We all have an ‘inner critic’. You know, that voice inside our heads that constantly chitter chatters negative stuff buried amongst the thousands of thoughts we think everyday. The one we use when we criticize and judges ourselves negatively? The one that whispers things like:

- “God I’m useless”
- “no wonder I’m not the centre of attention at parties, I’m dull and boring”
- “oh my God, why did she pick me to do the presentation? I can’t. It’ll be awful, a nightmare, and everyone will see how anxious I really am”
- “I’m just fat and lazy, why can’t I be like Ben?”
- “she’s a selfish horrible nasty person, and he likes her more than me!?”
- “nobody likes me”
- “I’ll never have somebody to love me”
- “it’s not fair, I’ll never get the job”
- “no wonder my wife isn’t attracted to me any more, I’m a mess” – and on and on – you get the picture?

If we delve further into CBT, we go deeper to identify our ‘hot thoughts’, our core beliefs – how they developed and who they originated with / where the ‘voice’ came from. It often manifests through the internalization of the ideas and concepts of authority figures and/or caregivers when we are children (often parents, but not necessarily). The rules and moral boundaries we set for ourselves are developed through learning from these people – and learning unhealthy core beliefs causes our distorted thinking.

Our self esteem and self image are developed by how we talk to ourselves, how we think of ourselves. The inner critic actually thinks it’s helping us, protecting us from surprise hurts or disappointments for instance – it’s part of our ‘ego defence mechanism’ set. But it’s not rational, and it is not constructive. It costs us too much. Everytime it ‘attacks’ it keeps our self worth low and stops us enjoying living a rich life.

It is never too late to fix unhealthy thinking, and it’s entirely possible to SILENCE THE INNER CRITIC!

How do we do that? Firstly, we have to recognise him and spot him chattering his destructive narrative at us. Note: he often attacks when you’re feeling down, when a negative life event has occurred, when meeting strangers, during contact with people you find sexually attractive, in situations in which you have made a mistake, situations where you are being criticised, situations in which you feel hurt at anothers behaviour, during conversations with anybody who might be disapproving… etc. etc. When we’re feeling an emotional disturbance he’s usually around! We can ‘turn him off’ and disempower him and neutralise him – and replace him with our own true persona voice of positive rational thinking. When we recognise him in action we need to ‘thought stop’ – a widely used trick is to wear a loose rubber band around our wrist, and to snap it slightly so that it gives us a teeny sting and starts us rejecting the thought.

Next we apply the externalising the inner critic CBT technique: The idea here is that we will assign our inner critic a ‘persona’ separate to ourselves – complete with a little body, a name, and a voice. Yes, really! Separating ourselves from the inner critic can be useful, since it helps us to spot when it is nagging, and allows us to make a conscious choice about whether to ‘obey’, ‘argue’, ‘ignore’ or ‘laugh at’ it, not ourselves. Thus we are introducing symbolism to enable us to separate the critic and the distorted thinking...
views from ourselves, it helps us to ‘thought stop’ the critic in it’s tracks – it allows us conscious choice, rather than automatic compliance with the core belief.

**Huh?** OK, this little character, which we metaphorically throw salt at, can be any shape or style you choose (animal, cartoon person etc)– as long as you’re happy you can zap it and are not scared of it (and do not make it cute and loveable!). A little creative visualisation works here. It is encouraged to create comically outrageous features, accompanied by a silly voice and appearance. As after all, the inner critic IS silly and stupid! It is also encouraged to give him/her/it an actual name. Then you should choose an appropriate way of ‘whacking’ them, or ‘shutting them up and putting them back in their box’ when needed. It is found that designing a ‘thought stopping’ / ‘whacking’ mantra unique to you (that you can say silently) to dispatch the inner critic is useful – example: let’s say a person finds themselves thinking ‘Oh God, this is awful, I’ll never be able to manage it, I’m hopeless’ or somesuch thought – when they notice / recognise this is the ‘critic’, they can confront it directly by stating their mantra, perhaps something agressive, like ‘hey you, SHUT IT, you’re not helpful or constructive – you cost me too much – I’m shutting you out and thinking calmly and rationally, so get lost – NOW’ … or something short and snappy like ‘Stop this nonsense” or “This is poison, stop it”.
Whatever works for you, whatever allows you to take control.

I know, yes, it seems ridiculous – it seems like a therapy method that would be used with a child – it’s ‘daft’… but it WORKS spectacularly well – even with adults, ‘emotional learning’ works in a much better way than cold academic thesis, and visualisation and personalisation is extremely effective. And hey, you don’t have to tell anybody! Just try it. Though perhaps not out loud 😊

The Inner Critic Technique does a number of things:

- It separates internalised core voices and beliefs from your own true persona
- With practice, it increases recognition of how and when these core beliefs affect you
- It enables increased control over the core belief, and immediately interrupts the effects
- It changes the feeling of powerlessness about the belief to a more empowered mindset
- By using humour, the normal emotions of fear, depression, or anxiety are challenged – humour and negative emotion cannot co-exist and therefore this helps you to ‘outgun’ these emotions long enough to ‘think differently’ based on rationale and evidence and what is most helpful to you in the situation - to ‘make your own choices’.
- It helps to clarify blame / responsibility for NATs away from ourselves, so relieving guilt.

In practice, even the most straight-laced and logical people, once they give this a go, have fun with it, and more importantly find it hugely effective. Perhaps it’s effective because of it’s child-like simplicity? – Who cares!? It works! Please try it…

**Task:** externalise your internal critic – describe him/her/it - and compose a ‘whacking’ mantra…

Design it, name it, recognise it, stop it…

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