

# Dealing *with* Criticism

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We are probably our own harshest critic. In our quest for that elusive perfection or to meet expectations, we are known to be rather hard on ourselves, even to a point of being unforgiving. Any behaviour or outcome that we perceive as not having measured up, we could find ourselves entertaining thoughts of self-condemnation.

Some of us may even go as far as projecting our own issues on others, viewing them with a critical eye when we think that they have missed the mark or fallen short of expectations.

Criticism is usually not an issue to most of us until we feel its sting – and that happens when it comes in the form of unwelcomed or demeaning comment or feedback, or we have interpreted it as such.

The sting of criticism, whether it is self-inflicted or it comes from others, can potentially inject its venom into the core of our being, leaving us emotionally scarred. Some of us may have even experienced constant barrage of criticisms – unfortunately from the very people that were supposed to nurture us. Consequently, we may have developed protective mechanisms to shield us from the pain.

Elbert Hubbard once said, “The final proof of greatness lies in being able to endure criticism without resentment.”

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We may argue that it is easier said than done, for far and few of us have learned to take criticism in stride, preferring to shun it all together. We live our lives putting our best foot forward, hoping to win people's approval at best, and to avoid their criticism, at worst.

But it does not always have to be this way. Learning to handle criticism well is a skill. Like any other skill, it requires practice, and more practice. And it invariably starts with us.

For a start, we could learn to deal with self-criticism, not by minimizing or dismissing the issue, but by engaging in constructive self-dialogue on the premises of respect and empathy. In other words, whenever we feel ourselves being critical of ourselves, we could either challenge or glean learning points from these reflections, but we do it without putting ourselves down or paint a negative self-image.

As we want others to do to us what we would do to others, we then ensure that we are respectful and constructive whenever we offer our opinion to others. Should we receive hurtful and unhelpful criticism from others, we could either engage the person in a constructive discussion if the situation permits, or simply refrain from personalizing the comments. After all, we would be better off conserving our energy on more significant matters than resenting people for what they said.

*Page 2 of 2*

SUTD Wellbeing Services offers professional counselling services for students in a private and confidential setting. If you would like to speak to a Counsellor to discuss any issue or challenge, please email us at [wellbeing@sutd.edu.sg](mailto:wellbeing@sutd.edu.sg).