"We are what we think about all day long." Ralph Waldo Emerson. That is the simplest definition of self-esteem. We have an inner voice that speaks to us consciously and unconsciously all the time. When our inner voice becomes and stays critical, it drags us down until we cannot have adequate love or esteem for ourselves.

"Love is the power which produces love." Erich Fromm. We must love ourselves to be able to love others. We all have to deal with our inner critical voice at some time or another. Here are some excellent ways to bring more love into your life by stopping your inner critic from getting in the way.

Stopping Your Inner Critic

Excerpts from **Self-Esteem Second Edition** by Matthew McKay, PH.D. & Patrick Fanning (A proven program of cognitive techniques for assessing, improving, and maintaining your self-esteem.). The new third edition is available at Amazon,

Everyone has an inner critic. Our self-esteem and self image are developed by how we talk to ourselves. All of us have conscious and unconscious memories of all the times we felt bad or wrong – they are part of the unavoidable scars of childhood. This is where the inner critical voice gets started. We also have an inner voice that has our best interest at heart. Listen to the good inner voice. How we respond to our good inner voice determines how we feel. When we don’t listen we feel bad. When we follow its lead with faith that it is guiding us towards what is best for us, we feel good.

How do you stop your inner critic? Before you can disarm the critic, you have to know him. Secrecy is his greatest strength. So if you can get really good at hearing and identifying his voice, you will have won a major victory. Remember that every time the critic attacks he is doing you real psychological harm. He is further wounding your sense of worth and making it harder to feel competent and happy in the world. You can’t afford what he is doing to you. It’s costing you too much.

Analyze your critical thoughts. As you analyze your critical thoughts, determine what they help you feel or help you avoid feeling; you’ll begin to see a pattern to the attacks. One person may find his critic's primary function is to help him atone for guilt. Someone else may experience a critic whose main effort is to provide achievement motivation. Another person’s critic may help desensitize her to the fear of rejection. Or a critic may harangue you to stay on the straight and narrow path. When you become aware of the theme or themes your critic uses, you are ready to fight back.
Some of the times to catch your inner critic are: when you are feeling depressed or down on yourself, meeting strangers, contact with people you find sexually attractive, situations in which you have made a mistake, situations in which you feel criticized and defensive, situations in which you feel hurt or someone has been angry at you, and conversations with parents or anyone who might be disapproving.

**Disarming the critic involves three steps:** (1) unmasking his purpose, (2) talking back, and (3) making him useless.

There are few things more effective for winning arguments than to suddenly unmask your opponent’s ulterior motives. A classic example is tobacco company "research" that finds no link between cigarette smoking and heart disease. Since the ulterior motives of the tobacco industry are clear, few people take their arguments seriously. Getting clear about the critic’s function makes everything he says less believable. You know his ulterior motive. No matter how he rants and raves, you’ve exposed his secret agenda and therefore feel less vulnerable to him. Remember that the critic attacks you because his voice is in some way being reinforced. When you are able to identify the role your critic plays in your psychological life, when you are able to call his game, you are beginning to seriously undermine the credibility of his message.

People with very low self-esteem have a more vicious and demoralizing inner critic. Low self-esteem robs you of your confidence. You no longer trust your ability to cope or make decisions. Risks stop being challenging; they’re scary. Since you can’t live up to your own critical voice, you’re also often critical of others. There are several things you can do to diminish your negative inner critic. Research indicates that to change behavior, it is more effective to stop telling yourself negative things than to just tell yourself non-negative thinking. So how do you stop telling yourself negative things? Read and try the following:

1. **Hear your inner critic. Catch him in the act.** You can’t change anything you don’t know is there. If you’re not paying attention to it, you’re actually reinforcing it. Once you hear your inner critic and know your vulnerable times you can then learn how to "turn off" and disarm it.

2. **Talk back and get angry at the inner critic:** Here are some examples of how to talk back:

   This is poison. Stop it!
   These are lies.
   These are lies my father told me.
   No more put-downs.
   Shut up!
   Get off my back!
   Stop this garbage!
Note: Choose a short statement that helps you feel angry. It’s good to get mad. (use profanity if you feel like it) Mentally scream at the critic so that you can drown him out with your anger and indignation.

3. **Try thought stoppage**: Tell the critic to stop. Stop ruminating. Get up, move, get a drink of water.

4. **Use attention shift**: Look outside. Look at people around you. Look at any object nearby and study it intently. Turn worry over to higher power.

5. **Then tidy up**: Put the worry in a shoe box on the top shelf of the closet in your mind and pack it away. Schedule time to worry. Write worries down and schedule time to think them over. When repetitive thoughts occur again say *STOP* I’ll worry about this at (name a specific time.)

6. **Now ask the price**: What price have I paid to listen to the critical voice? Make a list of the ways the critic has hurt you in relationships, work and self-esteem. The price may be external or internal.

**Now you must replace the inner critic with your positive voice**: Use a self compliment or a pre-selected affirmation.

If none of the above works for you try putting a rubber band around your wrist and snap it each time your inner critic speaks. Mentally scream "Stop it!" while snapping the rubber band. The sharp stinging sensation breaks the chain of negative thoughts and acts as a *punisher* so that the critic is less likely to attack in the near future. The important thing is to catch the critic just as he starts. It takes about 21 days to change a habit. Be consistent with this behavior and you will have more love in your life starting with yourself.

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