



Guide 3 • Self-Criticism

# WILD

## *Feelings*

Field Guides for  
Social Emotional Concepts

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# Self-Criticism

Just like it sounds, self-criticism is the habit of *criticizing your self* in response to challenging moments or feelings. Self-criticism is a thought pattern that you can learn to name, and then tame.

In this guide, we examine why we criticize ourselves, discuss how to recognize self-criticism, and practice these responses instead:

1. Self-kindness
2. Shifting your perspective
3. Mindfulness

These responses are skills that encourage you to choose self-compassion.

# How to use this guide

**There isn't any "right" way. Maybe you want to open it up in the middle, or read it from back to front—all of that is a-OK.**

If you are using the book to improve the way you talk to yourself when you face challenging moments or feelings, we invite you to take it slow. Thought patterns don't change overnight or in an afternoon after reading a guide. In fact, if you expect change to come that quickly, your inner critic is going to have a field day! It might feel frustrating to hear this, but you will have much more success if you think of this as a practice—something you can work on and improve throughout your lifetime.

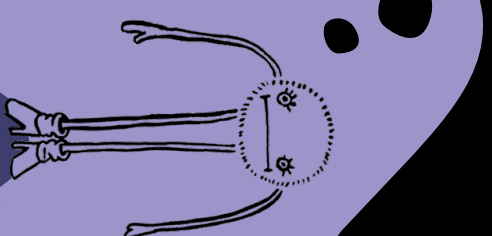
Think of the strategies in this guide as tools, to help write new stories about your self-worth. Take this guide with you, notice, and record things as they happen.

# I SUCK

## Real talk about self-criticism.

Self-criticism is a type of safety behavior designed to ensure social acceptance. It's a super normal pattern (we all do it) and it's a hard one to break! Ultimately, it's about control. It's your mind's clumsy attempt at self-care; if you receive criticism after you've already criticized yourself, the criticism from others won't hurt as much.

*If you tell yourself  
you suck first, you  
get to be in charge.*



# Why does it happen?

Many things can trigger self-criticism.

**You might be hard on yourself when...**

you try something new and it's super hard

you get dumped

you get negative feedback on something  
you worked hard on

a friend cancels plans you were looking  
forward to, and doesn't tell you why

You get left on read after you sent a  
vulnerable message

# ASK YOURSELF

**What are some things that typically  
bring out my self-critic?**

# What does it feel like?

**Self-criticism can show up in a number of ways, and it usually pops up when you're feeling vulnerable. When that happens, you might...**

get upset and blame yourself

If I wasn't so stupid, I would have done better.

take it personally

I suck. I always mess up. I am a fuck-up.

compare yourself to others

I'm not as cool as \_\_\_\_\_. Who'd want to be friends with me?

feel overwhelmed and freak out

I'm terrible at everything! Aaaaah!

**Write down some of the self-critical things you tend to say to yourself.**

**IT**

**MIGHT**

**FEEL**

**WEIRD.**

*Try it*

*anyway!*



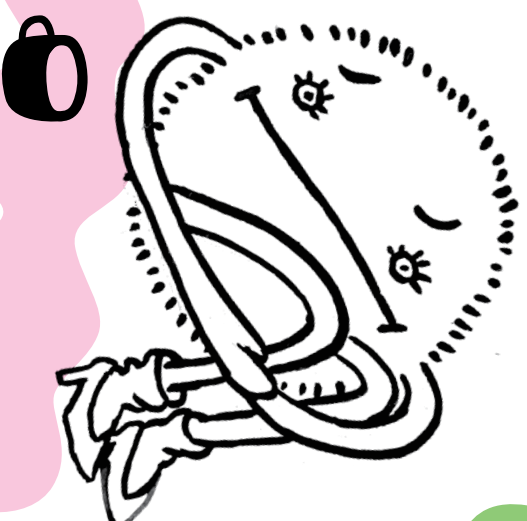
# How I can change my inner dialogue?

Luckily, you can learn to make choices about how to respond to yourself when you recognize your inner self-critic. You can practice turning towards your suffering with kindness and compassion. We're going to go over three skills you can use when you notice your inner dialogue isn't kind. Remember that it takes time, and some awkwardness, to learn new skills. You might not feel like you're doing a good job at first, or it might feel super weird—keep going.

**I'm so sorry you feel like you suck. It's natural to feel that way sometimes. Be patient with yourself. You're doing a good job.**


# Practice Self-kindness

When you mess up or feel bad, actively comfort yourself. Practice comforting yourself like you would a good friend.



*Yes, it will  
feel really  
awkward  
at first. Try  
it anyway!*





# SELF- KINDNESS

TRIGGERS  
*the*  
RELEASE



# OXYTOCIN!

**Oxytocin** is a hormone that increases feelings of trust, calm, safety, generosity, and connectedness while reducing fear and anxiety.

# NOW YOU TRY IT

 **Write some responses you might try instead of the critical ones.**

**Let's try re-framing some of the negative self-talk from the last exercise.**

*Instead of this...*

*Maybe this...*

**If I wasn't so stupid, I would have done better.**

**Trying new things can be really scary and hard. You're not stupid, it's just your first time doing this. I'm sure next time will be a little easier. Try to be patient, you're learning.**

*Instead of this...*

*Maybe this...*

Write a note to yourself that is self-compassionate. Talk to yourself the way you would a friend.

*It can feel super awkward at first...*

**AND  
IT  
WORKS!**

**I'm so sorry you're struggling**

**YOU  
ARE  
NOT  
WEAK**

**THAT  
IS  
SO  
HARD**

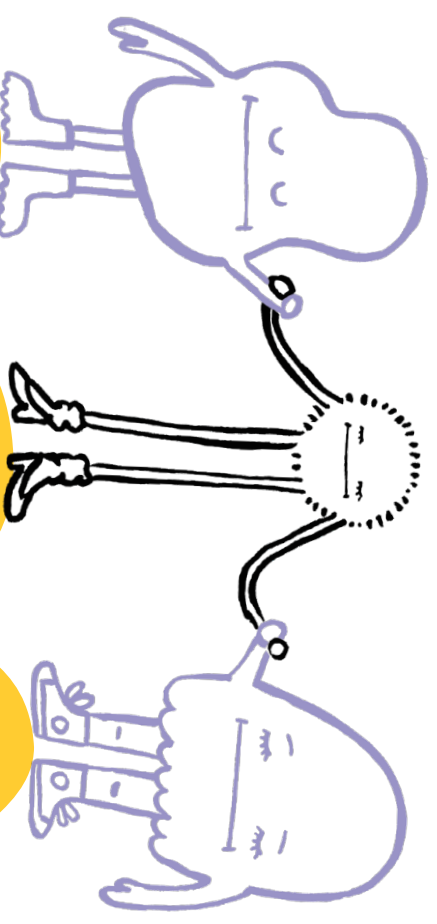
**Embarrassment,  
anger crying—these are  
all super normal**

**Everyone  
feels like  
they suck  
sometimes.**

*If you still  
feel alone, find  
someone to hug.  
That someone  
could be a pet!  
If you don't  
want to do that,  
just remember  
other people  
struggle too.*

# Practice shifting your perspective

When we suffer, we tend to feel alone, which is hard. Try to remind yourself that everyone suffers; it is a natural, inevitable part of life. Suffering doesn't separate you from humanity; it's actually what makes you human.



**Post an Instagram poll in your  
story asking folks:**

**When you  
mess up,  
do you  
automatically  
feel like  
you suck?**

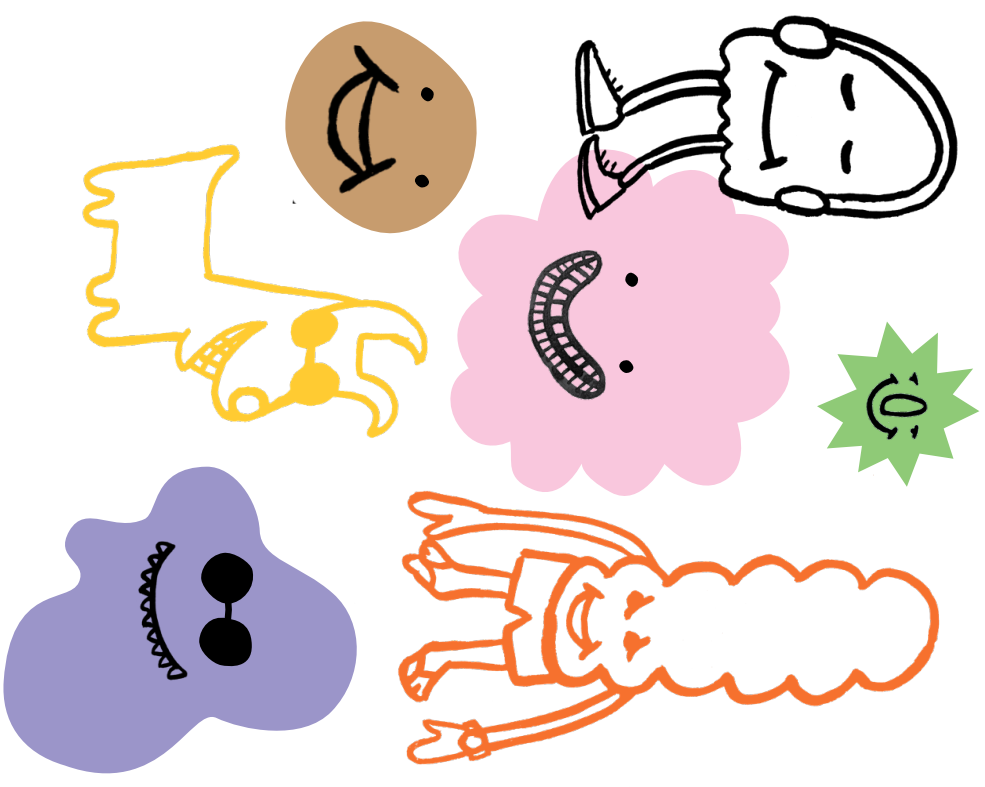


**LOOK  
AT  
THE  
DATA**

*Remind yourself that everyone feels that way sometimes.*

Visualize yourself in a dark room.

**Now imagine  
you turn on the  
light, and it's  
full of people  
you care about,  
smiling at you.**

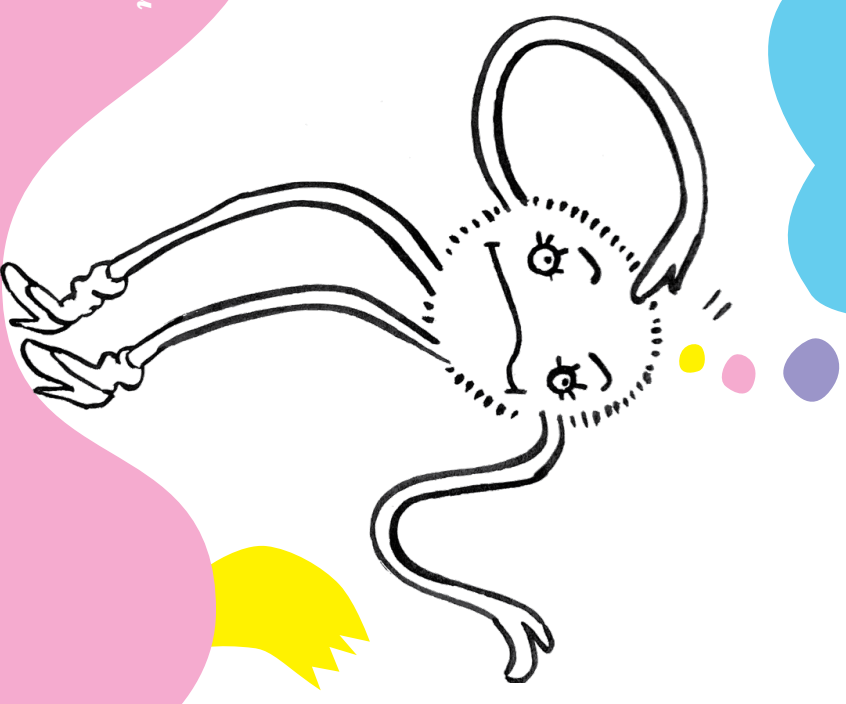


**Why do I feel  
like I suck? What  
else is going on?**

# Practice Mindfulness

Avoiding pain is natural, so it's hard to not immediately want to try to fix it or escape it. Try to sit with your discomfort and be present in the feeling. Think about your emotional experience, without ignoring, exaggerating, or judging. Describe it.

*You can't  
heal what you  
can't feel!*



## FEELINGS ARE NOT FACTS



Feelings come and go, and while they're with us, we may notice certain attributes that can be named. When you're observing, you're not critiquing; you're taking in all the details of the emotional experience. When a bird watcher is looking at a bird, they don't note "this is a stupid bird that's trying way too hard with those feathers." They just note the bird's features and environment. Try just observing your emotion without judgement.

## Mindfulness matters

Practicing mindfulness can help you slow down and examine the story your brain is telling you, which is usually biased. This practice can help you understand yourself and others better, especially when shit gets dark. You can learn to notice without judgement and keep our common dignity at the front of your mind. Mindfulness helps you realize that you don't have to believe every passing thought or emotion as *real* or *true*. **Feelings are not facts.**

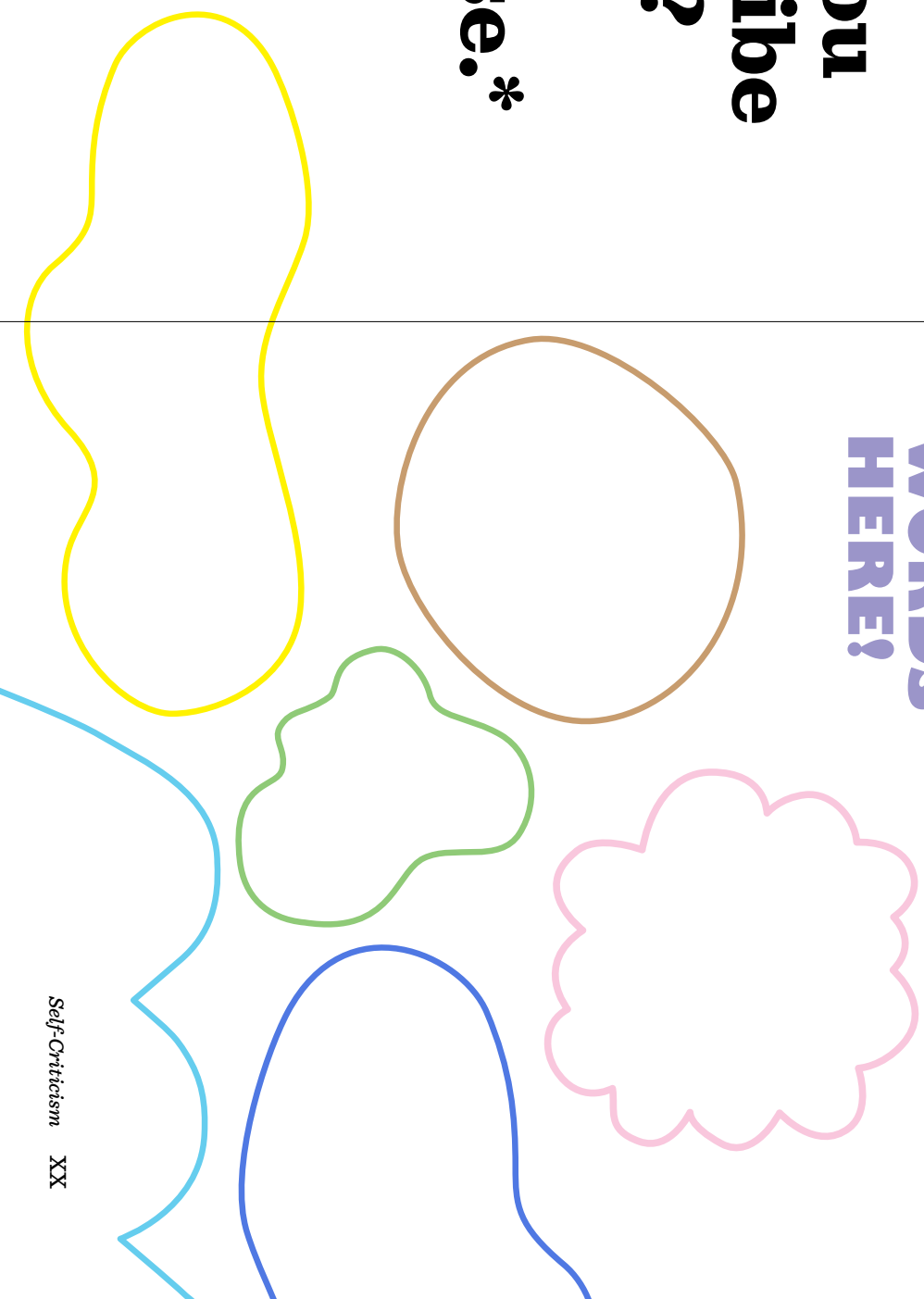


**How many words can you find to describe your feeling? Try to get really precise.\***

*\*If this exercise rolls your socks, be sure to see the Emotional Granularity Workbook*

XX Wild Feelings

**PUT ALL THOSE DESCRIPTIVE WORDS HERE!**



Self-Criticism XX

**Draw your feeling**



**Name your feeling**

*Nervous*

**Description**

*Wiggly, red, fast moving*

**Close relatives**

*Scared, uneasy, anxious  
afraid, unsure*

**Natural habitat**

*public speaking, first kiss,  
starting something new*

**Predators**

*social connection,  
preparation, practice, deep  
breathing, taking a walk*

**Voice**

*You're stupid! What's  
going to happen?! This  
is too scary.*

**Date & location seen**

*Two days ago when I had to  
give a presentation*

**Draw your feeling**

**Name your feeling**

**Description**

**Close relatives**

**Natural habitat**

**Predators**

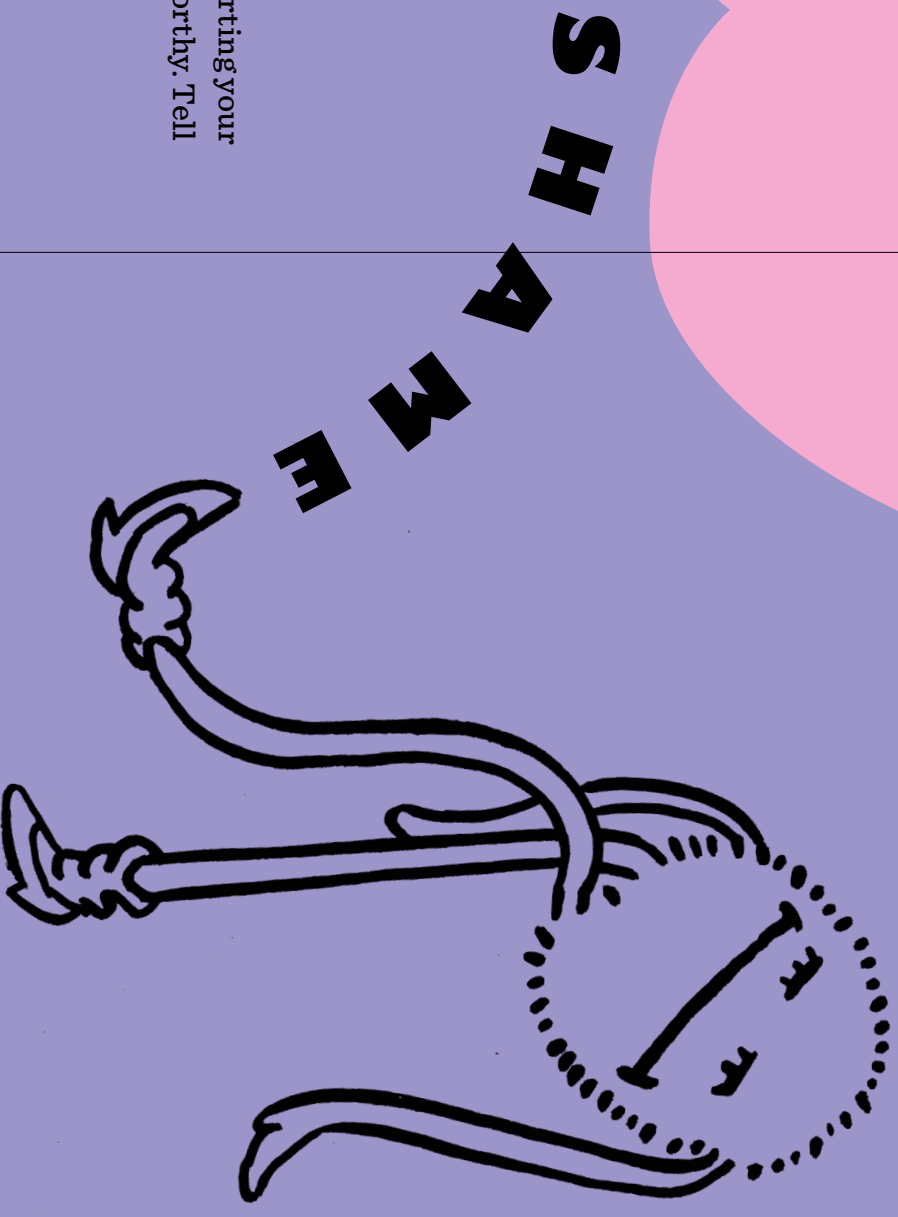
**Voice**

**Date & location seen**

# FUCK OFF!

## Shame

Self-criticism is fueled by shame, which is distorting your predictions and making you feel alone and unworthy. Tell shame to fuck off! **You are worthy.**



# TILDR

We have choices about how we respond to ourselves.

We can learn skills that help us practice being a friend to ourselves, instead of an asshole. Some tools:

## 1. Self-kindness.

*Talk to yourself the way you would talk to a friend.*

## 2. Shift your perspective

*Remind yourself that you're not alone. Everyone feels this way sometimes.*

## 3. Mindfulness

*Question the thought or feeling. Try to figure out where it's coming from, and remember feelings are not facts.*

If you had complete control over your dysfunctional thoughts, emotions, and behaviors *you wouldn't have them*. When you are struggling, be kind to yourself.

