



3 WAYS TO QUIET YOUR INNER CRITIC

and even harness it, so *it serves you*

By Claudia Olivie

Quiet & Harness

Your Inner Critic

Learn three ways you can quiet your critical inner voice and even how you can harness that voice to serve you in caring for yourself.

ABOUT THE INNER CRITIC

The inner critic is that voice in our heads, that subconscious part of ourselves, that tears us down.

It has all kinds of thing to say about what we're doing, how we're doing it, what we're not doing, what we're thinking, what we're saying, etc. It's always telling us we're not good enough, and that we're not doing things right.

The inner critic is that inner voice that tells us we're not enough of this or we're too much of that.

It has an endless list of things we could and SHOULD be better at – whether it's the way we look, how good we are at our job, our relationships, our family, our home, our car, our pets... the list goes on and on.

The inner critic has opinions and comments about everything – often even blatantly contradicting itself.

I can't count how many times I've heard someone tell me their inner critic says they should be two things that are mutually exclusive – like a full-time stay-at-home parent *and* the CEO of a fortunate 500 company working 80+ hour weeks.

Nothing is ever good enough for the inner critic.

It keeps us from showing up in our lives. It has us hold back. It can paralyze us in fear. In listening to our inner critic, we can be left feeling dissatisfied and critical of ourselves no matter what we do or achieve.

WHY FIGHTING THE INNER CRITIC DOESN'T WORK

When we bring the inner critic out into the light, a really normal reaction is to want to get rid of it, destroy it, and vilify it. Thing is, trying to get rid of our inner critic doesn't work.

Fighting our inner critic tends to make it louder, stronger, and more stealthy.

It may get sneakier on you, but the inner critic doesn't go away.

Even in our fight to get rid of it, the inner critic takes over. You may find your inner critic telling you that if you were more perfect you would have already gotten rid of it by now.

Our inner critic will grab ahold of anything and it so easily sneaks under the radar, often disguised as self-improvement.

The inner critic is grounded in instinct and socialization – it's part of our built-in "operating system". We can't just think it away or will it away. The truth is, it may go underground and get sneakier, but it's not going anywhere.

Since we're never going to get rid of our inner critic entirely, rather than fighting it, I want to encourage you to explore how you can quiet your inner critic and even how you can *harness* it.

Our inner critic can be our enemy, while we strive to satisfy and please that voice, or we can take back the lead and use it to serve and support us.

So let's dive into a few ways we can start to do that.

1. RECOGNIZING, ACKNOWLEDGING & NAMING

One of the most helpful things we can start with is recognizing the inner critic – actually seeing the things our inner critical voice says to us, bringing it to the light, and distinguishing that voice from our truth.

Our inner critic thrives in the shadows, so bringing it to the light is important, even if it's uncomfortable at first.

Start by noticing what your inner critic says to you. Play with the prompts below, and feel free to add anything else that shows up for you.

As you answer the prompts, notice if your inner critic is critiquing how you're responding the questions or is encouraging you not to "admit" certain things.

Remember no one else needs to see or know any of your responses, and you don't need to be perfect with it. The point here is to start bringing the things your inner critic voice says into the open so you can see it more clearly.

You may notice some physical or emotional reactions as you really look at the things your inner critic says to you. Take your time with it, notice the sensations you're experiencing, and give yourself space to feel them. If you need to take a break, do so.

What does that critical inner voice tell you about your life, your work, your friends, your family, your pets, your home, your car?

What does that critical inner voice tell you about your personality, your struggles, your accomplishments, what you should/shouldn't be proud of?

What does that critical inner voice tell you about how others perceive you, what others think of you, what society as a whole thinks of you, and how you show up in the world?

What does that critical inner voice tell you about your appearance, your body, your voice, your hair, your skin, your eyes, your clothing?

What does that critical inner voice tell you about how you are as a friend, a parent, a child, a sibling, a spouse/partner, a caregiver, a boss, an employee, a business owner?

What that critical inner voice tell you about how you eat, how you move, how you care for yourself, how you don't care for yourself?

What does that critical inner voice tell you that you should be doing or not doing? Saying or not saying? Thinking or not thinking?

What does your inner critic say to you most often? Where is it loudest?

Sometimes our inner critic sounds like someone from our life – a parent, teacher, sibling, boss, or even a personification of more general society. It may have a different voice when talking about different areas of your life. Are there any that stand out?

As you reflect on your responses, notice if the actual naming and voicing of the things your inner critic says to you removes some of their power and hold on you.

You may notice some things simply fall away, and you may notice that other things don't. That's helpful information to know about yourself.

The things that have a harder hold on you are likely more deeply ingrained through instincts and social conditioning. Simply being aware of that can help when they show up.

2. SOFT EYES

Now that we've taken a look at how your inner critic speaks to you and what that voice says, you may find yourself frustrated, angry, upset, or sad.

A common response is to want to just destroy our inner critic and be rid of it forever.

But arguing with our inner critic, being angry at it, even trying to cover it up with pleasant affirmations to counter it – none of those things work.

Instead, I want to encourage you to take a look at the inner critic as a distinct entity separate from your true self, and start to understand where that voice comes from.

Our inner critic is grounded in instinct and social conditioning. It stems from fear and a protective instinct.

It's striving for us to be perfect because the more perfect we are, the more it thinks we'll survive.

Our inner critic is a survival mechanism that is desperately trying to keep us alive and safe. Even if it's misguided, tends to be overly dramatic, and isn't necessarily grounded in reality, it's trying to protect us.

Our inner critic is always on alert, always afraid, and never takes a break.

Take a moment and picture your inner critic as a person in the real world who is that afraid, that stressed out, that concerned, 24/7. It never gets a break from anxiety and fear.

Go ahead and draw a little picture of your inner critic here – stick figures are perfectly fine (and notice if your inner critic is critiquing your drawing):

Imagine a real person who is that anxious, worried, and fearful all the time.

How would you view that person out in the real world?

Would you have some compassion for them? Maybe you could see the pain and suffering they're in. Maybe you could see how they're stuck in this loop and can't see outside of their intense fears, anxieties, and concerns.

How would you listen to that person?

Would you take everything they say to you as truth? Maybe you would compare what they said to what you see as true for you. Maybe you would listen underneath the specifics of what they're saying to hear the pain, fear, and concern that it's grounded in.

Now that you have this image of your inner critic as a distinct entity, let's give them a name.

Draw your inner critic again and use whatever name works for you. Maybe it's Ethel or Pam, or Stressed Out Suzy – it's entirely up to you.

Giving our inner critic a name and seeing that voice as a distinct entity, looking at it as if it were a real person in the real world, can help us have some compassion for why that voice is always anxious and afraid.

It also helps us create some space between what that voice says and what we take in. Our inner critic is not us. It's a survival mechanism that's grounded in instinct and social conditioning.

Understanding where that inner critic voice comes from and seeing it as a separate entity can give us the space to view it with more compassion, without also taking what it says as truth.

3. THE SELF-CARE BAROMETER

Now that you've brought your inner critic to light and can see it as a separate entity that you can have some compassion for, without necessarily taking on what it says as truth, there's one more way you can quiet your inner critic and even harness it.

As counter-intuitive as it sounds, your inner critic can actually serve you in caring for yourself.

You may have noticed that when you're feeling really good and taking good care of yourself, your inner critic doesn't bug you quite as much.

But when you're struggling, when you don't feel well, when you don't have what you need, that voice gets louder.

That's useful.

Our inner critic's volume – how loud that voice is, how much it's talking to us, how much space it's taking up in our minds – that can act as an indicator for when we need more self-care.

Maybe we need a nap or a walk. Maybe we need some time alone or maybe we need some time with friends. Maybe we need to laugh or dance. Maybe we need to have a tough conversation.

Rather than listening to the actual content of what that inner critical voice is saying, we can pay attention to its volume, treating it like a self-care barometer.

inner critic's
volume as a



self-care
barometer

When that voice gets loud, we can see it as a flag that there's something we need.

Then rather than beating ourselves up, we can take a step back and do something to take care of ourselves.

We can get some sleep, pause, cancel what we can, move things off our plate (even temporarily), get some alone time, call a friend – whatever’s right for us in that particular moment.

As we get what we need, as we take better care of ourselves, that voice will get quieter.

Again we can use our inner critic’s volume to notice when we’re caring well for ourselves.

We may notice the voice is less penetrating. We may notice more space between what our inner critic says and what we take in. We may notice that it just doesn’t quite hit us in the same way.

So rather than just throwing out the inner critic altogether, we can actually harness it and use it to help us care for ourselves by listening to its overall volume (rather than listening to the specifics of what it’s saying).

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ABOUT CLAUDIA

[Claudia Olivie](#) (she/her) teaches classes and workshops on wellness and self-care, including her [Magnificent Mornings](#) workshop on creating a morning routine that deeply supports you.

She loves teaching folx (and entire families) how we can create a "User's Manual" for ourselves, so we (and our loved ones) have a better understanding of what helps us show up the ways we want to, with a whole lot more ease – and how we can troubleshoot when things go sideways, because life is messy and rarely goes to plan.

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