

# Changing Your Critical Self-Talk with Self Compassion

This exercise should be done over several weeks and will eventually form the blueprint for changing how you relate to yourself long term. Some people find it useful to work on their inner critic by writing in a journal. Others are more comfortable doing it via internal dialogues. You can speak aloud to yourself, or think silently.

## Notice

The first step toward changing the way you treat yourself is to notice when you are being self-critical. It may be that—like many of us—your self-critical voice comes up so frequently that you don't even notice when it is present. Whenever you're feeling bad about something, think about what you've just said to yourself. Try to be as accurate as possible, noting your inner speech verbatim.

- What words do you actually use when you're self-critical?
- Are there key phrases that come up over and over again? What is the tone of your voice—harsh, cold, angry?
- Does the voice remind you of anyone in your past who was critical of you? You want to be able to get to know the inner self-critic very well, and to become aware of when your inner judge is active.
- For instance, if you've just eaten half a box of Oreos, does your inner voice say something like “you're so disgusting,” “you make me sick,” and so on? Really try to get a clear sense of how you talk to yourself.

## Soften

Make an active effort to soften the self-critical voice, but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment (i.e., don't say “you're such a bitch” to your inner critic!). Say something like “I know you're trying to keep me safe, and to point out ways that I need to improve, but your harsh criticism and judgment is not helping at all. Please stop being so critical, you are causing me unnecessary pain.”

## Reframe

Reframe the observations made by your inner critic in a kind, friendly, positive way. If you're having trouble thinking of what words to use, you might want to imagine what a very compassionate friend would say to you in this situation. It might help to use a term of endearment that strengthens expressed feelings of warmth and care, but only if it feels natural rather than schmaltzy. For instance, you can say something like “Darling, I know you ate that bag of cookies because you're feeling really sad right now and you thought it would cheer you up. But you feel even worse and are not feeling good in your body. I want you to be happy, so why don't you take a long walk so you feel better?” While engaging in this supportive self-talk, try gently stroking your arm, or holding your face tenderly in your hands (as long as no one's looking). Even if you're having trouble calling up emotions of kindness at first, physical gestures of warmth can tap into the caregiving system, releasing oxytocin that will help change your biochemistry. The important thing is that you start acting kindly, and feelings of true warmth and caring will eventually follow.