Why Are We Our Own Worst Critic and What Can We Do About It?

by ADRIEL MALDONADO

Self-Criticism and Anxiety

Anxiety can make even the simplest of tasks seem insurmountable. Things like paying bills, making phone calls, and even leaving the house can send someone with an anxiety disorder into a panic.

This can be provoking for our loved ones. They may not understand why something that is second nature to them is so difficult for us. And even if they do understand it, they may still find it frustrating.

However, there is frequently someone is even more critical of us. That is ourselves.

The worst is when the panic attacks come out of nowhere for no distinguishable reason. All too often I find myself thinking, “There is nothing to be anxious about! This is illogical! Why am I like this?”

Every time I see the way my anxiety affects my family, whether it is because I overreact to a mess they made, or if it's my husband having to take time from his busy schedule to take care of something I just couldn't push myself to do, I feel awful and chastise myself over and over.

We know better than anyone the ill effects of anxiety. We know better than anyone how all-consuming it can be. We also know that most of our anxieties are unfounded.

GAD and You

There are many different anxiety disorders, but if you have generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), you likely have a constant feeling of unease and worry about everything and about nothing.

When you have GAD you are aware it is not logical. This leads to you feeling upset with yourself for feeling what you do. It is vexing to not be in control of your thoughts and emotions, or to not be in control of the way you react to situations.

These frustrations lead to critical thinking. We may become ruthless in our assessment of ourselves.

We may begin to call ourselves disparaging names, either out loud or in our head. We may look back at how we reacted to a situation and think about what we wish we had said or done instead. And then we think about it over and over, as if it is a video on a loop.

We may sit around wishing we were different, wishing we were like someone else who is seemingly more easygoing.

As easy as it is to fall into this type of thinking, it is not helpful to us or anyone else. To the contrary, dwelling on negative thoughts can have a damaging effect both on a psychological level and on a physical one.

Try this instead: Remind yourself that anxiety is an illness. As with any illness it comes with limitations.

If you had a physical ailment, such as arthritis, you would have limitations. There would be certain tasks that you would find difficult to do, some that you would need assistance with, some that you may not be able to do at all. That would be frustrating, but it would be perfectly understandable. That is the nature of illness.

When you have an anxiety disorder there are certain things that are difficult to do, that you cannot do on your own, or that you may not be able to do at all. And yes, that is frustrating. But again, that is the nature of illness.

Try These Strategies

Give Yourself a Break

Figuratively, yes, but literally as well. If you find you are starting to have overly critical thoughts about yourself, stop and take a break. Do something that makes you feel calm, happy, or that you are good at.

Change the Way You Talk About Yourself

First, start with how you talk about yourself to others, then work on the way you think about yourself.

Treat Yourself the Way You Treat Your Friends

Before you say something about yourself, think, "is this how I would talk to or about my friends?" If a friend makes a mistake, do we harp on it over and over? Most likely not, so why do that to yourself?

As we know, having an anxiety disorder means we do not have complete control over our thoughts and feelings, but we can use what control we do have to cultivate a healthier self image.