



## 10 things to know about your Inner Critic, to help you break free from its grip, move forward and thrive in life.

1. **How do you recognise it?** - The inner critic is that voice in your head that makes you feel small, bad, wrong or good enough. It's the voice that tells you to ignore your real needs, and scoffs at your desires. It's full of 'I shoulds', and makes judgments about you being worthy or unworthy, or loveable based only on certain conditions. Everyone's inner critic has a particular tone or feeling.

*You're too loud / quiet / fat / strong / weak... You're too emotional... too sensitive... too much... You're not smart enough... not kind enough... You should be more patient... You're a pushover... You're a bad mother.... A bad partner... You're an idiot for saying that... Why do you always mess up... You're not as talented or experienced as them... I don't belong with these people, they're better than me... Don't make a show of yourself... People will think I'm mad... I'm so boring... You're too needy... You're so lazy... I should really have my life sorted by now... I should stop complaining... You should know better by now... You're really no good at x/y/z so don't bother trying... You're a failure... I'm weird... How could I still be making the same mistakes... I should know better... Eughk.*

It's relentless, and exhausting. It never gives you a break, or lets you be human.

2. **It has many different faces.** It can range from smaller 'corrections' or self-censorship, to vicious or abusive verbal attacks in your own head, that cause terrible shame and suffering. It can be an inner narrative in the background as you go about your day, or it can flare up in particular situations.
3. **It's NOT who you are.** It's not the real you, even if it *feels* like it is. It's part of what you absorbed from your family, environment and culture, while growing up.
4. **It's not telling you the truth,** though it seems real. It's a layer of lies, fears and false beliefs, that you need to recognise and unpeel, to access your true nature.
5. **It's totally normal to have an inner critic.** It's a natural part of human development, becoming socialised or 'civilised', by adapting to your family of origin and in wider society.

6. **Why is it there?** It developed to protect you while growing up, to keep you feeling safe and secure, and connected to those you depended on for your most basic needs. You were defenceless back then and had no choice: you *had* to conform to outside expectations, norms, and values, to stay in the tribe. Along with positive experiences, you absorbed any messages about ways you *didn't* fit in, and any criticism or shaming of who you really were, of your needs and desires, or your spontaneous, natural self. This created your inner critic: your internal 'morality police', *keeping you in line with how others need you to be.*
  
7. **Remembering it originally had positive intentions**, and comes from childhood wounds and adaptations, can help you come to terms with it and move past it, rather than adding another layer of self-criticism about it.  
  
Back then it was actually protecting you: it was *less* painful to make yourself 'wrong' and absorb all the criticisms and adaptations, than to feel the terror or pain of your caregivers and external environment letting you down. You were a tiny defenceless child, so cut yourself some slack.
  
8. **The inner critic is pernicious!** - Sneaky as hell, and covert... It can be a clear voice or inner dialogue, but it's also more unconscious and subtle. It's connected to your overall sense of self-worth, and can show up as a sinking, uneasy feeling of being somehow wrong, unworthy, unlovable... that's also woven into your emotions, body sensations and nervous system.  
  
It shows up when you least expect it, in all aspects of life. It's even there in your attempts to heal and evolve, when the underlying motivation is to 'fix' yourself, though you are already whole, worthy and deserving.
  
9. **The bad news is**, it will always be operating in some shape or form, throughout your life, so it's really important to recognise that, and not criticise yourself for having a critic. Beating yourself up for beating yourself up is not the solution!
  
10. **The good news is** there are lots of creative ways to neutralise and disarm your inner critic, so you can move forward despite it.

## 10 Strategies for Neutralising your Inner Critic

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- ⊙ **Consciously get to know it, and yourself, more.** As you go about your day, or in moments of quiet rest or contemplation, focus your awareness on your inner monologue. Notice how and when your critic is showing up, spot it in action in particular situations, get familiar with it. Give him/her a name!
- ⊙ **Start recognising how it's not true.** Notice how it's operating based on past fears, not present-day reality. See if you can figure out what it's trying to protect you against, what past events it may be based on, and importantly, recognise what positive intention lies behind it.
- ⊙ **Commit to consciously neutralising it.** A first step to disabling the critic is via your inner dialogue. For example you can:
  1. **Block it**, by saying things like 'Nope! – I see what you're doing and I'm not even going to engage with you right now.' Or;
  2. **Answer back**, with a rebuttal or evidence that it's wrong.

This is a good first line of defence, but has limitations, as the mind likes to keep a sense of control, by endlessly arguing around in circles. The inner critic thrives in the busy mind, so ultimately you need to unhook from your thoughts to really get free from it.
- ⊙ **Take refuge in your body.** Get out of your head, drop your awareness down into your physical sensations, and your emotions. You are more than your thoughts, so much more: there is a wealth of wisdom and truth residing in the rest of you, especially in your heart and belly centres.
- ⊙ **Take refuge in the here and now.** The inner critic lives and thrives off past wounds and future worries. Anchoring yourself in the present moment reality, can help loosen its grip and brings respite from the endless thought-loops.

- ⦿ **Soak up and boost any positive thoughts or sensations.** This is not about glossing over reality: it's important to acknowledge difficult emotions or thoughts, but it's equally important to let yourself really soak up any good feelings and encouraging thoughts. We're already hard-wired to focus on danger and threats, so we need *extra* emphasis on the positive.
- ⦿ **Grieve your past losses, and feel your feelings.** And make sure to access support from the right people or practices for you. This is an ongoing process.
- ⦿ **Attack it with humour:** undermine its seriousness with silliness! This won't always work, especially if you're suffering under the grip of a serious attack. But humour can be a powerful way to blunt and transform the critic.
- ⦿ **Annihilate it with large doses of self-compassion.** Being kind to yourself is the most powerful antidote to the inner critic, yet can feel hardest to do. Melting it down with self-love, and 're-parenting' yourself, is the most long-lasting way to free yourself from it. By being patient and understanding, yet firm and committed, in your resolve to do right by yourself. By becoming your own best friend, not worst enemy. (Your critic's already got that covered!)
- ⦿ **Enlist support for your courageous endeavour:** Ask for support and feedback from friends and allies, for this ongoing journey. Those who know and love you, and want the best for you, are well-placed to point out when you're stuck in a limiting belief, or drowning in a pool of self-defeat, shame or self-loathing. This work takes courage, consistency and commitment, and is so much easier with help and solidarity along the way.



My name is **Delphine O'Keeffe**, I'm a psychotherapist and coach, and a guided meditation leader.

I guide women to get to **know, love and trust themselves**, and be able to do and say what they need in their key relationships, while feeling good about themselves in the process.

I work with you to build the solid foundations *you* need, to **alchemise self-doubt into sovereignty and self-belief**.