



FaithWorks Counseling

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Identifying Self-Critical Thoughts

Self-critical thoughts are negative thoughts people have about themselves that are often harsh, judgmental, and unforgiving. These thoughts usually focus on perceived flaws, mistakes, weaknesses, or failures and can affect emotions, confidence, relationships, and daily functioning.

These thoughts often sound like an “inner critic” and may include statements such as:

- I’m not good enough.
- I always mess things up.
- Nobody really likes me.
- I should be doing better.
- I’m a failure.
- I can’t do anything right.

Self-critical thoughts are usually automatic, meaning they happen quickly and repeatedly without a person intentionally choosing them. They are often influenced by past experiences such as:

- Childhood criticism or emotional neglect
- Trauma or bullying
- Unrealistic expectations
- Perfectionism
- Repeated rejection or failure
- Comparing oneself to others

Over time, self-critical thinking can contribute to:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Shame
- Low self-esteem
- Perfectionism
- Avoidance of challenges
- Difficulty accepting compliments or success

In therapy, people learn to:

1. Identify self-critical thoughts
2. Examine whether the thoughts are accurate or distorted
3. Replace harsh self-talk with balanced, compassionate thinking
4. Develop self-worth that is not based solely on performance or approval from others

Self-Critical Thought	Grace-Based Replacement Thought
I should be doing more.	I am doing the best I can right now.”
I’m failing when I get overwhelmed.	Feeling overwhelmed does not mean I’m failing.
I have to keep everyone happy.	I can care for others without neglecting myself.

Learn to recognize:

- “Should” statements
- Perfectionistic thinking
- Guilt-based thinking
- Trauma-related beliefs about worth and responsibility
- Fear of disappointing others
- Difficulty giving yourself grace

Coping Skill:

- Daily compassionate self-talk
- Pausing before self-criticism
- Replacing guilt with realistic thinking
- Brief grounding/breathing exercises when emotionally overwhelmed

Homework Assignment:

Grace Journal

Write:

- One thing you handled well each day
- One moment where you gave yourself grace
- One negative thought you challenged

Self-Compassion Statements

Practice reading 3 personalized statements daily.