you start speaking kindly to yourself so that feelings of true warmth and care eventually follow.

References

- Neff, K. (2019). *Self-compassion: Guided meditations and exercises*. [Website]. See resource list.
Neff, K., & Germer, C. (2018). *The mindful self-compassion workbook*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.