

## Understanding the Inner-Critic

### Compassion

Exercise

10-15 min.

Client

No

*It is when the going gets tough, when we fail or make mistakes, that we need self-compassion the most. However, for most of us it is not a self-compassionate voice that assists us in these times, but rather a harsh self-critical voice that mentally beats us up. For self-compassion to grow, clients must become aware of what prevents them from being self-compassionate. The inner critic is the voice inside our head that delivers critical, disapproving dialogues. The critiques may include statements like: "You are useless", "You can't do anything right", "You are not capable", etc.*

### Goal

The goal of the exercise is to make your client aware of his/her inner critic and the consequences of this voice in terms of emotions and motivation. Many people argue that they need the inner critic to be productive or to prevent them from being lazy or sloppy. This exercise can help clients to understand that the judgmental tone of their inner critic is unlikely to create a positive starting point for doing things differently. Moreover, many clients will agree that they would not allow other people to talk to them like their inner critic does. Still, they allow their inner critic to say whatever it wants. The awareness of this discrepancy can be the starting point for a different relationship with the inner critic.

### Advice

This exercise works very well in groups too. The advantage of using this exercise in a group is that participants can learn from each other's experiences and notice that everybody (to some extent) suffers from an inner critic. In other words, this can contribute to an understanding of our common humanity, which is a core ingredient of compassion (Neff, 2011).

For many people, talking about their inner critic is very personal. It can be helpful to give some examples of your own inner critic first to create a more open and safe atmosphere thereby helping the client to feel safer and supported while being vulnerable.

### Suggested Readings

Neff, K. D. (2011). *Self-compassion: Stop beating yourself up and leave insecurity behind*. New York: William Morrow.

## Tool Description

### Instructions

Which parts of your self or your life are you most critical of?

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When you are critical of yourself, how does that criticism manifest? Do you use insults? Do you try to understand your limitations?

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What does it feel like to be self-critical?

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What type of language do you use when you are being self-critical? Can you give some examples?

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Imagine another person would speak to you, using the same words and tone that you use towards yourself when you are being self-critical. How would you react? Would you allow this?

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If you would not allow this, how come you allow your inner critic to treat you like this?

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As a result of your criticism, do you feel a sense of motivation to strive for self-improvement, or do you feel defeated?

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What would a good friend, who loves you unconditionally, say to you when you identify something about yourself that you consider a flaw, when you fail or make a mistake?

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Would it be possible to replace the inner critic with a voice that is similar to your friend's voice (see the previous question)? What could you do?

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