

“Help! I can’t handle negative criticism!”



Whether it’s from a loved one or your boss, we’ve all felt the sting of hurtful feedback. But our experts promise we can grow from criticism and move forward with confidence

Be kind to you

You’re not alone

Criticism often hits on things we’re already insecure about, making it even more painful. “Many of us already second-guess ourselves or have the false belief that we’re not worthy,” says expert Melody Wilding. She advises reminding yourself this simply isn’t true. “Recognize the universality of criticism by saying, *Everyone goes through this, and it was just my turn today.*” This mental shift broadens your perspective and helps you see that criticism doesn’t reflect your value as a person.

Take a breath

Giving yourself a moment to breathe and sit with your emotions helps hurt feelings dissipate



much faster, promises expert Sharon Martin. “Let it sink in a bit by admitting to yourself, *I’m really upset by this and now’s not the time to respond,*” she says. Giving yourself some distance from the comments helps you feel more in control.

Tally your strengths

Focusing on what you value about yourself goes a long way toward offsetting negative feedback, promises expert Leslie Becker-Phelps, Ph.D. “Practice affirmations about specific attributes, such as *I’m an honest person* or *I’m a good friend.*” It’s just as important to surround yourself with supportive friends and loved ones, she adds. “These connections make it easier to tell yourself you *are* valued so you can decide how much criticism you want to take in and what you want to let go of.”

Bounce back

Depersonalize comments

“Take a piece of paper and create four columns,” advises Wilding. In the first column, write exactly what the person said, not your interpretation. In the second, jot down everything you think they got wrong. In the third, include any helpful insights they may be giving you and, finally, in the fourth column, ask yourself what your next step is. “Maybe you’ll discover there’s something you can learn,” she says. “This objective assessment helps you take criticism less personally.”

Seek more feedback

“Look for lower-stakes opportunities to get feedback so you get used to hearing it,” urges Wilding. For example, you might ask your supervisor what you could be doing better, or

if you’re working on a creative project, you might show it to friends before it’s 100% done to get their opinions. “Proactively seeking out what people think makes criticism less scary.”

Choose your response

Last, decide how or if you want to respond. “If the comments were valid, you might say, ‘I really thought about what you said—it was hard for me to hear, but I think it’s fair,’” says Becker-Phelps. “Also, be honest about how it affected you, by saying something like, ‘You need to know it hurt my feelings.’” This opens the door to better ways of communicating. So rather than someone giving you a list of negative feedback, you might say, “Why don’t we set up a time to talk about X? We *can* choose to grow from criticism.”

Our expert panel



Melody Wilding, LMSW, author of *Trust Yourself: Stop Overthinking and Channel Your Emotions for Success at Work*, is an executive coach (MelodyWilding.com).



Sharon Martin, DSW, LCSW, author of *The Better Boundaries Workbook*, is passionate about helping perfectionists recognize their worth.



Leslie Becker-Phelps, Ph.D., author of *Bouncing Back from Rejection*, is a psychologist with a practice in Basking Ridge, NJ. More at DrBecker-Phelps.com.