

Be a Friend to Yourself

Exercises for changing your relationship with your inner critic

The inner critic has been around a long time. Don't expect to do these exercises once and see a massive shift. This is a way of relating to that voice that will cause change over time. Little by little.

The goal is not to silence the critic — it's to stop letting it run the show.

Exercise 1

Inner Critic Dialogue

This three-step exercise helps you engage with your inner critic in a healthier, more productive way — with compassionate distance rather than either fighting it or giving in to it.

STEP 1: Meet Your Critic

Name your critic. Is it a cartoon character, a fictional villain, someone from your past, or something else entirely? Giving it a name creates useful distance.

My critic's name:

Brief description (what do they look like, sound like, feel like?):

Set the scene: Where would you sit down with this critic for a conversation? Somewhere with enough distance to maintain perspective.

The setting:

Write a brief opening — welcoming them to the conversation:

(e.g., "Hello, [name]. I see you're here again. I'm willing to listen to what you have to say.")

STEP 2: Listen with Compassionate Distance

Record what your critic typically says. Don't soften it — let the full force of their usual message come through.

What my critic says:

For each critical statement, ask: what is this voice afraid might happen? What fear is underneath it?

The fear underneath:

What pattern or theme do you notice in your critic's objections?

STEP 3: Respond Wisely

Is there a kernel of truth in what your critic is saying? Not the harsh judgment, but a small piece worth considering?

The kernel of truth (if any):

Now write a reply to your critic that:

- Acknowledges without fully consenting to their characterization
- Speaks with compassion and self-understanding
- Offers practical guidance or a fresh outlook

My wise response:

Close the conversation with a compassionate but firm statement — one that creates a boundary while honouring the critic's protective intentions.

(e.g., "I will consider what you've said. However, I will decide what I do next. I'm responsible here, not my fear.")

My closing statement:

REFLECTION

After the dialogue, pause and notice:

- How do you feel now compared to when you started?

- What was the biggest challenge of this conversation?

- Did you experience any shift in perspective or insight?

Exercise 2

Reframe with Kindness

Practice transforming harsh self-criticism into supportive self-talk. A more compassionate tone can still be realistic and motivating — and it is much easier to respond to the inner voice when we have already decided what we want to say instead.

1. Identify one critical phrase from Exercise 1 — or recall a specific self-critical thought from recent days.

The critical phrase:

2. Ask: if a close friend said these exact words about themselves, how would I respond to them?

What I would say to my friend:

3. Now rewrite the original statement in a supportive, constructive voice — realistic, not falsely positive.
(e.g., "I made a mistake, but it's something I can learn from. I'm capable of doing better next time.")

My reframe:

4. Read the new statement out loud. Notice how it feels different from the original.

What I notice:

Tip: This exercise works best done repeatedly over time, not just once. Each time you catch a self-critical thought and reframe it, you are building a new habit of mind.

For worksheets and additional exercises, visit oneyoufeed.net/resources