

The inner critic Friend, Foe or both?

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Let me tell you a story...

Major shift in recent psychology research – inner critic recognized as having a protective function, trying to anticipate danger, prevent failure, rejection, shame... ‘please don’t do something that could get you hurt.’



It is an adaptive strategy

- We're designed for survival and wired to be aware of danger
- Certain environments feel more dangerous than others – where mistakes carry interpersonal risk
- We can internalise other people's voices (critical parents, teachers, peers)



Researchers distinguish between:

- Adaptive function: aim is to avoid rejection, maintain attachment, improve performance, stay true to your values
- Maladaptive function: when it becomes harsh, unhelpful, undermining the self. And when it becomes habitual, unquestioned, subconscious

- When does your inner critic show up most frequently?
- Does it feel adaptive or unhelpfully harsh?

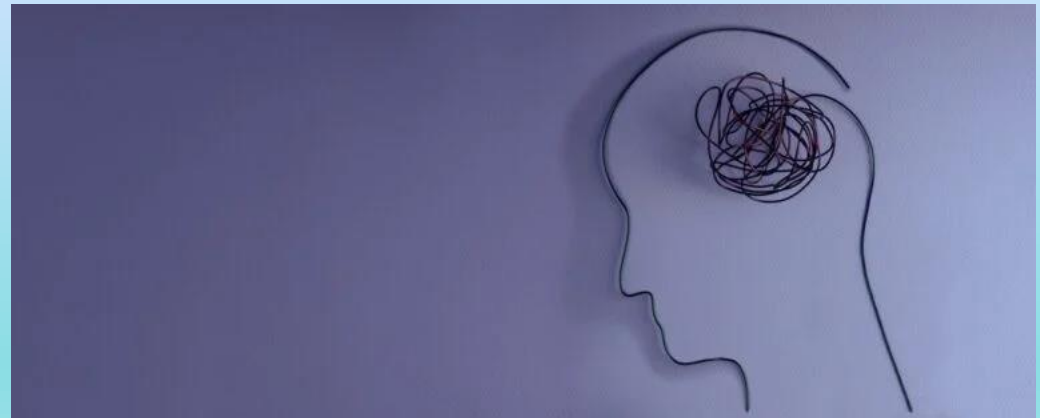


What does a 'harsh critic' sound like?

- They're all smarter/more confident than me
- Everyone else gets this except me
- I sounded so stupid just now
- I'm such an idiot
- This is rubbish—I can't submit this
- What's wrong with me?
- I should have figured this out by now
- I shouldn't need help

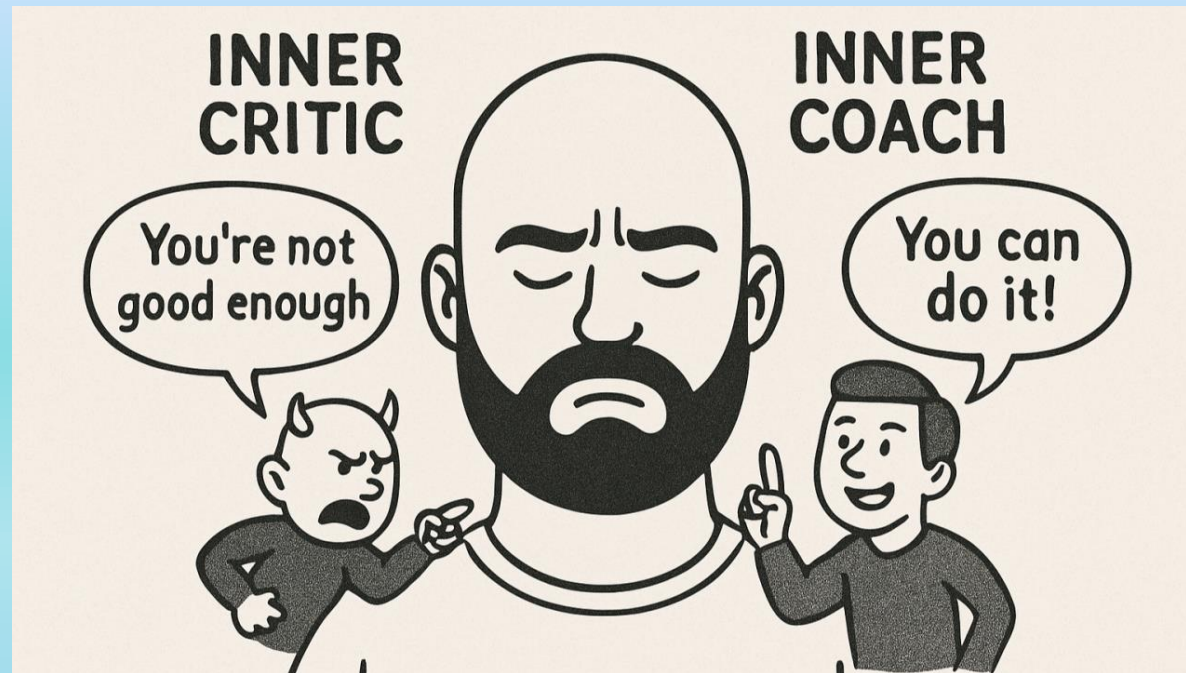
Excessive and harsh self-criticism is linked to:

- Lower confidence
- Lower motivation
- More procrastination
- Higher anxiety
- Low mood, depression



What can we do?

- We can't eliminate it. The better goal is to understand and balance it with a more compassionate part. Inner Critic versus inner Coach





- Notice when the inner critic shows up – name it
- Create distance/perspective ‘my inner critic is saying...’
- Bring on your inner coach to offer alternative, more helpful perspectives



- Treat yourself as you would treat a friend with whom you can be honest
- Re-frame failure as a learning experience 'everyone makes mistakes, I am not uniquely flawed.'

What would your inner coach say?

- They're all smarter/more confident than me
- Everyone else gets this except me
- I sounded so stupid just now
- I'm such an idiot
- This is rubbish—I can't submit this
- What's wrong with me?
- I should have figured this out by now
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- When you are feeling good about yourself, write down a list of your qualities, progress and achievements
- Surround yourself with supportive people
- Be aware of what influences you are taking in day to day



Conceptual shift re. inner critic

- Pathology v. Protective adaptation (that can become maladaptive)
- Eliminate self-criticism v. Notice, understand and update it
- 'Be positive' v. Build healthy self-compassion (inner coach)



The longest relationship you will ever have is with yourself – so would you like to take a harsh critic with you or your compassionate friend?

Questions? Comments?

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