

EMPATHY FOR OTHERS

Practice Hearing Another Person's Self-Judgment

As human beings we spend an enormous amount of time expressing our criticisms concerning the world around us. However, sadly what seems worse is the constant litany of self-criticism that is happening inside the head of each person every day. One of the most generous gifts you can offer of yourself is to take the time to tune into someone's judgments so as to hear their self-judgments.

This particular exercise helps me when I encounter a routinely critical person. When I hear their criticisms of me as self-judgments, my heart finds it easier to be more compassionate. Their negative thoughts about themselves touch upon hidden beliefs I may hold about my own Self, and I see our common connection through our choice of needless suffering.

Step 1. When someone criticizes you in a way that isn't constructive, become aware of his or her feelings. Notice if they appear upset, hurt, or sad. Then try to pick out phrases that sound as if they are judging or assigning blame. You might hear them say phrases that include the words "should" or "shouldn't."

Step 2. Using the chart on page 3, write down the other person's judgment under the first column.

Other Person's Judgment	Other Person's Self-Judgment (I don't like myself when...)
1. You [shouldn't] make random choices about how to live your life.	
2. Instead of complaining about work, you should do something that makes you happy.	
3. When you fail to obey the rules it drives me nuts.	
4. You shouldn't believe that you're not worthy of love.	

Step 3. Rewrite each **Judgment** from the first column as a **Self-Judgment** in the corresponding row under the second column by replacing personal pronouns with 'I.' Start each **Self-Judgment** with the phrase "I don't like myself when." This **Self-Judgment** is a judgment the other person is having about his or her own self.

Other Person's Judgment	Other Person's Self-Judgment (I don't like myself when...)
1. You [shouldn't] make random choices about how to live your life.	I don't like myself when I make random choices about how to live my life.
2. Instead of complaining about work, you should do something that makes you happy.	I don't like myself when I complain about work instead of doing something that makes me happy.
3. When you fail to obey the rules it drives me nuts.	I don't like myself when I fail to obey the rules.
4. You shouldn't believe that you're not worthy of love.	I don't like myself when I believe that I'm not worthy of love.

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Step 4. Read the first **Judgment** and imagine the person and the context of the situation that prompted their criticism. Then read the corresponding **Self-Judgment** and imagine this same person **saying these words to themselves instead**.

If you are close to this person, do you see how this Self-Judgment plays a part in their behavior and choices about life? Can you feel the heavy burden this person is carrying in their heart by believing in this Self-Judgment? Can you feel their suffering? Are you able to hear this person better and have empathy for them? Notice your reactions and write down your thoughts.

Example

By reading the self-judgments, I was able to take a step back and be objective about what each person was saying. I felt less caught up in their anger and frustration and able to be more of an observer. I didn't feel like running away or trying to find solutions to their criticisms.

I felt myself softening a great deal when I read the self-judgment "I don't like myself when I fail to obey the rules." This is a person in my life who is extremely rigid and seems to derive self-confidence by getting others to conform. After reading their self-judgment, I felt the heavy weight of perfection they may try to live up to in themselves and felt myself opening to being more compassionate when I listen to them.

