

Depression Dis-Courages: The Inner Voice of Self-Criticism Keeps You Locked in Negativity

“Oh, you are so stupid!”

“Can’t you ever just keep your mouth shut?”

“Well, sure, your drawing is okay, but you are no Picasso!”

“You will never be good enough to play your (flute, guitar, piano, violin....) in public.”

“Don’t brag. No one wants to hear you talk about yourself.”

Are these phrases like the sound track in your mind?

When we hear criticism from our parents or teachers the message sticks and you have to deliberately shrug it off. If you are depressed, it seems as if they play over and over forever. By the time you are an adult, you no longer need to hear it from someone else – you carry that negative voice in your own mind. You criticize yourself without any help from others, and that discourages you when it comes to trying something new or stretching toward a challenge. Low on energy with depression, your self-criticism robs you of whatever motivation you may possess.

Consider the impact of this. Everyone needs to have a bit of courage to take their talents into a new arena. Stating your ideas in a meeting or showing your creative side (whether drawing or writing or playing) or trying out for a team/a promotion/a new job: these things take confidence and courage if you are going to take the gamble of showing what you can do and seeing how it turns out. If you lived with parental criticism or, worse, apathy toward your efforts to do something new and different, your willingness to try is eroded. Later, when you hear the criticism in your mind, *you Dis-Courage yourself*. Eventually you undermine your own performance and may even quit in frustration as you hear the dis-couraging remarks from your childhood, “Don’t make such a spectacle of yourself!” “Don’t be such a show-off!” “Who told you that you are good enough to try for that?” When you are depressed, your thoughts tend to be imbalanced toward the negative anyway, so when this is the voice you hear when you have the chance to try something new, it can be very hard to shake off.

The voice need not have been spoken. You may carry the silent voice of being ignored when you ask for attention or show a parent your art or schoolwork or your perfect cartwheel. Mary knew she would have trouble qualifying for a promotion because she stops herself from telling her colleagues or boss about a success. In exploring her reluctance to tell others of her good work, she remembered how, at age 10, she proudly showed her mother a writing assignment with a big, red **“A+, Well Done!!!”** at the top. Her mother, without a word, tossed the paper into the trash and told her to go set the table for dinner. Mary carried that non-response with her as evidence that any of her efforts are un-remarkable and no cause for pride or sense of accomplishment.

You may have been taught and now may believe that self-confidence or accepting praise from others means that you are conceited. Quite the opposite, legitimate praise empowers you when you receive it and those to whom you give it. Praise for a genuine accomplishment provides courage to try. When you

give praise or accept praise, you En-Courage yourself or others to stretch the limits, accept a challenge, or try harder. When children believe that their efforts make their parents feel proud, they do not stop trying. They do more of what earns the praise. All of your life, if you can hear the voice of praise for genuine accomplishments, you want to put in more effort.

Finding the energy to recognize praise and take it in when you hear it or even offer it to yourself is much harder to do when depressed. When you are depressed it is harder than you may imagine to identify and eliminate the Dis-Couraging impact of the inner criticism and make the switch to hearing praise. It is necessary to first identify the negative voice in order to erase it and replace it with the positive voice. You will have to use your thinking brain to make that happen. Your brain gets stuck on negativity and has limited energy to fight back so deciding how to do that uses your resources to best advantage. You can begin the process of En-Couragement by using your rational brain to evaluate that negativity and get willingness to erase it and replace it with positives.

1. Make a rational decision that self-criticism is a waste of time and worse, it dis-courages you from efforts to succeed.
2. Make this reasonable choice: believe that you will be more motivated from praise that en-courages you than from criticism.
3. Decide to believe this truth: making progress demonstrates effort and you deserve to feel pride in accomplishment.
4. Then make an agreement with yourself to notice what happens when you have worked hard, practiced hard, or show some progress at work or at a creative endeavor. (There is usually a positive outcome to a project, a relationship, a talent improving, etc.)
5. Next, notice what *you feel like* when you see progress after effort. (What you will notice is that you feel good.)
6. Then, if that inner voice pipes up with a criticism that what you did is not good *enough*, replace this with the deliberate voice that says, "I am making progress, and that is good. I can try more whenever I am ready."

When you connect accomplishment with feeling good and recognize how en-couraged you feel to do or try more, you are on the path to eliminating the impact of self-criticism on your depression. You will feel more motivation and energy.

No matter whose voice provided the sound track, you can replace it with a new track of en-couraging, legitimate praise. If you must hear a voice in your mind, it may as well be one that gives you courage!