

# *From the Desk of Dr Jenn Hardy*

A quarterly-ish newsletter



## Hello!

It looks like I really put the "ish" in quarterly-ish newsletter this time around. The last one I sent out was in December of the year that changed everything (2020). You know how you have that one thing that needs to get done but its never an emergency so it keeps seeming to find itself at the bottom of the to-do list? Well, that's been my newsletter this year.

We can be really hard on ourselves when we fall behind. I know I've certainly been frustrated with myself for not sitting down and writing to you. That said, I suspect I'm my harshest critic. Likely, many of you didn't really notice or care that this newsletter is behind schedule.

Let this be your reminder that this seems to be a human struggle and that we are often our harshest critic. Speaking of critics, I spoke with Dr. Sophie Mort last week about inner critics. She has a new book out that I got to read early (A Manual for Being Human). She has a chapter specifically about where our inner critic comes from and what to do about it. I was honored that she selected one of my quotes to start the chapter. In this edition of the newsletter, I'm going to offer some thoughts and strategies about your relationship with your inner critic.

@drjennhardy

## Spotting your inner critic.

1. It likes words like: should, never, and always.
  - a. Take these examples: "You never get anything right." "You always say the wrong thing." "You should be better at this by now." Yikes, even typing these statements has me a little stressed out!
2. It tends to have its mind completely made up about you. It assumes the worst.
  - a. Even in the face of success, it tends to come in with undermining statements like: "You must have gotten lucky." "You may have gotten away with it this time, but next time you will mess up." "You could have done better."
3. Its favorite punishment is shame.
  - a. Instead of failing at something, it tells you that you are a failure as a human. It kicks you when you are down.

Now that you know what to look for, check in with yourself a few times a day to see if your inner critic has been hanging around. This is especially useful when we are feeling anxious or getting ready to try something new or stressful. As you are tuning into your thoughts, pay attention to times when other, more supportive voices are present.

## Resources to learn more.

On the next page, I'm going to be offering some starting strategies. That said, if you really want to dive into this work, know that there are a lot of resources available to help. Here are a couple to start with:

1. This article in The Guardian:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/jan/06/silence-your-inner-critic-a-guide-to-self-compassion-in-the-toughest-times>
2. Just about any book by Brené Brown. Her books explore topics like vulnerability and shame which frequently connect to our inner critic.
3. A Manual for Being Human: What Makes Us Who We Are, Why It Matters and Practical Advice for a Happier Life (Dr. Sophie Mort, 2021)

My inner critic is telling me that I'm probably missing some really great resources. I told it that I trust you to use these as a starting point, not as an exhaustive list.



## Strategies for shifting your relationship with your inner critic.

1. Externalize it. Therapists often use terms like inner critic to offer us some much need separation from the negative thoughts we have. I like to take things a step further and try to imagine what this critic would look like. Maybe name it as well. Don't pick a character (or name) that feels intimidating. Our goal is to take power away rather than add to it.
2. Pull in other voices. When I get to doubting myself and listening to that critical voice too much, I make it a point to think about what supportive friends, mentors, and family members would say to me. I can imagine their encouragement and allow these words to ground me.
3. Notice, but don't react. When we get to fighting with our bullies, they tend to fight back. Since our inner critic can feel like an inner bully, sometimes the best strategy is to notice and then ignore. Distract yourself by talking to someone, listening to music, etc.
4. Consider your inner critic's origin story. This inner critic served some purpose for you at some point in your life. Likely it was a way to help you to manage a difficult relationship, to gain approval from someone important to you, and/or to increase your likelihood of being successful with something that really mattered to you at the time. Why does an origin story matter? For me, I tend to be better able to offer myself some compassion when I hear that critical voice, knowing that it comes from a part of me that is trying to protect me.
5. Ask yourself if your inner critic is even helpful. I know that it will claim to be. But is it? Have you only succeeded when you have been mean to yourself? Probably not. If your inner critic is always in your ear, then consider asking healthy, successful people in your life about their thought processes when they are taking big risks. Chances are good that they have had to sort through their own relationship with an inner critic and not let it dominate their mental landscape either.
6. Be curious about what may be keeping your inner critic around. Take what you learn from Strategies 4 & 5 and go a step further. Are there certain fears you are hanging onto? Does your inner critic promise to protect you from these dangers? For example, some of us keep our inner critic around because we fear that we will "let ourselves go" (e.g., become a lazy failure) if we ease up on the criticism. Our inner critic likes to think in all-or-nothing terms. Most of life doesn't fit into the extremes, which means that your inner critic gets it wrong more often than it would like to admit.

