

The Inner Critic Translator

The voice isn't trying to destroy you. It's trying — badly — to protect you.

Everyone has the voice. *I'm such an idiot. I always do this. Why would anyone want me there.* This room doesn't try to silence it — arguing with the critic mostly makes it louder. Instead, you'll translate it: figure out what it's afraid of, and then answer the fear instead of the insult. About ten minutes.

One thing this is not: self-compassion doesn't mean deciding everything you do is fine. It means being able to look at what you did without destroying yourself over it — which, usefully, is also the state people actually change from.

STEP ONE

Write down exactly what it said

Word for word, in its voice, however harsh. Seeing it in writing is already different from hearing it on a loop.

STEP TWO

What is it trying to prevent?

The critic is almost always a bodyguard with terrible manners. What is it guarding against — embarrassment? Rejection? Failure? Being judged? Being hurt the way you were hurt before?

STEP THREE

Now translate it

Picture someone you deeply love — your closest friend, your child, your younger self — who did the exact same thing and is sitting across from you with the same fear. Write what you would actually say to them. Not a pep talk. The true, kind thing.

STEP FOUR

Let it be addressed to you

Read what you just wrote — because it was for you. Copy out the single truest, kindest sentence from it, and keep it somewhere the critic can't talk over it.

This kind of practice has a real research base — a meta-analysis of 27 randomized trials found self-compassion training brought moderate reductions in self-criticism, anxiety, and depression for many people. Moderate, for many — not magic, for everyone. But the direction is good, and the practice costs ten minutes.

If the critic gets loud again tomorrow, that's not a relapse — it's a bodyguard doing its old job. Come back and translate it again. The translations get faster.

IF IT STIRRED SOMETHING UP

Coming back down

Breathe in through your nose for four, out through your mouth for eight — longer out than in — for a few minutes. Then name five things you can see, four you can hear, three you can touch. Stirred-up feelings after writing like this are common and tend to pass; if they don't, that's information that this deserves more support than a page can give.

If you're in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, please don't work through it alone here. In the US, call or text 988 (the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or chat at 988lifeline.org — available 24/7. Outside the US, findahelpline.com lists helplines around the world.

A BLESSING ON THIS WORK

This work is a gift. Share it freely with anyone who needs it — print it, copy it, pass it on whole. It is not for sale, by us or by anyone, and it shouldn't be changed. Above all, keep the crisis lines and the words about seeking professional help exactly as they are — for someone, those may be the lines that matter most. It exists to help people heal, and to raise the vibration of the world. That will never cost anything here.

— Aether & Root · aetherandroot.com/inner-work