

35. Attitude Activity: Kill Your Critic

Popular psychology regularly refers to the ‘inner critic’ – the voice we all have inside our heads that pokes fun at our achievements, hopes and dreams. Some people have inner critics with such strong voices that they are too scared to commit to anything – we’ve worked with students who couldn’t bring themselves to admit (even to a teacher or parent) what their dream or goal was.

If this is you, try the following activities to improve your confidence in yourself. Killing your critic isn’t easy, but there are some ways forward.

» Name your critic. Seriously. Some students find it easier to dismiss the voice if they’ve given it a silly name.
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» Listen to it – recognise its voice. Next time you hear it, label it: ‘That’s my inner critic.’ At least you will start recognising it. What is it fond of saying?
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» Kill all comparisons. Let the inner critic say what it wants for ten minutes but all comparisons are banned. If it tries telling you, ‘You’re not as good as ...’ shut it down. It’s called ‘impostor syndrome’ when you feel you are a fraud. ‘I don’t deserve to be here’ or ‘Others are cleverer than me’ are common feelings and messages. Refuse to accept the voice if it tries any comparisons like these. Design a response – a quick, no-nonsense answer that shuts your critic down:
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» Challenge your inner critic with data, such as your GCSEs or the last grade you got on a piece of work. Or challenge your inner critic with a demand: ‘Well, if you think that, what should I do about it? Got any ideas?’ Use the space below to record your successes:
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- » Start working on something new but tell your inner critic you're just messing about. This is apparently a tactic used regularly in advertising and movie writing. You say to yourself, 'I'm just messing around here, making a few sketches or writing a few words. It's just a bit of fun ...' What have you been too afraid to start work on before now?

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- » Invite it to come back at another time. This is a good one. You say, 'I'd appreciate your constructive criticism when this is finished.' Set a date and write it down. Say to yourself, 'I'll listen to my critic – in a week's time for fifteen minutes.'

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Final Thoughts

Everyone has an inner critic – you're not alone. As long as you can manage the negative thoughts, you'll do extremely well. Your teachers will have felt the same at some point, as will your peers, or parents, or family. How have they coped? It will be worth asking them for their tricks and tactics!

Use the space below to make some initial plans about beating your inner critic:

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