

## **Ready to be Kinder to Yourself? Ten Steps Toward Self-Compassion**

“You knew that would happen!”

“Can’t you do anything right?”

Or how about:

“Idiot!”

Who’s saying all those mean things to you? Most likely, your own harshest critic. YOU!

We human beings sure can be tough on ourselves. Pointing out our mistakes. Our misjudgments. Anything we do that falls short of a demand we didn’t meet. All too often demands we created for ourselves that weren’t realistic in the first place.

And just where does that critical voice come from? I suspect it’s a voice we hear as children, maybe from parents who criticized and scolded, when we were judged as not having met the demands that were placed on us. Or teachers. Maybe other kids. Somewhere along the way we learn that when we make a mistake, or can’t quite perform as well as someone else thinks we should, we are going to hear about it. Often with some pretty harsh words.

Sure, criticism can make you better. That’s probably what was behind all that criticism that came your way as a child. Or at least that’s what you were told.

### **Turn Off the Self-Criticism and Replace It with Kindness**

But what happens is that, as we become adults, that baton magically gets passed to us. And unfortunately we latch onto it. By doing so, we invite those critical voices into our minds, and give them free reign to sound off at will. And they truly take advantage of every opportunity! While compassion for ourselves gets pushed off into the corner.

If you’re living with a chronic condition like a bleeding disorder, you know about demands. Your condition places all kinds of demands on you, every day. With each demand, it is another reason to be hard on yourself when your performance doesn’t quite measure up.

Let me ask you something: Have you ever thought about the toll it takes on you when the person in the mirror always has a good scolding ready, just waiting to unleash it? That’s a lot of pressure to live with. And another question: Is it possible that you might be demanding a little too much of yourself in some areas of your life? And how about this: Is all the scolding the only way you have to keep yourself motivated?

You've heard that expression, with friends like you, who needs enemies? So I have to ask: Are you being a friend to yourself?

And I have to add something here. When you're that hard on yourself, that becomes your view of the world. And that can translate into being hard on other people, too.

### **Compassion starts with being kind to yourself**

Here's how to get started.

**Set priorities.** Sit down with yourself and think about what you really need to do to take the best possible care of yourself. Focus on the basics, what you need to do to maintain your optimal health, physically, emotionally, and in your relationships. Make a list. And a schedule. These are your priorities.

**Remind yourself that not everything is a crisis.** One of the best ways to give yourself a rough time is to look at anything less than perfection as an absolute catastrophe and then make yourself at fault. Take a step back and consider the situation. Let's say you slipped up or made a mistake in judgment. Is this something that can be fixed? Do you know how to get things back on track? And if not, is there someone who can help? All that energy spent on self-criticism can be channeled toward finding a solution.

**Focus on the big picture.** Who knows, you may even decide that what felt like a crisis at the moment was only a bump in a much longer road. What a relief, right?

**Look for the lesson.** Here's where you have a choice. You can look at a mistake or a setback as a reason for punishment, and call yourself lazy, stupid, etc. Or you can turn this into an opportunity for learning. Try this: "Oh, so that's what happens if I... At least I know how to avoid this problem in the future." And then move forward, that much more educated.

**Watch your self-talk.** We spend our waking hours talking to ourselves. Evaluating, predicting, explaining... judging. And it's that judgment talk that can make us very unhappy. So be more aware of your self-talk. When you feel the critical voice gearing up to let loose with a good old scolding, tell him/her to be quiet. And then engage that kindly, compassionate voice that's been cowering in the corner for too long.

**Give yourself a break.** Ask that voice of kindness for a little pep talk. Remind yourself: "I'm human. I'm trying hard. This is not an easy road. And I am doing the best I can, even if not everything I do is perfect." Having trouble conjuring up that voice? It might help to sit down with a sheet of paper and do some journaling. Give yourself a positive self-talk script you can read when you need a lift. Try some affirmations. Start out with: "I am a work in progress. I get better every day."

**And let yourself feel.** One of the ways we punish ourselves is by telling ourselves that we shouldn't be feeling the way we feel. But there is no right or wrong way to feel. So as emotions come up, don't swallow them. Let yourself feel, whether that judging voice approves or not. Sad, mad, afraid. It's all part of being human. That's being kind to yourself.

**Replace punishment with rewards.** Chances are, if you are letting loose on yourself with that critical voice, you may also be punishing yourself in some way. Avoiding people. Not doing things you know you would enjoy. Pushing yourself to overwork. What if you gave yourself some rewards when you meet an expectation you have for yourself? This is a way to shift your focus to what's going well, and to give yourself some encouragement to keep up whatever you're doing that got you there. Indulge in something you enjoy that promotes your wellness, a little break, a favorite activity, some fun with a friend or family member. You deserve it!

**Let somebody help.** Limit your time with critical people. Instead, try to surround yourself with people who bring out the best in you. Be kind back. Kindness leads to more kindness. And it sure feels a whole lot better than criticism!

**Smile at your imperfections.** Nobody's perfect. Now, how do such imperfect people manage to dress themselves in the morning? It's a mystery. We're all so imperfect that we just have to shake our heads and laugh at ourselves sometimes. How's that for lightening up?

You're dealing with a lot. So how about giving yourself credit for doing the best you can? Show yourself some compassion and some love while you're at it. Be kind to yourself.