



From Self-Criticism to Self-Love

While I was in graduate school suffering from dissertation procrastination, I decided to seek the help of a psychologist. After we talked a while, the Doctor said, "Imaging you're a loving mother. What would you say to Brenda?" The words that came out surprised even me: "You are so stupid! Brenda, you're screwing up again."

The psychologist repeated my words and asked me how it felt. "Awful," I said. "Yes, because you just criticized yourself into little pieces. No and compassion.

Many of us subject ourselves too harsh judgments and abusive self talk and self-criticism can be a special problem for African Americans as we tend to internalize racist messages from the mainstream culture. Unchecked, these negative thought patterns can lead to low self-esteem and depression. Here's how to begin healing:

- First think of three statements that would make you feel special if someone said them to you. Write them down. They might include "I love you," "I'm proud of you" and "You're doing your best and growing every day." Repeat these statements ten times daily.
- When negative thoughts arise, write them down too so you can face them. Then tear the words up and renew your affirmations.
- Read Hal and Sidra Stone's *Embracing Your Inner Critic* (Harper San Francisco, \$12). Also listen to Louise Hay's audiotape series *You Can Heal Your Life* (Hay House, \$16.95 at audio-book stores).

Remember, what we experience outside reflects what we feel inside. So practice treating yourself with love and kindness.

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