

BEFRIENDING YOUR INNER CRITICS



WRITTEN BY BOBBI L. PARISH, MA, CTIRC-S



BOBBI L. PARISH, MA, CTIRC-S

Trauma Recovery Coach Supervisor

Executive Director of The International Association of Trauma
Recovery Coaching

I'm so glad you're here! Our Inner Critics can create such havoc in our inner world. And we're often told to ignore them, tell them to go away or even to shut up. As a Trauma Recovery Coach who utilizes Internal Family Systems methods I want to teach you a new way to interact with your inner critics, one that will both soothe them and help you befriend them so that they are finally on your side!

BobbiParish@iaotrc.com



WHAT IS AN INNER CRITIC?

Almost everyone has an inner critic -- or two, or three or even more. If you're a trauma survivor you might even have a small tribe of them, as trauma has the capacity to turn parts of ourselves that would usually be loving and kind into parts that criticize, malign and even attack us.

Your inner critic is the part of you that tells you:

"That was a stupid thing to do! You're such an idiot!"

"Everyone can see how terrible you are at this. You shouldn't be doing it."

"Your mother was right, no one will ever love you."

"You can't speak at that event! Everyone will see how unqualified you are!"



WHY DO WE HAVE INNER CRITICS?

Although you might think that your inner critics exist to tear you down and destroy you, they actually came into being in order to protect you.

Kind of a wild way to look at it, right?

How can something that's telling me such terrible things about myself be trying to help me survive?

Our inner critic is a defensive strategy that our brain and mind (they aren't the same thing!) use to help us avoid shame, not call attention to ourselves, stay small and even try to be invisible in the face of potential threats. With their harshness they are trying to protect us from feeling shame, criticism and rejection.

But we can change all of that by befriending our inner critics.

HOW DO INNER CRITICS COME INTO BEING?

The Brain's Role in Developing the Inner Critic

Our Default Mode Network is automatic and always online -- either running in the background or very vocally in the foreground.

The quality of our Default Mode Network is programmed in our childhood. If we are raised in a warm, loving home then the voice of our Default Mode Network is warm and loving.

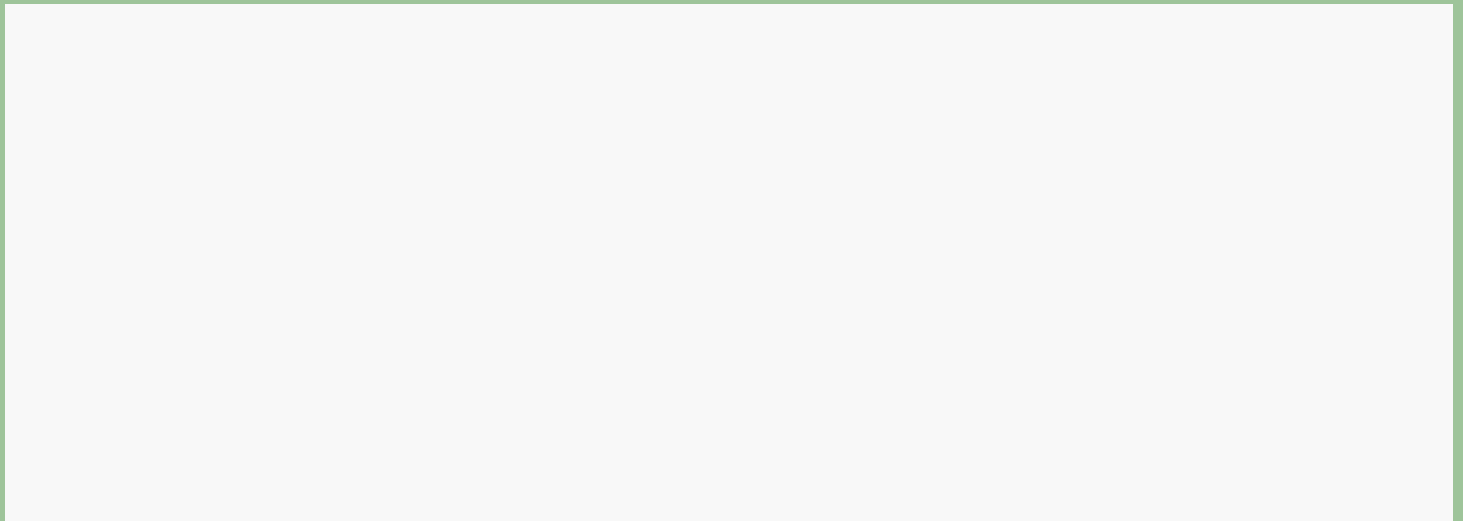
But if we are raised in a home that is judgmental, harsh, critical, unkind or even neglectful the voice of our Default Mode Network takes on a similar tone.

In her book, *The Resonant Self*, Sarah Peyton refers to the Default Mode Network of trauma survivors as savage.

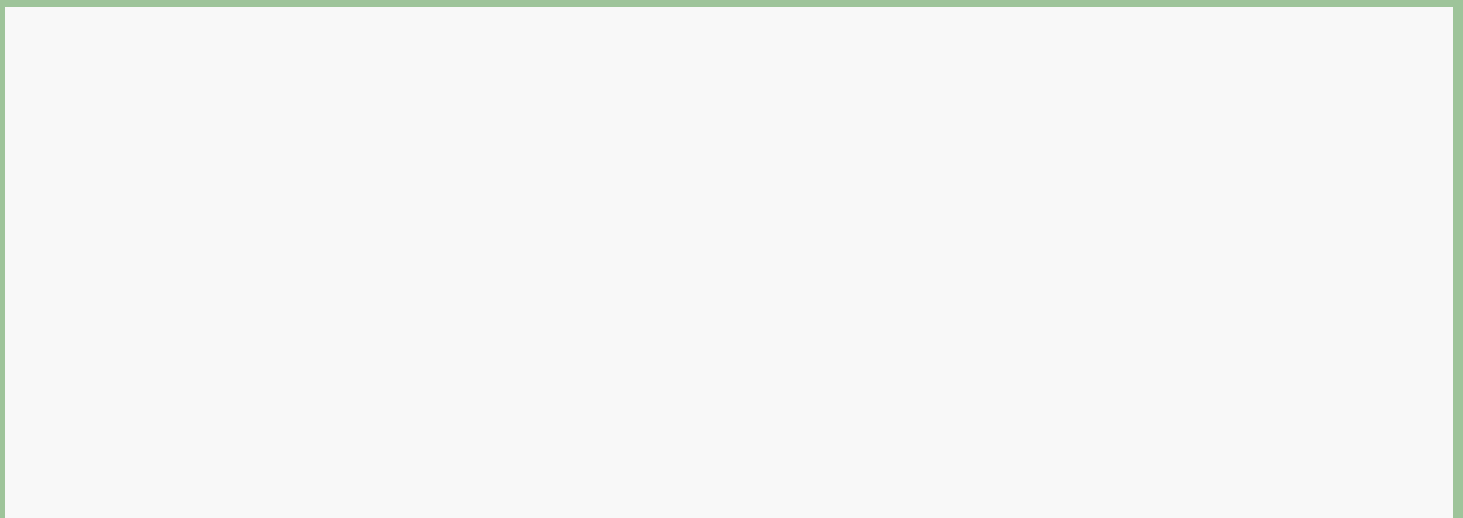
When our Default Mode Network is savage it is constantly sending us unkind messages. These become louder and more apparent to us when the Default Mode Network is in the foreground of our thinking.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR DEFAULT MODE NETWORK

When does your savage Default Mode Network come online? What are you doing when it's the loudest?

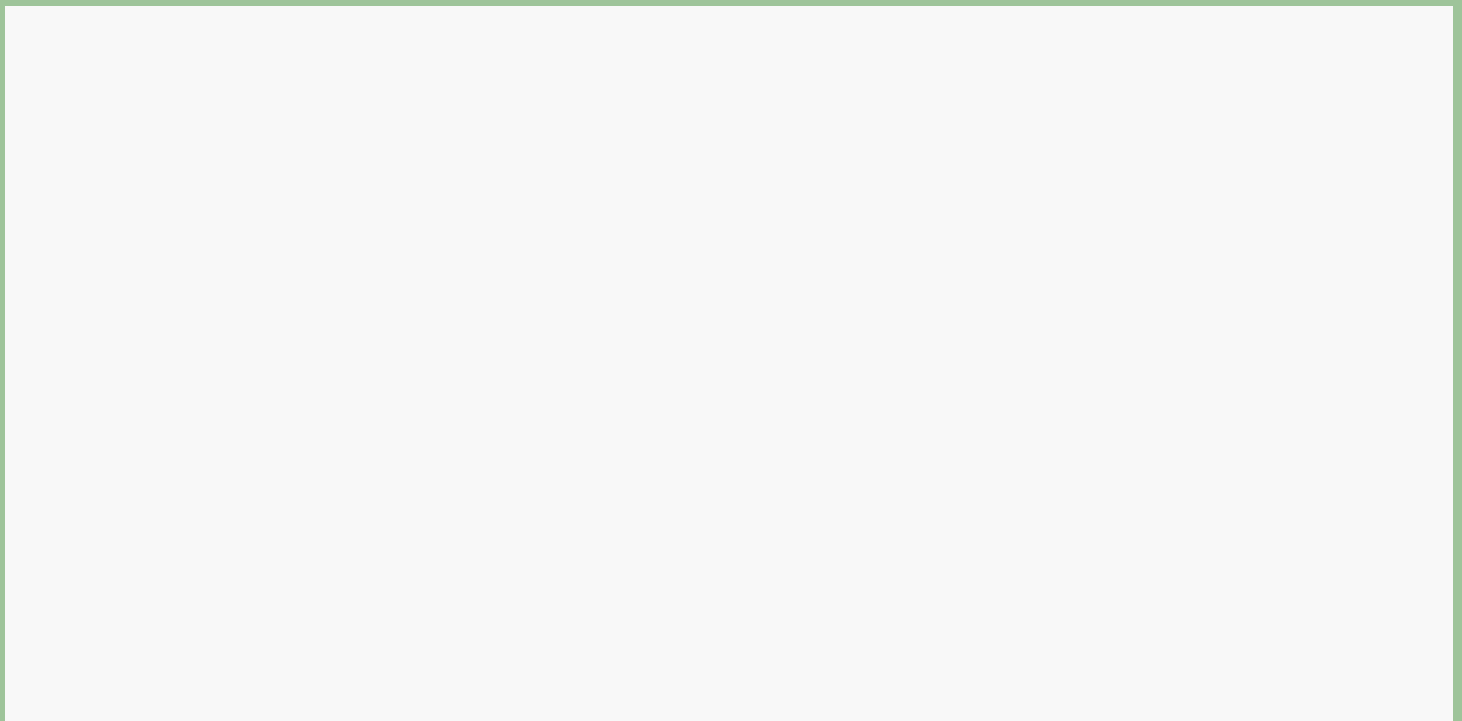


What are your savage Default Mode Network's favorite messages to tell you?



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR DEFAULT MODE NETWORK

What strategies do you use to silence or keep the voice of your savage Default Mode Network silenced?



Are you interested in learning how to identify and understand the ways your savage Default Mode Network shows up as an inner critic in your daily life?

If so, fabulous! Keep reading!

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PERSONAL INNER CRITICS

Once our brain has been programmed as a builder of the inner critic, it shows up in our daily life in our mind and body through cognitive, emotional and somatic experiences.



Identifying your personal inner critics is key to understanding and befriending them so that you can soothe and transform them from being protectors into becoming inner supporters, mentors and advisers.

According to Jay Earley and Bonnie Weiss (see Resources)

there are seven types of inner critics:

The Perfectionist -- The Taskmaster -- The Inner Controller

The Destroyer -- The Guilt Tripper -- The Underminer

The Molder/Conformer

Let's take a deep dive into each type so you can identify which type(s) of inner critics you experience.

DO YOU HAVE AN INNER PERFECTIONIST?

An inner critic who plays the role of the Perfectionist demands that everything be done according to the highest of standards: perfectly. When you do not perform to these standards (which you cannot, as the standard is unattainable) the critic attacks, saying you are not good enough. This critic often creates self-fulfilling prophecies because it can cause us to procrastinate and avoid tasks due to a fear of not being able to do it perfectly.

An inner Perfectionist might develop if:

Having perfect grades was demanded of you as a child.
Your caregivers expected you to behave according to unattainable standards as a child.
You were never allowed to make mistakes, and were punished or shamed when you did.



HOW DOES AN INNER PERFECTIONIST BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Perfectionist it might be telling you: "You're not good enough unless what you do is perfect," or "No matter how hard you work you will never be able to perform to the high standards the world demands of you," or "Everyone sees how imperfect you are. You can't hide all of your flaws."

Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Perfectionist you might struggle with procrastination. By doing this it creates self-fulfilling prophecies because it can cause us to avoid tasks due to a fear of not being able to do them perfectly.

Emotionally, an Inner Perfectionist might leave you feeling hopelessness and despair because perfection is an unattainable standard.



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER PERFECTIONIST

If you have an inner perfectionist what do you think caused it to develop as a way to keep you safe?

What does it say to you?

How does your Inner Perfectionist want you to behave?

How does your Inner Perfectionist think behaving that way will keep you safe?

DO YOU HAVE AN INNER TASKMASTER?

An inner critic who plays the role of the Taskmaster keeps you “mercilessly marching forward”, no matter the cost to you emotionally, cognitively or physically, to prove your worth and value.

An inner Taskmaster might develop if:

Resting was labeled as lazy in your childhood.
Productivity was tied to personal value in your family.
Self-care was labeled as selfish by your caregivers.
Value was placed on what you do rather than who you are in your family system -- doing was more important than being.

You live in a culture or work in a field where working long hours and taking on more work than you can do within a standard workweek is prized.



HOW DOES AN INNER TASKMASTER BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Taskmaster it might be telling you: "You're not good enough unless what you do is perfect," or "No matter how hard you work you will never be able to perform to the high standards the world demands of you," or "Everyone sees how imperfect you are. You can't hide all of your flaws."

Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Taskmaster you might feel like the only way to prove your worth is to work long hours, volunteer to take on extra projects at work even if you have to work a lot of overtime to accomplish them, and take class after class or read every new book in your field.

Emotionally, an Inner Taskmaster might leave you feeling overwhelmed and resentful of being judged by what you do rather than who you are.



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER TASKMASTER

If you have an inner taskmaster what do you think caused it to develop as a way to keep you safe?

What does it say to you?

How does your Inner Taskmaster want you to behave?

How does your Inner Taskmaster think behaving that way will keep you safe?

DO YOU HAVE AN INNER CONTROLLER?

An inner critic who plays the role of the Inner Controller works to control behavior it determines to be unacceptable. An Inner Controller is very concerned about social constructs and how others view us. As a result, it works to prevent us from engaging in behaviors that are seen as socially unacceptable such as overeating, having an addiction, losing our temper or failing to follow standards set forth by our culture, heritage, or family.

An Inner Controller might develop if:

You were raised in a family or cultural system that had rigid rules for behavior that you didn't always meet and were therefore shamed and/or punished.

You were rejected or ostracized from social groups or your family because you engaged in behavior they didn't deem acceptable.

Aspects of your identity were seen as unacceptable so you had to develop the capacity to repress or reject them.



HOW DOES AN INNER CONTROLLER BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Controller it might be telling you: "Don't act that way or do that thing or we will be judged and rejected," or "We will never belong to the groups we want to unless you get rid of or suppress that part of yourself" or "Don't do that or be that because others will think we're bad, wrong or flawed."

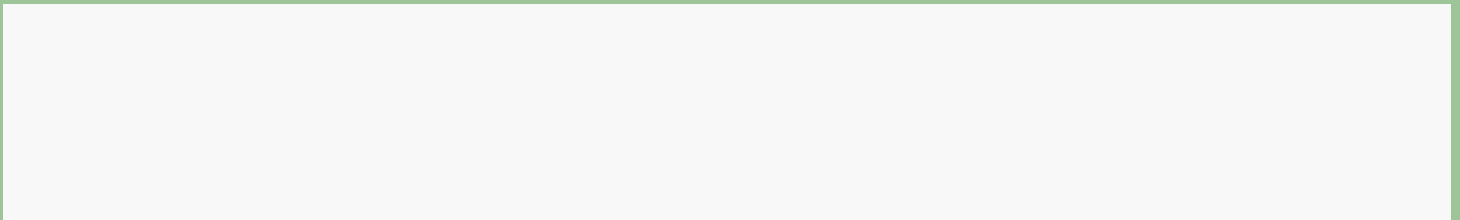
Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Controller you might be constantly trying to suppress parts of yourself or certain behaviors in order to be accepted. You might begin to isolate yourself socially because you've been bullied, shamed or rejected for behaving or doing something deemed unacceptable.

Emotionally, an Inner Controller might leave you feeling powerless, flawed, ashamed and rejected.

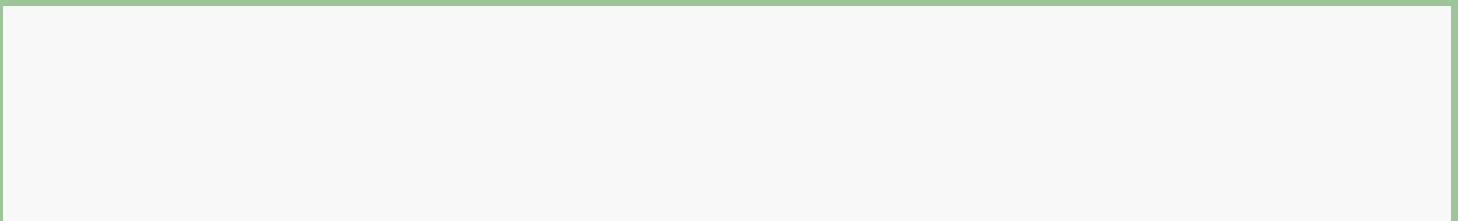


GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER CONTROLLER

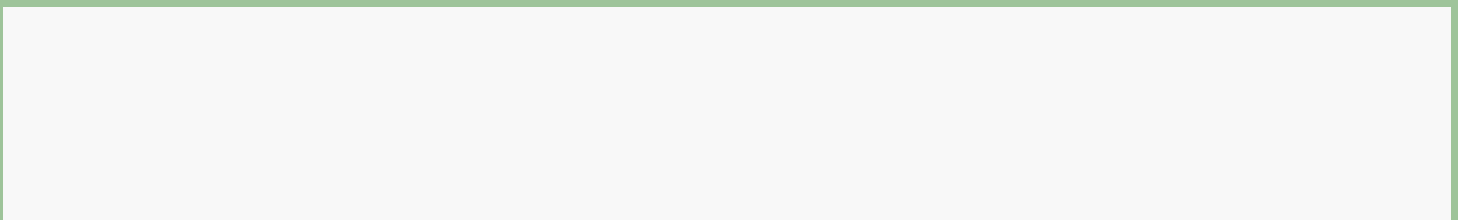
If you have an Inner Controller what do you think caused it to develop as a way to keep you safe?



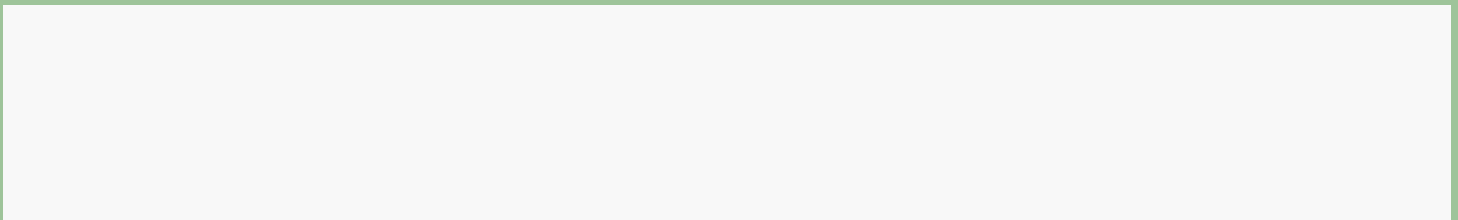
What does it say to you?



How does your Inner Controller want you to behave?



How does your Inner Controller think behaving that way will keep you safe?



DO YOU HAVE AN INNER DESTROYER?

An inner critic who plays the role of the Inner Destroyer attacks your very right to exist because you aren't worthy of it. This critic is intensely shaming and wants you to stay as small and invisible in the world as you can, all in service of protecting you from others seeing how unworthy and shameful that you are.

An Inner Destroyer might develop if:

You were raised in a family system where you were told that you were bad, worthless, unwanted or a burden.

You were abandoned by your family and told it was your fault because you were bad or unworthy of being wanted and loved by them.

You were abused by your caregivers and told it was your fault because you were bad and deserved the abuse.



HOW DOES AN INNER DESTROYER BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Destroyer it might be telling you: "You're so bad that you don't deserve to live," or "No one will ever love you because you're so unworthy." or "You should be ashamed of yourself because of how hard you are to live with and love." "If anyone treats you badly it's your fault because that's how you deserve to be treated."

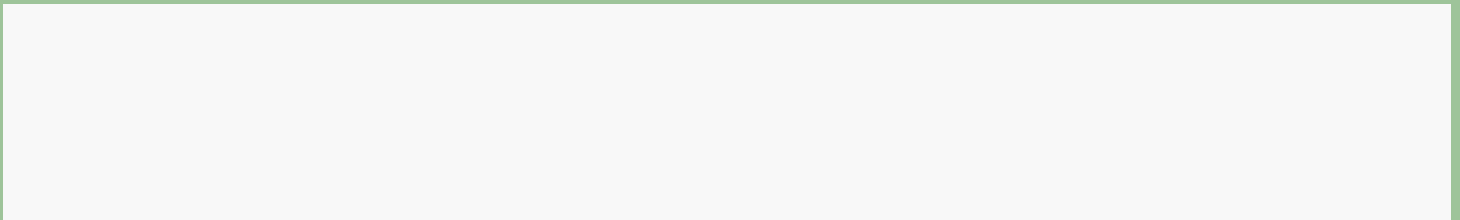
Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Destroyer you might struggle with motivation to try anything to improve your life because it feels so futile. You might experience suicidal ideation because you don't feel you have the right to exist. You might turn to addictions or other coping strategies that help you numb or avoid your emotional pain.

Emotionally, an Inner Destroyer might leave you feeling hopelessness, shame, despair, depression, apathy, loneliness and worthlessness.

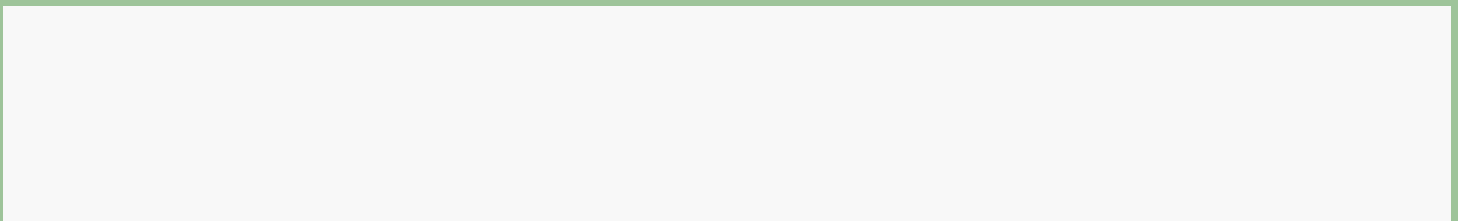


GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER DESTROYER

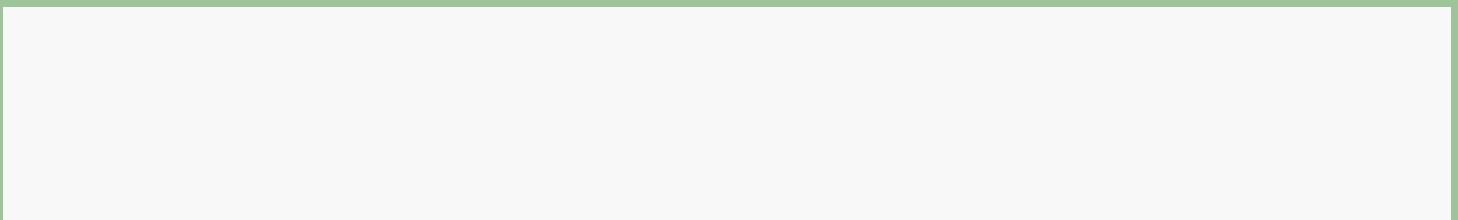
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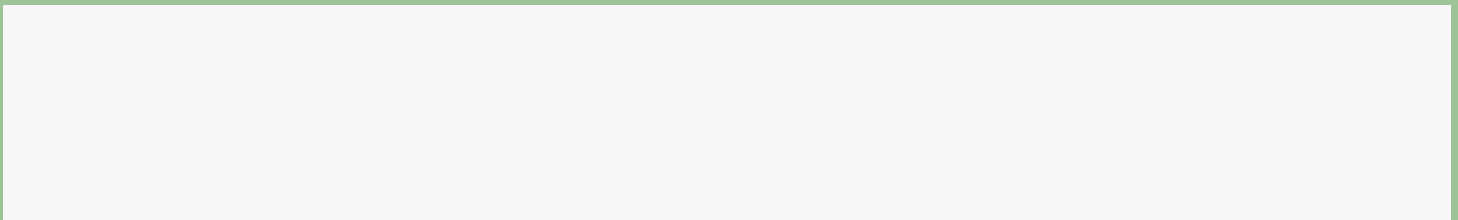
What does it say to you?



How does your Inner Destroyer want you to behave?



How does your Inner Destroyer think behaving that way will keep you safe?



DO YOU HAVE AN INNER GUILT TRIPPER?

An inner critic who plays the role of the Inner Guilt Tripper constantly reminds you of mistakes you made in the past and harm you may have caused to others, or even to yourself.

An Inner Guilt Tripper might develop if:

Making mistakes was met with shaming or punishment when you were a child at home, school or any other environment where you spent a lot of time.

When you made a mistake and, as result, caused harm to another that person was treated as better and more valuable than you.

You grew up in an environment where those who made mistakes and potentially caused harm to others were publicly shamed, denigrated and/or ostracized from your family or social group.



HOW DOES AN INNER GUILT TRIPPER BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Guilt Tripper it might be telling you: "You must avoid making a mistake at all costs." or "It's better not to try something or to socially isolate than risk making a mistake," or "If you make a mistake those who know about that mistake or who were harmed by your error have a right to mistreat you because you deserve it."

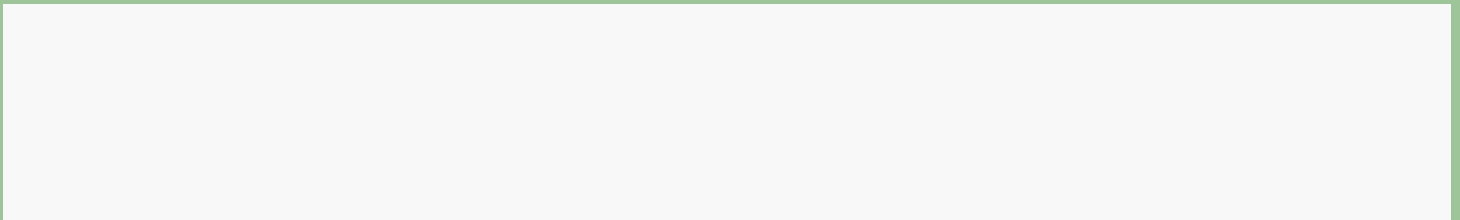
Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Guilt Tripper you might struggle with repeated flashbacks of mistakes you made in the past -- both visual flashbacks of the moments when you made mistakes and emotional flashbacks of shame. You may avoid trying new things or taking risks because of the potential for mistakes.

Emotionally, an Inner Guilt Tripper might leave you feeling guilt, shame, fear and anger or injustice at how you are treated compared to someone you inadvertently harmed.

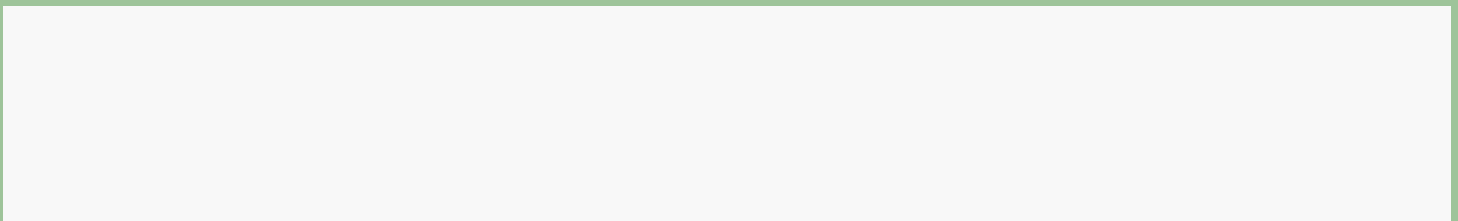


GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER GUILT TRIPPER

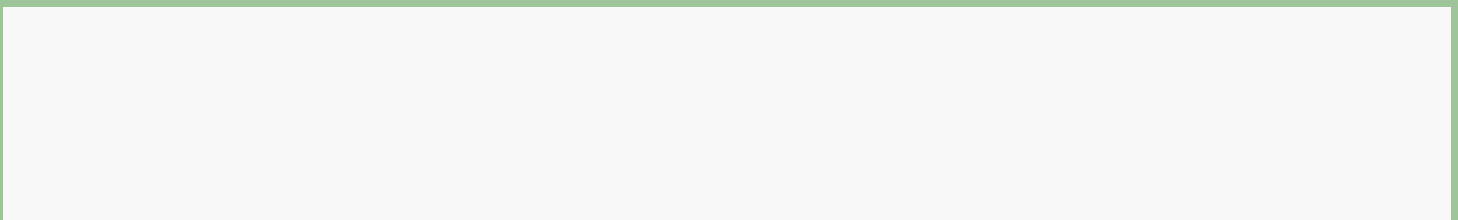
If you have an Inner Guilt Tripper what do you think caused it to develop as a way to keep you safe?



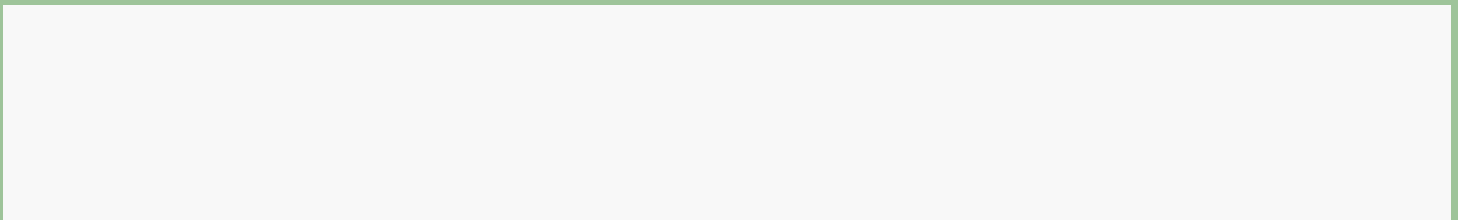
What does it say to you?



How does your Inner Guilt Tripper want you to behave?



How does your Inner Guilt Tripper think behaving that way will keep you safe?



DO YOU HAVE AN INNER UNDERMINER?

An inner critic who plays the role of the Inner Underminer tears you down to keep you small, silent and isolated, telling you that you are worthless and incapable, to prevent future harm and threat. The Underminer usually develops alongside and works in tandem with other critics such as Guilt Trippers and Destroyers to prevent future harm.

An Inner Underminer might develop if:

having self-confidence or self-esteem are interpreted as arrogance and you are scolded or shamed for feeling good about yourself. Sometimes, as a child in an abusive home your self-confident felt like a threat to adults who were causing you harm and they, therefore, targeted you for more abuse in order to squash your self-esteem.

another critic such as a Guilt Tripper needs an Underminer in a supportive role to establish safety.



HOW DOES AN INNER UNDERMINER BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Underminer it might be telling you: "Self confidence and self-esteem are wrong and bad," or "The safest thing to do is hate yourself so others don't see you as a threat." or "Don't call attention to yourself or stand out, you'll just be a target for others."

Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Underminer you might struggle with self-esteem, doing new things or activities that you aren't 100% certain you can do well, and be plagued by thoughts and beliefs that your life is meaningless and you don't matter.

Emotionally, an Inner Underminer might leave you feeling worthless, fearful of interacting with others, lonely, unappreciated and shameful.



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER UNDERMINER

If you have an Inner Underminer what do you think caused it to develop as a way to keep you safe?

What does it say to you?

How does your Inner Underminer want you to behave?

How does your Inner Underminer think behaving that way will keep you safe?

DO YOU HAVE AN INNER MOLDER/CONFORMER

An inner critic who plays the role of the Inner Molder/Conformer wants you to behave in a certain way that has been deemed acceptable and/or ideal by those that you hold in high esteem. This critic attacks when you don't conform and praises you when you do. It is the only critic that uses praise to reinforce desired behavior.

An Inner Molder/Conformer might develop if:
praise and favor were given to those in your family or social system who met established standards, and withheld from those who did not, if becoming who others wanted you to be garnered you the acceptance, love and attention that you very much wanted or allowed you to avoid harm, threat or abuse.



HOW DOES AN INNER MOLDER/CONFORMER BEHAVE?

If you have an Inner Molder/Conformer it might be telling you:

"To be accepted you have to do what others want you to do and be who others want you to be" or "Your needs and wants don't matter. You need to sacrifice those if you want to be loved and accepted," or "Caring for others and ignoring your own needs will get you the love you crave."

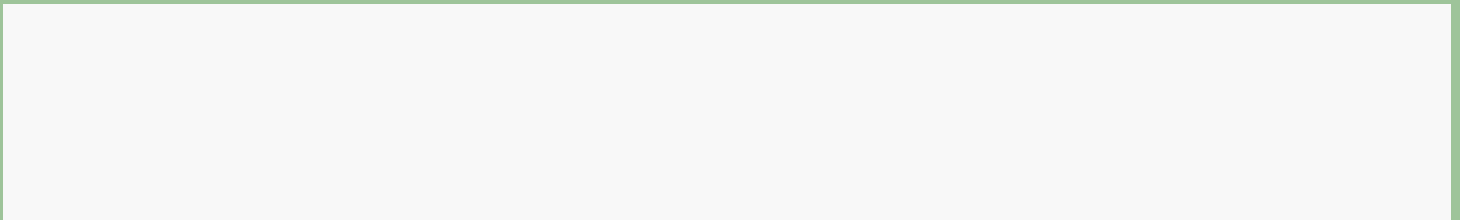
Behaviorally, if you have an Inner Molder/Conformer you will sacrifice your wants and needs to please others. You may become the caretaker of those around you, the one others depend on for comfort, to complete tasks others don't want to do or to always be available to meet their needs..

Emotionally, an Inner Controller might leave you feeling empty, resentful, lost, misunderstood, alone and unfulfilled.

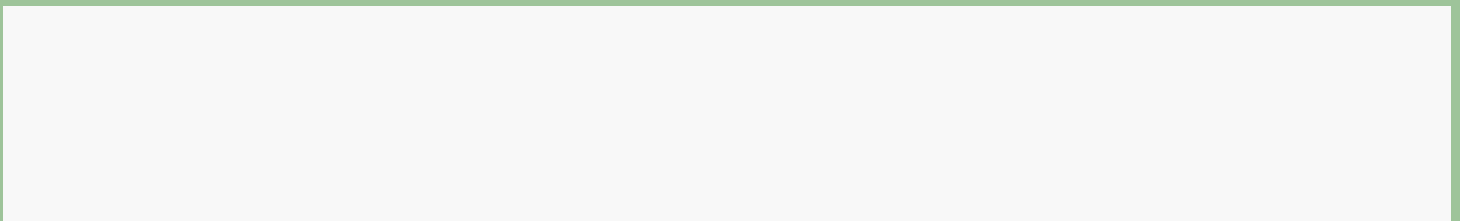


GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER MOLDER/CONFORMER

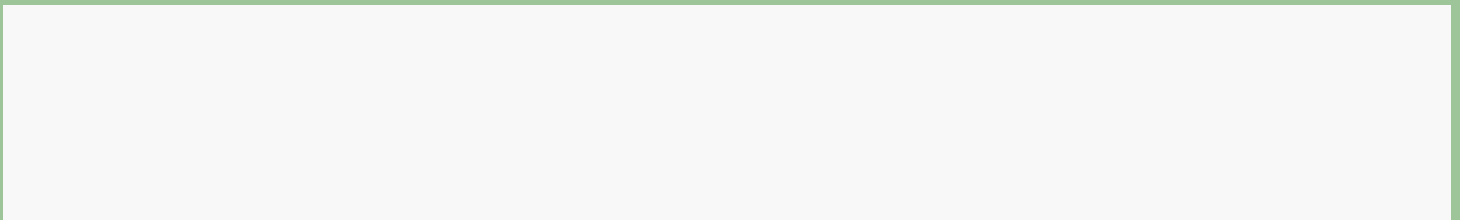
If you have an Inner Molder/Conformer what do you think caused it to develop as a way to keep you safe?



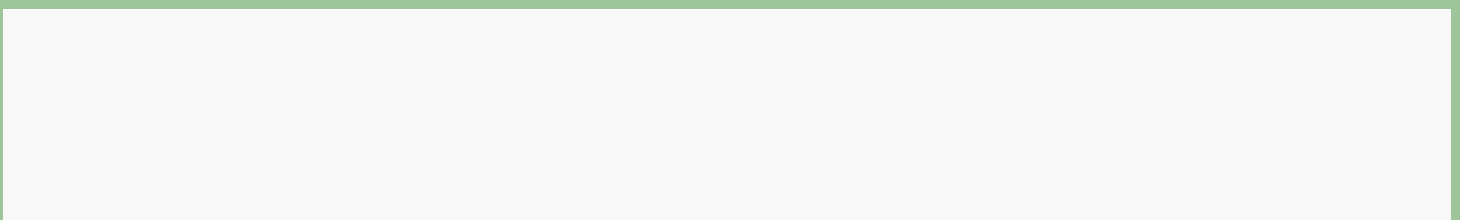
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How does your Inner Molder/Conformer want you to behave?

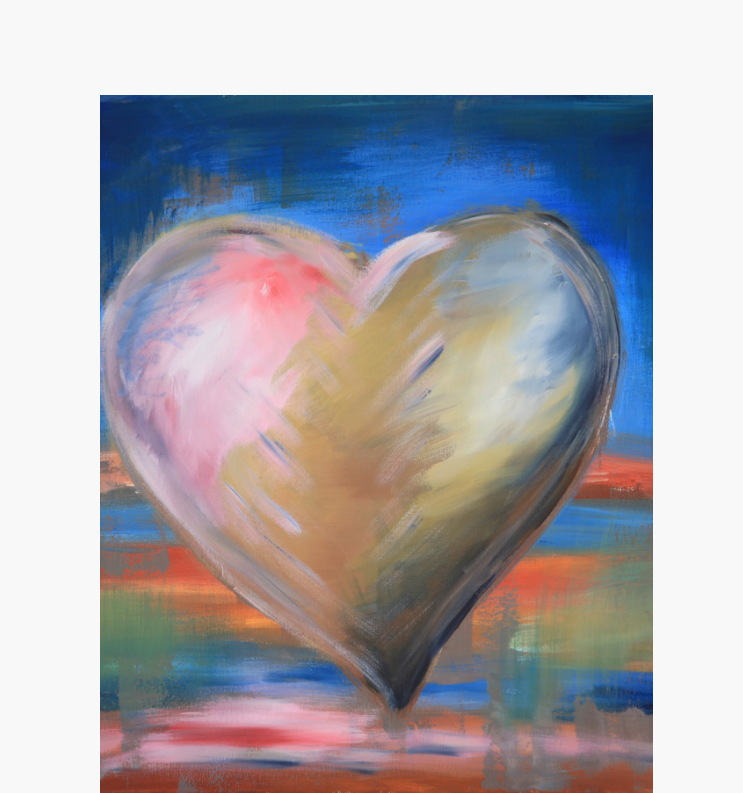


How does your Inner Molder/Conformer think behaving that way will keep you safe?



Many people will tell you that the way to handle an inner critic is to tell it to be quiet and go away, to push it out of your mind or even fight against it to gain control over your mindset.

But inner critics are largely misunderstood. They develop in order to protect us. And when we push them away they may come back stronger than ever because they think you still need protection and they don't want to fail you.

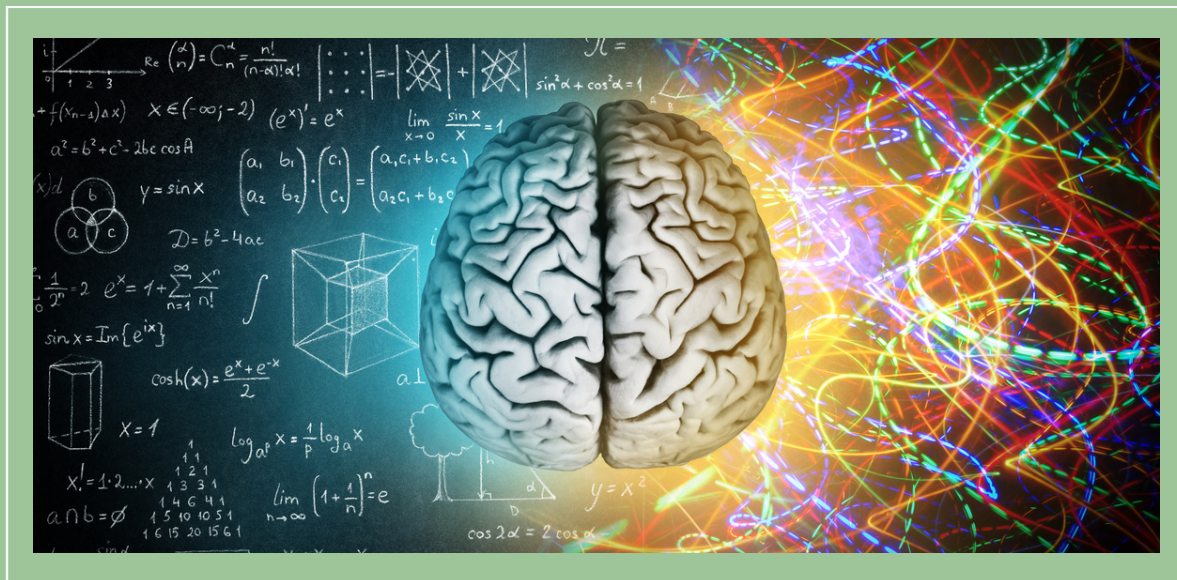


The best way to help an inner critic to stop engaging in the behavior it has learned to do in order to protect you is to build a relationship with it so you can help it understand that you are no longer under threat and they can stand down. Rather than treating your inner critic with the same lack of kindness and threat that caused it to come into being, we must meet it with compassion and acceptance.

BEFRIENDING YOUR INNER CRITIC

Pushing away, fighting against or trying to exile your inner critic may silence it temporarily. Yet, trying to transform your inner critic permanently with this strategy won't work because that behavior feels like a threat to it, and it exists solely to protect you from threat. Ironically, you are now treating it in a manner similar to how you were treated, with behavior similar to what brought it into its protective role. You will not be able to transform your inner critic permanently by subjecting it to the same treatment that caused it to come into being in service of your survival.

WHAT DOES YOUR INNER CRITIC NEED TO "STAND DOWN" FROM ITS PROTECTIVE ROLE? RELATIONSHIP AND COMPASSION



Remember, your inner critic resides in the Default Mode Network in your brain. And the single most powerful way to tap into neuroplasticity and reprogram the brain is compassion.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING YOUR INNER CRITIC

FOLLOW THESE STEPS

STEP ONE

STEP

1

Use the questions that follow the description of each type of inner critic to get to know and understand your inner critic. This is the beginning of befriending it.

Now that you've begun to befriend your inner critic you can offer it what it needs to know that you are now safe and its protection isn't needed. Offer it the words and treatment that it needed in the past -- that you are lovable, worthy and deserving of having your needs met. Provide compassion liberally!

STEP

2

STEP TWO

STEP

3

Engage in a daily practice of engaging with your inner critic with compassion. Be patient and relentless in your provision of compassion. Over time your brain will reprogram and your inner critic will transform.

STEP THREE

USE THE RESOURCES AT THE BACK OF THE WORKBOOK TO HELP YOU RELATE TO YOUR INNER CRITICS -- PARTS WORK AND VOICE DIALOGUE ARE POWERFUL METHODS FOR THIS PROCESS

ESTABLISH A PRACTICE OF OFFERING YOUR INNER CRITIC COMPASSION AND KINDNESS ON A DAILY BASIS

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

STRATEGIES AND IDEAS TO USE IF DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES ARISE

REAP THE BENEFITS OF YOUR CRITIC'S TRANSFORMATION

NEW ROLES YOUR INNER CRITIC WILL TAKE

INNER MENTOR

The Inner Mentor is a wise advisor who offers you guidance and options based upon its years of learning how to read the environment and people in order to detect threat. Now, instead of reacting to the threat with criticism it offers wisdom on how to problem solve and assess situations you encounter.

INNER CHEERLEADER

Your Inner Cheerleader encourages, supports and uplifts you through the process of building a new way of living in the world where you are now your own priority and building a life you love to live is your goal.

INNER CHAMPION

If your Inner Critic transforms into an Inner Champion it serves to advocate for your best interest as you navigate life. It champions your needs, wishes, and setting boundaries so your authentic self can develop as you stop people pleasing and caretaking with others.

RESOURCES

- EARLEY, JAY AND BONNIE WEISS. FREEDOM FROM YOUR INNER CRITIC: A SELF-THERAPY APPROACH. (2013) BOULDER, CO: SOUNDS TRUE, INC.
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