



Anxietylab.org

3-4-5 Program Course

Understanding The Inner Critic

This is a core problem for most child abuse survivors. The inner critic is the destructive voice we hear in our heads that constantly brings us down with harsh negative criticism about everything we are and everything we do. It is the voice everyone has but turned way up in volume and harshness. For abuse survivors, this inner voice can be a source of horrific torment as it keeps us scared or angry and feeling bad about ourselves all the time. The internal sense of shame can become almost overwhelming. *"Toxic shame"* is the term given to the extreme negative beliefs of the abuse survivor. And to make it worse, our culture can often make survivors feel shame for their experiences – the shame that it happened, and the shame of our struggles afterward.

The negative things that happened to us changed our brains to be wired to look for problems. It is a survival mechanism. Being abused when we were small and vulnerable taught our brains to be on guard all the time. It also taught us to feel badly. Early experiences of violence and intense fear burn these beliefs into our physical brains – our neural pathways store these energies until they are resolved.

As children, we can't help but unconsciously interpret our abuse as a sign that we're no good and not worthy of love and protection. Those harsh beliefs then replay over and over in our minds, becoming a torment.

We're easily triggered by the slightest criticism.

Those negative beliefs also strengthen over time, presenting a huge obstacle to happiness and

calm. They must be challenged and replaced with better thoughts. It will take time and effort but it is vitally important if we want to achieve real calm and happiness and resolve our C-PTSD.

There is a ton of information available about how to tame the inner critic. Information on this is very easy to find – that's the good news. It's *doing something about it* that is the goal now.

Anxietylab.org and the 3-4-5 Program are designed to be effective as **quickly as possible** without having to do any more reading or work than is absolutely necessary. There are links below for more research and back up information. The Lab also recommends books by Pete Walker and Arielle Scwhartz for those who want more in-depth study.

Characteristics:

1. This Inner-Critic voice is usually quite authoritative and has no patience for anything but perfection. The critical thoughts are usually in the “all-or-nothing” category: “I'm NEVER going to win.” “I ALWAYS lose.” “I'm COMPLETELY useless.” “NO ONE cares about me.”
2. The thoughts are usually repetitive and once they begin, they replay in our head over and over until challenged
3. It becomes an addiction, a habit
4. It seems to be productive to listen to the inner-critic because it may seem like we're working on our flaws
5. The inner-critic is a perfectionist. Inner-critics demand perfection (which is the enemy of the abuse survivor).

Challenging the Inner-Critic:

The most effective way to overcome the Inner-Critic is to use a combination of methods:

1. consciously notice the critical voice (write it down when you catch it, if possible)
2. consciously ask yourself what you believe about yourself (Inventory and daily logging)
3. challenge those beliefs by doing Method #2: Reality Testing (are these things true?)
4. decide that you will replace negative beliefs with positive ones (saying daily **Affirmations** will re-wire the brain to replace repetitive thoughts)
5. Ask yourself: would I say these things to a friend?

6. develop habits that strengthen these efforts (meditation, exercise, sleep, etc)
7. turn the critic into a cheerleader instead by believing in your own worth
8. *decide* that you are going to have better thoughts and beliefs because you are worthy of happiness
9. firmly decide that you are going to be kinder to yourself
10. make a list of your positive qualities, (you'll need it when you have flashbacks). This is very important to do. Think hard, list every good thing about yourself that you can think of, even small things, ("*I'm good at washing the dishes.*"). Everyone has accomplished *something* in their life, even if it was just surviving a bad childhood That's a positive accomplishment. Put it on your list first.

Further research:

Inner Critic definition:

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/inner-critic>

Inner Critic Hacks:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/melodywilding/2020/05/11/inner-critic-hacks-8-easy-exercises-to-quiet-negative-self-talk-in-seconds/?sh=7f35d1921d2e>

4 Ways to Over Come Your Inner Critic:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/compassion-matters/201305/4-ways-overcome-your-inner-critic>

Shrinking the Inner Critic:

"COMPLEX PTSD:

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING", Pete Walker, M.A., M.F.T. (book)

<http://www.pete-walker.com/shrinkingInnerCritic.htm>