

Negative Self-Talk & Resources

- intro -

Prepared by Root Cuthbertson 2020

Ideally, an Inner Transition aims to re-frame negative self-talk and reduce self-criticism. Language is powerful. Words affect reality. For instance, the word 'should' can transform into the word 'could' or 'might'. Post-modern dancer and journalist Nancy Stark Smith recommends replacing 'ambition' with 'curiosity.' Often the word 'but' can be upgraded to 'and.'

Negative self-talk is a large topic with many available resources. The following resources are intended as an introduction. They draw from contemporary teachers who have suggested various practices for western audiences. This guide signposts a few recommendations for beginners. You could start with these, and if you'd like to continue learning, there are plenty more resources to discover.

Benefits of Re-Framing Negative Self-Talk

(Nick Wignall - Elizabeth Scott)

Re-framing negative self-talk has many benefits, for example:

Improved	Reduced
Optimism & Outlook	Depression & Negativity
Self-Awareness & Personal Insight	Rumination (chewing over thoughts)
Empathy & Self-Compassion	Self-Criticism & Self-Judgment
Assertiveness & Self-Confidence	Worry & Anxiety
Sobriety	Addiction Issues
Motivation & Productivity	Perfectionism & Procrastination
Seeing Opportunity	Self-Limitation & Powerlessness
Capitalizing on Opportunity & Success	Sense of unachievable goals
Communication & Relationships	Relational Conflict, Insecurity & Neediness
Mental & Emotional Well-being	Stress

Inner Speech

Most individuals maintain some form of self-talk or inner speech, like the narrator or the inner voice they hear when reading. This is a normal part of a person's sense of self. Most individuals' self-talk includes a running commentary on their:

- thoughts and emotions
- self-image and self-reflection
- planning, problem-solving, and critical thinking
- conscious or subconscious beliefs.

The Inner Critic

Negative self-talk can take the form of an 'inner critic.' The inner critic typically evolves from internalising the voices of other people saying how an individual 'should' think, feel, behave, etc. These messages – received since childhood from parents, friends, or society – are the source of negative judgments, limiting beliefs, and fictional stories. The inner critic can perpetuate such negative messages, often by repeating the same beliefs or stories, and can contribute to maintaining coping strategies or reactionary behaviours even when they are no longer helpful (see [Compassion for Challenging Behaviour](#))

The inner critic can become very strong and begin to dominate an individual's choices, especially in the absence of self-compassion (see [Empathy & Compassion](#)). The inner critic can use simple or sophisticated tactics to keep individuals disempowered, limited, or fearful. To begin noticing what unhelpful, irrational, or untrue beliefs are dominating one's choices, it can be helpful to first identify, and then listen to, the inner critic. Acting upon what the inner critic says is rarely helpful. An Inner Transition can involve becoming familiar with the inner critic, re-framing negative self-talk, increasing options, and allowing more choice.

Psychologist Guy Winch describes some common 'psychological injuries' related to negative self-talk: failure, rejection, rumination, guilt and depression. Individuals who follow their inner critic:

When experiencing:	Are less likely to:	Are more likely to:	And likely reinforce:
Failure	respond resiliently	react defensively	limiting beliefs
Rejection	respond with self-compassion	reduce self-esteem	negative self-image
Rumination (chewing over thoughts)	forgive and let go easily	self-criticise	worry and anxiety
Guilt & Depression	respond with hope or optimism	assume the worst	procrastination and pessimism

The inner critic can use examples of failure, rejection, rumination, or guilt to reinforce negative beliefs and dominate an individual's choices.

Reinforcing The Inner Critic

(Eva Taylor Grant)

Certain behaviours reinforce the inner critic and increase negativity such as:

- Denying one has an inner critic or negative self-talk
- Avoiding self-care (see [Date With Your Self](#))
- Poor health habits – physical, mental, emotional (see Self-Care Guides: [Physical & Sensory, Nature, Mental & Worldview, Emotional & Social](#))
- Too much time alone (see [Burnout to Balance](#))
- Not seeking support (see [Seeking Support](#))
- Too much time with negative people (see Self-Care Guide: [Emotional & Social](#))
- Not addressing relationship problems (see [Task-Process-Relationship](#))

Individuals can become more aware of such behaviours and aim to replace them with ones that contribute to well-being.

Kinds of Negative Self-Talk

(Dana Sparks – Nick Wignall)

Some of the many kinds of negative self-talk the Inner Critic commonly uses include:

	Inner Critic script:	Re-framed script:
Personalising	It's all about me.	I am one of many factors.
Filtering	I magnify the bad and minimise the good.	I am honest about the bad and the good.
Polarising	Win-lose, either-or thinking.	Win-win, both-and thinking.
Catastrophising	I predict the worst will happen.	I am curious and prepared for anything that happens.
Self-Criticising	I can't; I don't deserve to.	I could; I might; I deserve to.
Victimising	Nobody values or cares.	I value, and I care.
Self-Demanding	It's not enough nor perfect.	It's enough; it will do.
Using 'Should'	They say I ought to. I'm obligated. I should.	I'd like to. I have a choice.
Labeling	This is in a category I already know.	I'm curious how this relates to what I already know.

	Inner Critic script:	Re-framed script:
Over-generalising	It's always like this everywhere for everyone.	It's sometimes like this in some places for some people.
Assuming	I predict what others will say, think, or feel.	I'm curious what others will say, think, or feel.
Emotional Reasoning	My irrational emotions tell me it's true.	My rational consideration tells me it's true.

The Inner Critic Can Be Wrong

(Nick Wignall)

While the Inner Critic can use simple or sophisticated tactics to get its way, it can also rely on habitual patterns that do not accurately describe reality. The Inner Critic can exaggerate or distort reality and overfocus on negative interpretations. Psychologist Nick Wignall calls this 'cognitive distortion,' saying it is commonly associated with negative self-talk.

Wignall suggests that negative self-talk is not an intellectual problem, it's rather a habitual problem. Most people understand that their negative self-talk is not completely true. The problem is their habit of repeating negative self-talk as if it were true. Part of an Inner Transition is learning to catch the Inner Critic whenever it presents inaccurate negative self-talk and re-frame it.

Re-Framing Negative Self-Talk

(Nick Wignall)

Nick Wignall offers Cognitive Restructuring, an aspect of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, as a useful technique for re-framing negative self-talk. It relies on consistently identifying habitual thoughts and re-framing them. This can be a transformative part of many kinds of Inner Transition. There are six basic steps in Cognitive Restructuring:

1. Stop, pause, breathe, and re-center. (see [Mindfulness - Re-Centering](#))
2. Identify what triggered the thought.
3. Notice any habitual thought patterns, like negative self-talk.
4. Identify any emotional reactions and rate how intense they are.
5. Re-frame, re-script, and generate alternative thoughts.
6. Re-rate the intensity of emotions.

R.A.I.N. Technique

(Michele McDonald – Tara Brach)

To re-frame negative self-talk, psychologist and meditation teacher Tara Brach offers the R.A.I.N. Technique, based on Buddhist principles and Michele McDonald's model.

R ecognise:	Acknowledge the Inner Critic and negative self-talk.
A cknowledge:	Allow the negative self-talk, and relax resistance. Pause to reflect.
I nvestigate:	Actively inquire about the negative self-talk with kindness and concern.
N atural awareness:	Non-identification with the negative self-talk, and freedom of choice.

Like Wignall, Brach emphasises that the R.A.I.N. Technique is not a one-time magic pill, but a practice of consistently interrupting negative self-talk in order to break old habits and form new thought patterns. Gradually individuals can reinforce new habits and make an Inner Transition toward what she calls 'natural loving awareness.'

Tips for Re-Framing Negative Self-Talk

(Elizabeth Scott - Jancee Dunn - Tamar Chansky – Brené Brown)

- **Practice self-compassion** (see [Empathy & Compassion](#)). Be kinder to yourself, and reduce your self-judgment. Most people have shortcomings or limitations; it's a common part of the human condition. Try embracing your imperfections. Be more willing to mess up, forgive yourself, and move on.
- **Reduce the power of your Inner Critic.** Become more aware of your Inner Critic's activity and clever tactics. Try giving your Inner Critic a nickname, and their often-repeated negativity a title. For instance, 'Here's the Judge (or Nag, or Perfectionist, or Gremlin) with that same old Guilt Story (or tirade, rant, harangue, conspiracy theory)!' Constrain your Inner Critic's negativity: let it only be allowed certain hours per day, or on certain topics. Take your negative self-talk less seriously.
- **Investigate the truth.** Negative thoughts are not always true; they can be skewed, biased, or based on incorrect assumptions. See if your Inner Critic is wrong, maybe by magnifying or minimizing aspects of the truth. Contradict your Inner Critic and dilute your fear, judgment, shame, or guilt if they are not actually so strongly yours.
- **Adjust the frame.** Try enlarging your perspective or scope. In all of history, among all people from your background, surely your shortcomings are not the worst. Your negative thoughts, emotions, or actions are not the totality of who you are. You have good points too. Try to see things in a more optimistic context. How might your best friend describe the situation? With honesty, love, compassion, and desire for you to improve?

- **Adjust the language.** Sometimes you can interrupt your Inner Critic in the middle of a negative phrase, contradict it, and re-phrase it. You can mute the negativity by making it more neutral: e.g. adjust 'I hate this' to 'I don't like this.' Imagine you were talking to your best friend, or to a child. How could you re-phrase things more positively? e.g. adjust what you *can't* do to what you *can* do. Try some affirmations to expand what may be possible for you; and make them realistic to bypass your Inner Critic's objections.
- **Share with others; seek support.** To help reduce shame and reinforce your re-frame, share some of your negative self-talk with a close friend or family member. Simply being witnessed, or saying it out loud, can be very helpful. Your Inner Critic may begin to appear unreasonable, unrealistic, or ridiculous.

“(People) are disturbed, not by things, but by the notions that they form about things”. – Epictetus (c. 55-135 CE) Greek Stoic philosopher.

Related Inner Transition Resources

Inquiry: Empathy & Compassion
 Compassion for Challenging Behaviour
 Date With Your Self
 Self-Care Guides - Physical & Sensory, Emotional, Mental, Social, Worldview, Nature
 Inquiry: Burnout to Balance - Doing & Being
 Seeking Support
 Task-Process-Relationship
 Mindfulness - Re-Centering

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