

Silencing Your Inner Critic Following a Breakup

Objective

To reduce self-criticism and increase self-compassion following a breakup.

What to Know

Rejection and feeling like you failed because your relationship ended can contribute to a downward spiral of negative self-talk. You might believe your inner voice because it offers you “evidence” that what you feel so intensely is true.

Relentless self-criticism prolongs and complicates the grieving process following a breakup. Perhaps you are hard on yourself about your personality, your appearance, your intelligence, or things you said (or failed to say). Rather than beating yourself up, questioning your choices, and agonizing over what could have been, use this challenging time for self-care and compassion. Here are some suggestions to silence your inner critic.

1. Appreciate who you are – apart from the relationship. Who were you before your ex entered your life? Who do you *want* to be? Analyze your interests, hobbies, and friendships to begin the process of moving on. Make some short-term goals and use this time to grow into the person you wish to be.

2. Are your expectations unrealistic? Perhaps you blame yourself for not meeting a cultural standard that seems easy to achieve for others. The expectation that you should know exactly what makes the perfect relationship is unrealistic and self-defeating. Whenever you criticize yourself for being single, remember you are not flawed if you do not currently have a partner.

3. Consider what you learned about yourself. Each failed relationship is an opportunity to reflect on what you learned about yourself. When you notice you are in a self-critical spiral, take out a journal and write about what the relationship taught you. For example, “I know I could work on improving my communication skills,” or “I’d like to increase interests and hobbies of my own.”

4. Imagine how you will feel about the breakup in ten years. There will come a day when this loss does not feel so painful.

5. Pay attention to your thoughts. Be the observer the next time you criticize yourself. Notice how you feel, and if your thoughts make you feel awful, replace them with different, healthy thoughts. Create positive statements to replace the critical or negative ones.

6. Practice loving kindness. Be gentle with yourself when you are overwhelmed with negative self-talk. Keep in mind that beating up on yourself creates trauma. Talk to yourself as if you are a child being criticized. Be loving and kind to this child.

7. Avoid comparing yourself to others. Comparing yourself to others can create fear that impacts decision-making. If you believe you never measure up, you might wonder what the

point is in trying.

8. Ask yourself, “Is this true?” Whenever you criticize yourself, ask this question.

9. Be your own biggest supporter. Consider your past accomplishments, including the good things that happened during the relationship. Take time to acknowledge yourself.

10. Keep a gratitude journal. Reflect on what you are grateful for that happened in the past. Note all the good things currently in your life.

11. You are not the “mistake” – and you are not a failure. Everyone makes mistakes, and you are not a terrible person because of past relationship decisions.

12. Ask for help. Sometimes you might require outside help, and following a breakup is a great time to seek help so you can move forward with a clean slate.

13. Immediately stop negative thoughts. Create a positive statement to replace negative self-talk. The most powerful words are, “I am.” For example, you might say, “I am smart, funny, and a great cook.” Be mindful of the statements you say to yourself when you are upset, angry, and fearful. Turn those statements around as quickly as possible using positive “I am” statements.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

Who were you before your ex entered your life?

Who do you *want* to be?

Write down some of ways you criticize yourself.

Who can support you during this difficult time? Write down the names and phone numbers of at least four people.

Write down your interests, hobbies, and friendships and make some short-term goals.

Write about what the relationship taught you. If you need additional space, use a journal or notebook.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you while completing this activity? Explain.

What was the biggest obstacle you encountered when completing this exercise? Describe.

Were you successful at silencing your inner critic? _____

Why or why not? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
