

Surviving Your Inner

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Self-Limiting Beliefs and ADHD

By Terry M. Dickson, MD, ACG, CPCC

ADULTS WITH ADHD OFTEN HAVE DISTORTED THINKING about themselves. Experiencing a life of frequent failures and disappointment can lead to loss of confidence, self-doubt, low self-esteem and feelings of personal inadequacy. Adults with ADHD often have self-limiting beliefs that tend to predict negative outcomes. These folks may describe their lives as a constant train wreck and never even question certain assumptions and beliefs that keep them going in a constant survival-mode pattern.

There is an “inner critic” (sometimes called “gremlin” or “saboteur”) that keeps pounding self-limiting beliefs into our brains, telling us: “There is no other way but the way things have always been.” “You might as well give up because you will fail.” These assumptions and beliefs can, with practice, be challenged daily and lead to thought patterns in alignment with a more fulfilled life.

What is this saboteur, gremlin, or inner critic? These terms embody thought processes and feelings that maintain the status quo in our lives. “I know I’m going to fail again. Things just can’t be any different!” Even though this inner critic may appear to protect us at times, it actually keeps us from moving forward and getting the very things we truly want in life. It makes us feel like we can’t really consciously choose the way we truly want to live. It keeps us from being creative. The inner critic typically has the future already predicted as a potential threat. Since the future is uncertain, the inner critical voice tries to protect us from possible danger and fear sets in. This inner critic can become a constant source of self-limiting beliefs and assumptions that drive our lives.

What should you watch out for?

› **Self-limiting talk.** Self-limiting talk creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, because you stop looking for solutions and just assume defeat. Instead of looking for options, you tell yourself that you can’t handle things you face and give up. “I can’t finish anything I begin...” or “I am getting fatter and fatter!”

› **Jumping to conclusions.** When you experience a difficult situation, you interpret it in a negative way rather than just stating the facts. “If I give this talk to the community board, they’ll just laugh at me.” “If I go to the gym, people will make fun of my flab.” When we jump to conclusions, we all too often assume the worst-case scenario and make fact out of what might be fiction.

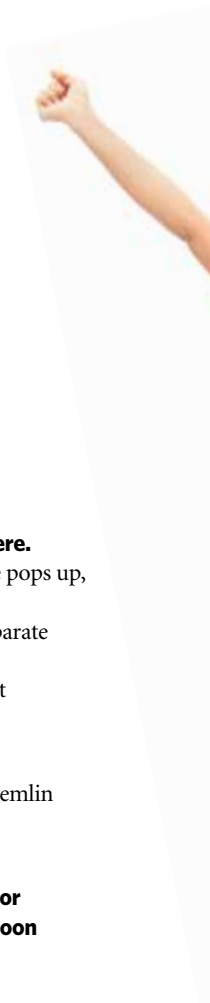
› **Habits of speech.** Often our speech patterns are so automatic that we don’t even think about them. Even though we may not mean what we say, our words can have a negative impact on how we feel about ourselves. “I’m so stupid!” or “What do you expect from someone as clumsy as I am.” This habit shows up in the way we discount ourselves to others. Sometimes these habits can be disguised as humor, but it’s not really funny at all.

› **The thoughts of others become our own.** These can be planted by external sources such as colleagues, friends, spouse, or parents. These “well-meaning” voices can become part of our script and self-talk. Though their thoughts often serve us, they can also be quite detrimental when we are unable to distinguish their ideas from our own. Look for speech such as “You really shouldn’t...” or “You ought to...” When other people’s thoughts become our own, we begin to act out of guilt rather than our own desires. This is also known as social conditioning.



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THINKSTOCK



What can you do about your inner critic?

1 You can acknowledge that it is there.
Give it a name. Whenever that voice pops up, say: "Is that _____ speaking?"

It is also important that you learn to separate yourself from this gremlin. "Now that I've heard from _____, this is what I really think."

2 You can ignore it!
Just don't give it a foothold. The gremlin is going to be there lurking around but you don't have to invite it in.

3 You can give _____ a job to do or you can send _____ to the moon for a long vacation.

4 You can literally talk to _____ and move it out of the way.
You can say, "I'm in charge here, so BACK OFF!"

5 Make a list of your values.
What values are being honored or dishonored by what your inner critic is saying to you? How does what the inner critic is saying align with what you truly want in your life? How do your visions for the future differ from what your inner critic is saying? Come up with a definition of what true success would look like to you. What is your life purpose?

6 List your goals, both for the present and the future.
Decide what steps you need to take to reach your goals. If taken in small steps and planned out, you can see success along the way. Celebrate often with each new success!

7 Don't settle for second best.
It is better to have tried and failed than to not try at all. Consider this: Failures are nothing more than learning experiences. Go at your obstacles in full-throttle mode, and don't stop until you have achieved at what you set out to do. If one door or opportunity closes, find another door to go through. When you do fail, consider what you need to do differently next time. Don't let your inner critic tell you that your dream is impossible.



8 Find ways to keep yourself motivated.

What would it be like if you didn't move forward with your goals? What would you be giving up that is important to you? What are you saying "yes" to that would lead to a more fulfilling life by ignoring your inner critic and moving toward what matters most to you?

9 State a belief that you hold that keeps you from performing at your best.

Now write down the self-talk that goes along with this belief. Ask yourself what comfort zone this places you in. Now state the opposite of your limiting belief and write down new and positive self-talk that would go along with it. Describe the new and expanded comfort zone that it places you in now. How are you behaving with this new empowering belief?

10 Know that you cannot please your inner critic.

Often the harder you try to change, the stronger it gets. The secret is to realize that it does not have to have power over you and that you don't have to play its game.

EVEN THOUGH YOUR INNER CRITIC may have had control of your thoughts and beliefs for many years, know that you can conquer those inner feelings and be the person you were meant to be. To your success in following your dreams! 🎯