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Manifestation of Self-Criticism

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Self-criticism is a habit that we have learnt from our past. Some of the factors that could have contributed are an authoritarian parent, a strict teacher, a bully, a narcissistic sibling or one's own inner perfectionism.

Although our current levels of self-criticism are likely highly impacted by our childhood experiences, it is crucial to remember that as an adult, your life is in your own hands and you have the power to change. It may be helpful to think about the roots of your negative self-assessment, but remember that whatever they may be, you have the power to feel happier.

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Parental Care

Many times we don't even realize what we think and say about ourselves. Parents who give children autonomy, and encourage them to do things by themselves, including making mistakes, pave the way for the child to develop self-confidence and realize that mistakes are a part of life.

On the other hand, children brought up with authoritarian parenting, which is characterized by traits such as controlling and rigid, may grow up with a negative self-perception and a low sense of self-worth. If they are constantly rejected during childhood, not treated with compassion and frequently criticized, they tend to become overly critical of themselves and

others.

Childhood Roots

This inner critic tends to make an appearance early on in one's life and remains a constant companion to the effect that it becomes a part of our personality. Children, especially those high at risk for depression, often internalize and exaggerate the expectations of parents, peers or society.

The result may be a tendency to set impossibly high standards for themselves, that only fuel the inner critic.

Theories of Self-Criticism

There are several theories for the manifestation of self-criticism. One asserts that self-criticism refers to the anger that has been turned inward, which happens when a person is filled with hostility but is too afraid and insecure to let it out.

Another theory is that people who scold themselves act out of guilt and shame, or are trying to subconsciously shield themselves against criticism from others. Criticizing oneself in advance, before anyone else has done it, is then a self-defense strategy, wherein the person believes, "You can't tell me anything I don't already know".

This, the person subconsciously believes, will have a lower adverse effect on his feelings as compared to the criticism by another alone.

Culture and Criticism

Some cultures believe, as a norm, that self-criticism motivates behavior. This may cause parents to speak and act towards their child in a highly critical manner. This critical voice gradually become internalized, which means that it grows to a part of the individual's self-assessment.

Internalized Critical Voice

Adults are therefore impacted by criticism, even when the initial source is no longer around them. It helps to push us lose weight, get better marks or earn more money. It sounds like 'I have to be a millionaire, else I'll be a nobody', 'I have to rank first, or I am a failure' etc.

This voice continues to be active and present throughout one's life, if nothing is done about it.

Typical Thoughts

Self-criticism usually involves negative internal thoughts about one's own self or attributes. When these thoughts are applied broadly, they tend to have more overall negative impact on the well-being. These include statements like, 'I can't do anything.', 'I am worthless.', 'I am a failure.' etc.

These statements are overly general and unfocused, which makes them comparatively difficult to work on. These then tend to affect an individual's confidence and self-esteem.

Key Points

- Self-criticism has its initiation in childhood.
- Authoritarian parenting often gives rise to individuals with high self-criticism tendency.
- Self-criticism may be due to the inward turned anger.
- Self-criticism may act as a shield for criticism from others.
- Cultural norms may give rise to self-critical individuals.

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