The Inner Critic: Friend, Foe, or Neither?

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Conflict of Interest - Disclosures

Co-Founder of Tend Health. Tend Health provides mental health and well-being services to individuals and organizations. This will not influence the content of this presentation.
Learning Objectives:
Following this presentation, attendees will be able to:

- Understand the origin, function, and habit loop of the voice of the inner critic
- Name one’s resistance to quieting the inner critic
- Recognize the voice of the inner critic early and often
- Practice specific strategies to quiet the inner critic and leverage a different, more nurturing inner voice to support well-being and achieve high standards
Ever Feel Like A Fraud?

Coping with Imposter Syndrome

“I think instead of worrying about why people don’t believe in you, we should worry about why you don’t believe in yourself.”
Know Your Inner Critic

- What do you typically criticize yourself for?
- What sorts of things do you typically say to yourself/about yourself?
- How do you say these things?
- What does your internal voice sound like? Does it remind you of anyone?
- If I stop doing talking to myself this way, then what ...
Motivates me  
Helps me get things done  
Toughens me up  
Pushes me to excel  
Makes me a better person  
Helps me strive for perfection  

What else?
The suicide of New York emergency doctor Lorna Breen at the height of the city’s COVID pandemic was front-page news—and opened up a painful conversation about what we ask of our overworked first responders. Her still-grieving family hopes it can lead to widespread change in a professional culture often disinclined to take its own mental health seriously.

BY MAUREEN O’CONNOR
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● Self-criticism only serves to keep the threat system active

● Self-criticism prolongs our pain and suffering and can keep us stuck and unable to move forward from the struggle we are facing.
What feelings are evoked? What is your impulse to do?
When it comes to others we are usually good at separating the behavior from the person ... less so when it comes to ourselves
Unhelpful thinking styles and Self-criticism

- **Labelling**
  - Making global and derogatory statements (about ourselves) on the basis of our behaviour in a specific situation

- **Shoulding**
  - Using "should" statements to put unreasonable demands or pressure (on ourselves)

- **Overgeneralizing**
  - Taking a negative instance and concluding this applies to everything
Unhelpful Thinking Styles

**LABELING**
- I am such an idiot.
- I am selfish.
- I am not ____ enough.

**SHOULDING**
- I should be able to do this.
- I should not have done that.

**GENERALIZING**
- I am always messing up.
- I am never going to get this right.
What gets in the way of being kind to ourselves?

Feedback loops, based on increased positive affect or decreased negative affect are powerful reinforcement cycles that sustain our habitual responses.
MEDICAL STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND LIFE SATISFACTION DECLINES THROUGHOUT MEDICAL SCHOOL

What is the hidden curriculum?

“What does it mean to be relentless? As caregivers, we know exactly what it means. To be relentless means never giving up on the patient whose last hope rides on your knowledge, your skills, your compassion. It means devoting every fiber of your being to ensuring your patients have access to the right specialists and the right interventions at the right time. It means early mornings and late nights. And it means running on empty stomachs but full hearts.”
The Doctor’s world is one where our own feelings - particularly those of pain and hurt - are not easily expressed.

The Citadel quality to medical training, where only the fittest survive, creates the paradox of a humane empathic physician who shows little humanity to himself.
In organizations, culture eats strategy for breakfast...
What about our *inner culture*?

*We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are.*

—Anais Nin
What is Self-Compassion

- Mindfulness
- Common Humanity
- Self-Kindness
If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.
~ Jack Kornfield
Addressing unhelpful thinking styles...
The self-critical voice is just trying to protect you and stay in control.

It neither needs to change nor be ignored, nor in charge.

https://ifs-institute.com/resources/videos
Self-Compassion Impact

- Increased Wellbeing
- Reductions in: Anxiety, depression, stress, perfectionism, shame
- Increases in: Life satisfaction, connectedness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, gratitude
- More effective coping with divorce, chronic pain
- Less likely to develop PTSD after combat trauma
- More conscientiousness and taking greater responsibility for mistakes
- More exercise, safer sex, helps smokers quit, less alcohol use
- Better physical health including enhanced immune response
- Healthier body image and eating behavior
- Better romantic relationships
- More forgiveness and perspective taking
- More compassion, empathy, altruism for others
What’s the Evidence for Self-Compassion among Clinicians?

SCHC program (2020 Neff et al, Journal of Clinical Psych) was found to significantly:

**Decrease:** Depression, stress, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout

**Increase:** Self-compassion, mindfulness, compassion for others, job satisfaction in healthcare professionals
Let’s Practice

This is a skill you can learn and strengthen

Think of a time in the past 2 weeks when you were distressed - maybe something that is still somewhat distressing now.

Imagine the setting, the sounds, the smells.

Recall your inner monologue and your feelings.
What happened?

- Did you criticize yourself?
  - What did you criticize yourself for?
  - What sorts of things did you say to yourself/about yourself?
  - How did you say these things?
  - What was the tone of your internal voice?
How do I do this “self-compassion” thing?

Common Humanity
This is a moment of suffering, This is hard. I am human.

Self-Kindness
How might I treat / talk to a friend in this same situation?

How can I best take care of myself in this moment?
Call upon your deepest anchors of kindness ... A Mantra that is kind, authentic, accessible. One Thing to Say to Yourself (Instead or in Addition to)

I am a human, doing the best I can under the conditions and constraints that exist.

May I forgive myself for things left undone.

What else?
Three Gates in All Speech

True?  Necessary?  Kind?
Physiological Self-Compassion

- Voice
- Hug
- Hand on heart
- Music
- Poetry
- What did I do well today?
Not to feel better ...

Wild Geese

ood. You do not have to w
ough the desert repenting
your body love what it lo
tell you mine. Meanw
THANK YOU!

www.tend.health