

**Compassion**

Exercise



15 min.



Client



No

## Befriending Your Inner Critic

We all have voices that echo inside our head – some of them are helpful, and some of them are hurtful. That hurtful voice gets called by various names, such as “inner critic” (Elliott, 1992), “pathological critic” and “inner gremlin.”

Dr. Marilee Adams calls it the “Judger,” as it is a voice that tends to negatively judge us and beats us up psychologically. It is a voice that can attack us and others. It is a voice that, if we pay heed to it, can take us down the “Judger path” into the “Judger pit.” High levels of self-criticism have been suggested to create a negative vicious circle of a dip in mood triggering self-criticism that triggers a further dip in mood (Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002). Over time, self-criticism can become a defining attribute of the relationship that people have with themselves. Repeated exposure to self-criticism can become a general attitude of self-directed hostility. Rather than treating oneself with warmth, kindness and reassurance, the individual develops a punitive self-critical attitude, thereby negatively affecting the way he relates to himself.

Yet, the Judger voice is not all bad. The function of the inner critic is both to prevent the individual from making mistakes and to motivate toward ideals. In principle, the goals of the inner critic can be considered as important for optimal human functioning. It is designed to keep us safe, physically and psychologically, although it does this in some maladaptive ways. By identifying and understanding our Judger voice and its motivations, we can learn to appreciate it and help it to be calmer, while still listening to the valuable information that it offers.



### Author

This tool has been created by Lisa Sansom, based on materials created by Marilee Adams. Lisa did a 5-day training workshop with Marilee to further understand her research and concepts.



### Goal

To identify your own unique internal Judger voice, and to work with it, instead of engaging in the battle.



## Advice

- This tool can be used in different ways. First, it works well for a solo client, working alone. Second, this tool can also be delivered by a coach to a client in a coaching session. Third, it can also be used in facilitated group settings, where people will share information about their own inner Judger voices.
- It is important to recognize that using this tool can be difficult. The Judger voice does not really like to be brought out into the light and shared, and even doing this exercise can provoke the Judger voice to be stronger and to yell more.
- Clients engaging in this work need to have support in place if this becomes too difficult in the moment. It may be worthwhile to take a pause and progress slowly.
- Some clients may find that this is very engaging work. Clients who use this exercise with the most success approach it with compassionate curiosity, as they might a shivering strange puppy or a young distressed child. Be cautious, be compassionate, and open up your questions.
- Although this may not feel like a positive intervention, it is about accepting that we have inner critical voices that can get in our way and make us feel miserable. This voice is a part of us, and needs to be loved if we are truly to accept ourselves as we are. Showing compassion and acceptance towards one's Judger can create more peace of mind and flourishing.



## Suggested Readings

Elliot, J. E. (1992). Use of anthetic dialogue in eliciting and challenging dysfunctional beliefs. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, 6, 137–143.

Heimpel, S. A., Wood, J. V., Marshall, M. A., & Brown, J. D. (2002). Do people with low self-esteem really want to feel better? Self-esteem differences in motivation to repair negative moods. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 82, 128.

Judger / Learner mindset chart:

<http://inquiryinstitute.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/The-Inquiring-Mindset-Poster.pdf>

Video – Marilee Adams explains the Judger mindset:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFBiBDTE9ec>



# Befriending Your Inner Critic

## Preparation

Individuals should be in a quiet space with time to reflect. They should be well-rested and not hungry, angry, tired or feeling lonely or otherwise distressed. This is an activity for individuals to do when they are in a quiet, positive, contemplative, curious state of mind.

## Instructions

Consider times when you have been in a “Judger” mindset. These are times when your thinking has been closed and detrimental. Perhaps you have been highly inflexible and blamed yourself and/or others for the horrible situation in which you found yourself. You may have wondered what was wrong with you and wrong with other people. Your mind was filled with criticism.

Write down – what was your inner voice telling you about yourself, others and the situation?

Now, write down what the risks were for you. What was the risk to yourself if the worst thing happened? Were these physical risks? Psychological risks? Risks to your status? Risks to your self-image? What could have gone wrong for you, even if the likelihood was small? What were you most worried about?



What were the risks to other people? If things went wrong in this difficult situation, what would have been the potential problems for others, even if the likelihood was small? What were you most worried about?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write their response to the question about risks to other people.

Finally, what were the risks to the situation if the worst thing happened? Could it have been detrimental for relationships? Could it have caused problems for other people who weren't even present? Might there have been safety concerns? What were you worried about?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write their response to the question about risks to the situation.

Look back at the risks that you wrote. How did your Judger mindset try to keep you safe, considering the risks that were possible?

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write their reflection on their Judger mindset.



Now, considering all that you have realized, write a letter of gratitude to your Judger. Start with “Dear Judger” or whatever other name you wish to give to your inner Judger mindset. Acknowledge that its job is to keep you safe, and that you recognize how much it has to yell to get your attention. Acknowledge that your Judger is part of you and cares about you deeply. Then, let your Judger know (in the letter) that you will listen carefully to the information that the Judger has to share, and consider it as you move forward, which does not always mean immediate and instance obedience. While your Judger has ideas, you do not have to instinctively follow what it says, and you may sometimes choose another path forward, while still staying safe as your Judger wishes.

Thank your Judger for being there for you and give your Judger a mental hug.

A large, empty light gray rectangular box intended for the user to write their letter of gratitude to their Judger.