

Coping with Criticism

- 1. Think of something you are currently procrastinating on.** This could be talking to someone about something that you are afraid they will judge you for. For example, Athena was putting off talking to her parents about wanting to take a gap year. Or it could be something that you are afraid to start because you don't think it will be good enough. For Eric, it was starting an assignment. Write down what you are currently avoiding.
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- 2. Identify the criticism or judgement you expect.** Think of a specific person that you are concerned might criticize or judge you for what you will say or do. Imagine the worst thing that person might say or think about you if you did this thing. The harshest thing Athena could imagine was that her parents would say something like, "Athena, this is such a bad decision. Do you know how much you are disappointing us?" Write down what you are worried your critics would say or think.
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- 3. Think of an assertive response.** Assertiveness means standing up for yourself without putting the other person down.

When you're doing this, it is helpful to first see what you could agree with in the other person's criticism. Athena could certainly agree that her decision was disappointing to her parents. However, she needed to remind herself that disappointing them was not her objective. She wanted to take responsibility for her own life, and to do that she would need to stand up for herself, regardless of how it made her parents feel. This was her assertive response: "You may know better what is good for me and you might be right, but part of me growing up is doing what I believe is right. Even if I am wrong, I can learn from this."

What is your assertive response to the criticism you expect? Write it here.

4. Imagine what this person would say in response to your assertive statement and answer it with more assertiveness. Remember, what you are doing is practicing standing up for yourself while tolerating others' disagreement or criticism. *Don't fall into the trap of trying to convince the other person that you are right or to make them see it your way.* The point of coping practice is not to get others on your side. It's to get *you* on your side!

What are you worried the person would think or say to you next? Write it down.

What would your assertive response be to this?

What are you worried the person would think or say to this?

What would your assertive response be to this?

Now that you have completed your assertive responses, practice them. You can read out loud both parts two to three times, or you can get a friend to play the part of the person you are worried will judge you. When you read or hear the critical words spoken aloud, you get a more powerful experience of what you are afraid being criticized might actually be like. And saying your assertive responses aloud will bring them to life and give you practice in building resilience to the possibility of being judged by others. This will allow you to be more creative and authentic in what you do.