

## Ep #17: How to Deal with Criticism



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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## Ep #17: How to Deal with Criticism

When you are dealing with people, you want to decide, where is this person falling on the spectrum? Is this helpful criticism, meaning it is designed to be feedback to help me become a sharper, better person? Is it neutral criticism, meaning it's just kind of like someone's just running their mouth and not really adding value, but they're also not really hurting you, they're just making noise? And then you have the very far end, which is just straight up abuse, okay.

And you're going to use different skills for each of them. So for this episode, I'm going to give you some real general tools on how to deal with criticism.

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Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey, everyone. Welcome to episode number 17. We are talking about how to deal with criticism. I feel like this is the most commonly asked thing, especially right now in the holiday season. So this is not a holiday episode, but it is going to be focused on how to deal with the critics in your life.

So, I found this quote on Pinterest that said, "Ships don't sink because of the water around them. Ships sink because the water gets inside them." And I thought that was a really good quote for what we're talking about today because the truth of the matter, when it comes to criticism, is it matters how you interpret what another person says, the story you tell yourself around that, and how much emotional energy you pour into that and allow it to affect you, i.e. letting the water get in.

So this was a really cool quote by Journey Strength. At least that's what it said on Pinterest. And Pinterest things get so shared and stuff, so that's the one that I ran across, but it's possible that it's by someone else.

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So, at any rate, you want to keep this in mind when people are running their mouths and they're criticizing you. They don't have power over you. They only have power over you if you allow it. So in this episode. So, in this episode, we're talking about how to not allow it, because you don't want to allow every critical remark to shape your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions. Because not every criticism in your life is worthy of your concern.

Sometimes it is, sometimes it's constructive, sometimes it's helpful. But a lot of times, we have to filter through the noise and decide what is helpful to us and what do we need to protect our emotional energy from getting swept away in things that aren't true. Because if you choose to believe the stuff that critics say, then you are essentially inviting a thief over for dinner.

So people can only steal your joy, your happiness, your emotional resources if you invite them into your internal world and allow them to take over with their comments, okay. So we don't want to invite them over for dinner if they are a toxic person or if they are a critical person or they're somebody who is not offering feedback that is supportive or helpful to your growth as a human on this Earth, okay.

And so when you change the self-talk around what they are saying and you keep them out of your house, the criticism's going to start rolling off of you like water off your back, okay. It's just going to not affect you in the same way.

So, here's what's true; criticism only matters to us if we, A, believe it's true, B, create a story about it in our minds, and C, give it time and space within our emotional energy. So what that means is giving it time and space is giving it time and space in our emotional world and putting out emotional energy on it.

This kind of stuff will wear you out faster than anything else. If you get wrapped up in nonsense, because the deal with critical nonsense is it does not have a solution. So you're going to be anxious and stressed and feeling all the feels, and not really getting anywhere.

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So we really want to stay on top of this in managing our minds and how we want to respond because, here's the deal; when someone is criticizing you, you have to remember, it's largely about them. When someone is judgmental and critical of you, it gives you a window into how they see themselves, not how you should necessarily see yourself.

So this goes back to an episode that I did a few episodes back, why no one can make you feel anything. People feel the way they feel. And what comes out of their mouth is usually a reflection of what's going on for them internally.

So now you, as the receiver of that criticism, get to choose and decide how much of that person's inner monologue you actually want to deal with. And let me tell you, just switching it in your brain as when someone says something critical to you, to be like, "This obviously says more about you than me. This is obviously something you're wrestling with." It won't fix it for you, but it will help depersonalize it for you a little bit, especially if the criticism is unhelpful or untrue.

So, what I want you to remember is that you have power in these situations. A lot of times when we get in criticizing situations, we think we're powerless. And that's not true. You have power.

And one of the ways you can execute that power is choosing and deciding, is this helpful to me? Is it neutral to me, meaning you don't really feel any kind of way about it, it's kind of like whatever? Or, is it hurtful for me?

From there, you get to decide how you want to be treated. And you get to put up whatever boundaries you need to feel good in the relationship or in the interaction because, sometimes, when we're dealing with critical people, we tend to respond either passively, or we respond really aggressively, okay.

And in primal terms, we would say our response is either fight, you know, fight with that person, or it's to freeze, freeze and do nothing. So when I say primal, it goes back to those primal survival mechanisms, where we fight,

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freeze, or we take flight to survive a threatening situation. So that's kind of what I'm referencing there.

And this largely has to do with how much our brains perceive criticism as a threat to us emotionally or mentally. And yes, my friends, this is a thing. Our brains don't like it. And in fact, we can kind of see it as a threatening thing.

So, remember, your brain cares about keeping you alive and functioning well on an emotional and a mental level just as much as a physical one, okay. Your brain is just as interested in those two categories as it is keeping you physically alive, because you are one being and everything is connected.

So, this is why some people can have PTSD, which is post-traumatic stress disorder, from mental and emotional abuse. So that takes criticism to an extreme. Because there's a whole spectrum of criticism. There's constructive criticism, there's just meaningless criticism, and then there's just straight up abuse, which we wouldn't even call that critical. We would just put it in an abuse category.

But people can develop PTSD for emotional and mental abuse, even though their bodies, their physical bodies, were never threatened, harmed, or abused. But their mind and emotions were. And the brain deeply cares about that. And it will create multiple protective measures to help you survive that kind of threat.

So people can have flashbacks and they can have all kinds of relationship trauma just from mental and emotional abuse. So again, that is criticism taken to a whole other category. But most of the time, people minimize this kind of abuse and they always start out in therapy saying things like, "Well, it's not that bad, it's not like my mom beat me or anything."

But let me tell you, my friends, from a psychological standpoint, your brain disagrees with you. One of the most common traits of complex PTSD is relational trauma. And a lot of times, relational trauma falls into this verbal

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and mental abuse category where you can't see the physical scars of it, but emotionally it wounded you just as deeply as any kind of physical abuse would.

So again, trauma is a complicated issue. So I'm not saying it's the only factor. I'm saying it is a factor. It can be a contributing factor, but it's not the only case.

And a large part of this too is because, you know, as kids, our brains are developing and we don't really have the brain capacity to filter through what parents or primary caregivers or teachers say about us as untrue. A lot of times, we see the adult caregivers as a reflection of ourselves. And so it's very difficult, in childhood, to sort of filter through what other people are saying about us, criticizing or just lying to us about ourselves or whatever it is, and disagree with them.

It's very challenging because we don't have all the wiring for that quite yet. So many times, as adults, we have to relearn how to talk to ourselves, how to disconnect from negativity of others, untrue stories about ourselves, and claim our own truth, okay. And so there's no shame in doing that. That is just empowering. It's helpful. And it's going to support you in meeting your goals if you can work some of this out.

But because some of this stuff happens so early on and before we even know it's a thing, we usually have to catch up to it in adulthood because we don't get some of this brain development around questioning and pushing back on what people say about us until our early teen years, okay. So that's a lot of years before we even get to becoming teenagers where we start to really question this. And then, of course, in adulthood, these kinds of misguided messages or these hurtful untrue messages that were in childhood sometimes they get in our way in adulthood and we have to go back and reclaim ourselves.

So, in this episode, I'm going to give you specific tools on how to work with criticism. So I know I just gave you a whole bunch of information, and really

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that was just psycho-education on how criticism is a huge spectrum, okay. and when you are dealing with people, you want to decide where is this person falling on the spectrum?

Is this helpful criticism, meaning it is designed to be feedback to help me become a sharper, better person? Is it neutral criticism, meaning it's just kind of like someone's just running their mouth and not really adding value, but they're also not really hurting you, they're just making noise? And then you have the very far end, which is just straight up abuse, okay.

And you're going to use different skills for each of them. So for this episode, I'm going to give you some real general tools on how to deal with criticism, okay, because here's what you want to do when you are trying to relearn how to talk to yourself, disconnect from the negativity, and claim your own truth, okay.

So I'm going to give you skills to do just that. So, here's three things to keep in mind. You want to keep it in perspective, you want to manage your mind around it, and you want to make a decision that honors your safety and wellbeing. Okay, so let me break these three down for you.

Number one, keeping it in perspective. So what this means is you need to consider the source; who is saying it? Why are they saying it? And do you care? I mean, do you really care?

So many people I talk to get so worked up about the things people say about them. And then, when we kind of break this down, I'm like, what value does this person add to your life? Like, who is this person?

And many times, it's like, well they add no value and actually I really don't care about them that much. Then why are we spending energy on this? You know what I mean? We have to learn to keep things in perspective and change the stories in our minds, which I'll get to in a second. But for right now, we're staying on keeping it in perspective.

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People who don't know us or people who don't understand us or people who just criticize to criticize, why do you want to give those people energy in your life? You probably don't.

So we really should only value opinions that are constructive and that are designed to support us, make us better, or help us on our journey. Because if someone is just running their mouth to hurt you, control you, or just plain cut you down, then I invite you to give yourself permission to dismiss their voice as theirs and theirs alone.

You do not have to create a story in your mind around that because that's how they get inside the house. The second you start to emotionally connect to it and create a story around it, they're in, okay.

So it is very important to, right off the bat, consider, do I give two shits about what you think? And if the answer is no, you want to give that criticism back to them. I don't mean say it back to them, I just mean from a mental standpoint. Give them back their words, you know. Let them keep them. They belong to them. You don't have to own everything somebody says about you. You don't have to take it in.

You can stand firm in your truth. You honor your path and you cut the noise that suggests something different. So that's kind of what it means to keep it in perspective.

Number two, manage your mind around it. criticism can only affect you if you believe it's true, create a story about it in your mind, and get emotionally connected to that negative story. Okay, so you want to intercept this long before it gets too deep into your emotional wiring, your emotional self.

So start with reframe the story you tell yourself when someone is criticizing you. For example, you might start a new job and someone might say, "Wow, you're so slow at getting that done." So when you start a new job, you're probably insecure and anxious, so there is a very big temptation there to go down the negativity route.

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So the tempting negative story you might be thinking you'd make out of that would be, "well, I suck at this job and everybody thinks so." Right, that would be a very common tempting negative story to start telling yourself, and then your emotions are going to connect to it and you're going to feel like shit at work.

So, instead of hooking into that story, I would invite you to reframe it into something that is more truthful and honors that actual situation. Okay, so here's an example of a reframe. I am learning and growing in my new role. I trust myself to improve as time goes on.

Telling yourself that is much more of a neutral statement. And when we act in neutral statements and neutral stories, we can put our energy into tangible action items and actually get better at our job. Because what's going to happen? If you tell yourself a negative story and your anxiety kicks up 10 times higher and you feel like crap every time you go to work and you're feeling ashamed, you only have so much energy to put into things.

So some of your energy is going to be divided and it's going to be going into managing your anxiety and stress over what other people think of you, rather than putting all of that energy into learning how to get faster and better at the tasks that you're being paid to do. And in the end, people's opinions change all the time.

When you start to get better at your job, when you put your focus into improving and doing the job you were hired for, people are going to start to notice that. And even if they don't, it doesn't fucking matter, okay. It only has to matter to you.

You're the only one who needs to care about you and how well you're doing and what you think about yourself, that you're meeting your own expectations. But I would really invite you to reframe that in some way for you, the way I used in this example, because that might not exactly apply to you, but I think you get the logic behind it.

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And the last one, number three, is make a decision that honors your safety and wellbeing, okay. So this is where boundaries and assertive communication come in.

You are allowed to set whatever boundary you need to when people are being rude and critical. You don't have to go into automatically going into fight or freeze, as we spoke about earlier in the episode, okay. That will be your default, because we all default into that, unless we choose a different way.

You want to be assertive in your communication. You do not want to be passive and you don't want to be aggressive. And I will do an episode on that in the future, talking about assertive communication, because that is a topic all by itself. But for this episode, you want to keep in mind, being assertive is always your goal when you're asking for what you need, offering a solution, and you're protecting yourself with boundaries.

Because when you're assertive, you're not fighting with someone and you're also not freezing with someone. It's very much stating your needs in a clean healthy way without shame or blame.

Alright, my friends. That is a wrap for today's episode. I'm hoping that this was helpful for you in navigating some of these relationships that feel challenging or difficult.

And, of course, if anything comes up for you when you're listening to these episodes, such as strong emotions, triggered, or you're getting overwhelmed, take it as information that something in your internal world needs support. There is no shame or blame in getting mental health support in your local state of residence. So, please, take action on that and take ownership of your mental health is stuff is coming up for you in these episodes.

And lastly, if you loved today's episode and you don't want to miss one, you can actually join my email list. It's on my website. I have had a flood of

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emails wanting to be notified or wanting to know how you can be notified every time a new episode drops.

So, the apps do this, if you subscribe on Apple Podcasts or you're following on Spotify, they should notify you, but I'm also doing it too. So if you want to visit my website at [nicolesymcox.com](http://nicolesymcox.com) there is a signup link where you can put in your email address and we'll just send you an email every week and let you know when a new episode releases.

Alright, my friends, have a great week.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to [nicolesymcox.com](http://nicolesymcox.com).

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