



TURN SELF-CRITICISM INTO

SELF-COMPASSION

That critical inner voice is unkind – and often, it's trying to prevent you from experiencing unpleasant surprises or harm. Unfortunately, however, its method of "protecting" you (sometimes by repeating cruel words said to you in the past) is very painful. This worksheet will introduce a new perspective to take on self-criticism, and help you respond to that voice with self-compassion.



**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy.
It works best with guidance from a professional.*

1 GET TO KNOW YOUR CRITIC

The first step is recognizing when the (self) critic is talking. Think about the self-critical thoughts you have had in the past and write some of them down – especially if they come up for you a lot.



TONE:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ☐ Anxious | ☐ Sarcastic |
| ☐ Angry | ☐ Cruel |
| ☐ Disappointed | ☐ Sneering |
| ☐ Cold | ☐ _____ |



THEMES:

- ☐ Perfectionism (phrases like, "I did that all wrong," "It's not good enough")
- ☐ Doubting yourself ("I'm just not good at X," "I can't handle this")
- ☐ Labeling yourself ("I'm dumb/stupid/unattractive/terrible/a disappointment")
- ☐ Downplaying the positive ("Anyone could have done that, I'm not special")
- ☐ Morality or shame ("I'm bad/evil/worthless/shameful/selfish/needy")
- ☐ Defectiveness ("I'm broken," "There's something wrong with me")
- ☐ Self-blame and responsibility ("It's all my fault," "I should have known")



Take a look at the thoughts you wrote down.

- What kind of emotional tone do they have? _____
- Are there any repeated topics or themes? _____
- Does your critic repeat unkind words that people have said to you in the past? _____

2 EXPLORE THE WARNING

Highly self-critical thoughts are often not accurate, helpful, or true. But let's listen to them for just a moment. What is most important to your critic? What is it trying to tell you is at risk? Here are a couple of examples:

HOW THE CRITIC'S MESSAGE COMES OUT (self-critical thoughts):	WHAT'S IMPORTANT: What is important to your critic?	WHAT'S AT RISK: What is your critic trying to protect you from?
"I probably bombed this test." "I'm such a failure." "I'll never succeed in college."		
"The argument we had was all my fault." "I just shouldn't have spoken up, it was selfish." "I should have known better."		
"There must be something wrong with me for feeling this way." "I'm just broken inside."		



What is your critic trying to tell you is important?
Or, what is it telling you is at risk?
Try your best to listen for the meaning behind the cruel words.

3 RESPOND TO YOUR CRITIC WITH COMPASSION

Try to treat your critic with patience and compassion. Acknowledge its fears but push back against its cruel words. Talk to your critic the way you would a loved one, or the way you hope a loved one would talk to you:



"Hey! I can hear that you're really worried and you're trying to protect me. But the words you're using are not kind to me, let's try that again."



"Okay. I'm really worried about our performance. College is so important to us. I don't want us to fail a class, then the semester, then the year..."



"I hear you. That test felt really bad. It's okay to be worried about it, but no more name-calling. Let's take a walk to calm down, then set up a meeting with the TA and see how we can improve."

It might seem a little silly to talk to yourself like this. But we encourage you to give it a try. Self-compassion is a great way to validate your own feelings, but also to think in ways that are more helpful and true – and as a result, get to more effective action (like coping, getting support, or solving problems).

What could you say back to your own self-critic with compassion?

