



# Silencing your inner critic

Reflection guide

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## Overview

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Define self-esteem and its components
- Identify sources of adult self-esteem
- Make connection between irrational thinking and low self-esteem
- Learn how to interpret comments of inner “Critic”
- Learn strategies for controlling the “Critic” and enhancing self-esteem
- Create personal plan for developing positive self-esteem

## Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

# Job aids or activity materials

## Self-assessment

Please read each question and indicate if it is true:

Question	Most of the time	Some of the time	Hardly ever
Do you like and accept yourself the way you are?			
Are you comfortable talking about your strengths and weaknesses?			
Can you receive compliments?			
Can you accept criticism, knowing that you don't have to be perfect?			
Are you comfortable with your appearance?			
Do your behaviours and actions reflect your values?			
Are you open to new experiences?			
At work and in other social experiences, do you believe you have interesting things to say?			
Do you believe you deserve to be loved and respected?			
Do you need positive feedback from others in order to believe that you've done a good job?			

Do you feel that you must please everyone all the time?			
Do you express your needs, wants, and preferences?			
Do you believe that you are competent?			
Do you take yourself very seriously?			

## The components of self-esteem

**Nathaniel Branden**, a psychologist who has written many books about self-esteem, claims that humans are the one species that can create a vision of what values are worth pursuing and then live by the opposite! The following list contains positive behaviours that build strong self-esteem and those that contribute to diminished self-worth. Think about those qualities that you have and how they relate to your sense of self-esteem.

Builds self-esteem	Diminishes self-worth
Focusing	Non-focusing
Thinking	Non-thinking
Awareness	Unawareness
Clarity	Obscurity or vagueness
Respect for reality	Avoidance of reality
Respect for facts	Indifference to facts



Perseverance in the effort to understand	Abandonment of the effort to understand
Loyalty to personal values (integrity)	Disloyalty to personal values
Honesty with self	Dishonesty
Self-confrontation	Self-avoidance
Receptivity to new ideas	Closed-mindedness
Willingness to notice and correct errors	Perseverance in errors
Concern with consistency	Disregard of contradictions

Adapted from The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem by Nathaniel Branden.

### Sources of self-esteem

Self-awareness, self-respect, and self-compassion – the chief components of self-esteem – come from a lifetime of experiences, accomplishments, failures, and what we hear about ourselves from others.

- Childhood messages (from parents, teachers, and other important people in our lives)
- Reinforcement in youth
- Personal internal voice
- Reinforcement in adulthood
- Biology

## Irrational thinking

There are patterns of thinking that can distort the messages we give ourselves and discolor what other people say to us. Which one(s) do you use?

- Filtering
- Good or bad thinking
- Catastrophizing/awfulizing
- Personalizing

## The hidden agenda

Behind some of the messages that we give ourselves is a “hidden agenda” – the insecurity and doubt we feel when we compare ourselves to others. If you can identify your hidden agenda and increase your self-awareness, eventually you can change the way you assess yourself. This process can boost your self-esteem and silence your inner “Critic.”

The Old Message	The Hidden Agenda	The New Message
In this column, list negative messages you hear from your inner “Critic.”	List how the message positively or negatively reinforces aspects of your self-image.	Rewrite the negative self-statements to eliminate absolutes, generalizations, and words with a negative meaning.
I wish I had her figure/his build! Mine is the worst I’ve ever seen.	I always compare myself to other people. Sometimes it makes me feel good if I’m more attractive than they are. Usually it confirms that I’m a “loser.”	Although it would be nice to have a more attractive body, I’m healthy and energetic. If I put my mind to it, I could exercise more to tone up.
I won’t be able to participate at the meeting the way other people do.	Every time I try to talk up during team meetings, I think about how hard it was to give my opinions in school. I had a couple	I’m an adult now. I can take the risk to speak up because I do have good ideas. At the last meeting, someone on my

	of teachers who used to make fun of kids who gave the wrong answers.	team voiced the same suggestion that I was reluctant to express.

## Refuting the “critic”

You can change the voice of your “critic” by using logic and reason to create rational thoughts. By “neutralizing” your language, you can increase self-esteem.

List one or two personal irrational thoughts, and then refute your “Critic” by creating rational statements.

Irrational thoughts The voice of the “Critic”	Rational thoughts The voice of strong self-esteem
“I can never say ‘No’.”	“I often have a hard time saying ‘no’ to my children when we’re in a store, but I am able to set limits on their TV viewing.”
“I’m always at fault.”	

## Enriching my self-esteem

Below is a list of strategies that contribute to strong self-esteem. Check one strategy that you choose to work on during the next month.

- Use logic to refute irrational thoughts.
- Eliminate absolute and negative descriptive words.
- Use humour, and don't take self too seriously.
- Use the "thought stopping" approach.
- Stop comparing self to others.
- Be self-aware (of feelings, thoughts, behaviours, etc.).
- Be self-accepting and self-compassionate, especially with deficiencies.
- Be self-responsible.
- Affirm your strengths.
- Be assertive.
- Keep self in continuous learning mode.
- Get support and be with positive people.
- Make list of past successes and positive attributes.
- Give to others.
- Do what you love.
- Walk the talk (match your behaviours to your values).
- Act as if you have strong self-esteem even when you feel you don't.

What specific plan do you have for acting on that strategy?

## The highs and lows of self-esteem

By answering these questions, you may gain insight into what enables you to feel good about yourself and what can erode your self-esteem.

Recall a situation or time when you experienced low self-esteem.

What contributed to your low self-esteem?

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What did you do to improve how you felt about yourself?

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Recall a situation or time when you experienced high self-esteem.

What contributed to you feeling good about yourself?

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What insights have you gained about yourself over the years, and how have you used this knowledge to strengthen your self-esteem?

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