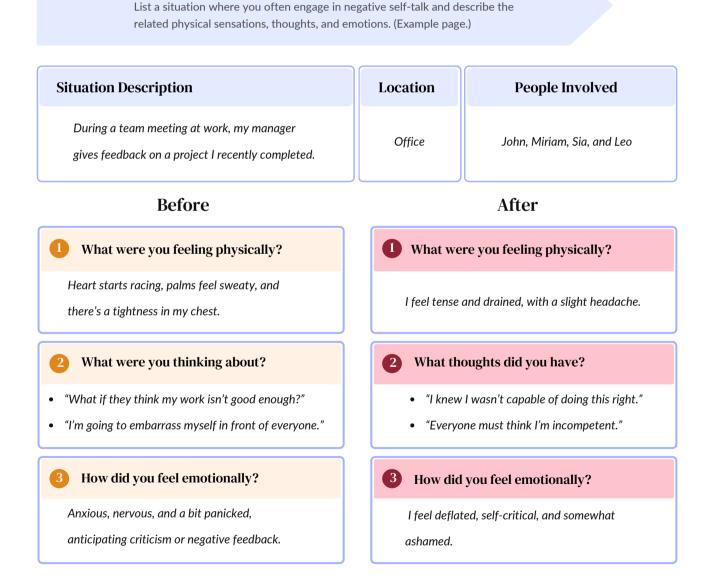# Identifying Your Triggers

Understanding what drives your <u>negative self-talk</u> is a vital step in breaking the cycle of self-criticism. Negative self-talk can be sparked by various triggers—situations, events, or thoughts that lead to harsh self-judgment. These triggers might be external, like interactions with certain people or situations, or internal, such as specific thoughts or past experiences.

Recognizing what prompts your negative self-talk means paying attention to the moments when you start to criticize yourself, along with the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that come with it. **By becoming aware of these triggers, you can learn to catch them early and challenge them, reducing their influence over how you feel about yourself.**

PART 1: Identify Triggers

List a situation where you often engage in negative self-talk and describe the related physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions. (Example page.)

Situation Description	Location	People Involved
During a team meeting at work, my manager gives feedback on a project I recently completed.	*Office*	*John, Miriam, Sia, and Leo*

Before

1 What were you feeling physically?

Heart starts racing, palms feel sweaty, and there's a tightness in my chest.

2 What were you thinking about?

- *"What if they think my work isn't good enough?"*
- *"I'm going to embarrass myself in front of everyone."*

3 How did you feel emotionally?

Anxious, nervous, and a bit panicked, anticipating criticism or negative feedback.

After

1 What were you feeling physically?

I feel tense and drained, with a slight headache.

2 What thoughts did you have?

- *"I knew I wasn't capable of doing this right."*
- *"Everyone must think I'm incompetent."*

3 How did you feel emotionally?

I feel deflated, self-critical, and somewhat ashamed.

Scan or <u>click here</u> to learn more about stopping negative self-talk

Identifying Your Triggers

Situation Description

Location

People Involved

Before

1. **What were you feeling physically?**

2. **What were you thinking about?**

3. **How did you feel emotionally?**

After

1. **What were you feeling physically?**

2. **What thoughts did you have?**

3. **How did you feel emotionally?**

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1. **What were you feeling physically?**

2. **What thoughts did you have?**

3. **How did you feel emotionally?**

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Identifying Your Triggers

PART 2: **Identify Patterns (Example Page)**

Look for patterns in your negative self-talk triggers. Identifying these patterns will make it easier to anticipate and challenge these thoughts in the future. (Example page.)

Are there common themes, people or situations that often trigger negative self-talk?

Example: I notice negative self-talk when I'm at work and my boss gives me constructive feedback. I immediately think I'm not doing a good job. It also happens when I'm around my sister, who always seems so put together and confident. It's worse when I'm around people who seem very confident or when I feel like I'm being compared to others."

How do you feel physically and emotionally right before the negative self-talk starts?

Physically, I feel tense in my shoulders and neck. My heart rate speeds up, and I get a knot in my stomach. Emotionally, I feel anxious, irritated, or sometimes even ashamed, like I'm about to be judged.

What past experiences might have contributed to the development of these negative thoughts?

I remember my teachers in school pointing out my mistakes in front of the class. I often felt embarrassed and ashamed. I also grew up with a very critical parent who always pointed out what I did wrong, which made me feel like I was never good enough.

How do you usually respond when negative self-talk begins?

I tend to withdraw and become quiet, avoiding eye contact. Sometimes, I overcompensate by trying to be overly helpful or agreeable, hoping people will like me or not notice my flaws.

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How can you be compassionate to yourself when you notice negative self-talk starting?

I'd like to remind myself that it's okay to make mistakes and that feedback is an opportunity to learn, not a reflection of my worth. I could say, 'I'm doing my best, and that's enough,' or 'I am allowed to be imperfect and still be valuable.

How could understanding your negative self-talk triggers help you respond differently in the future?

If I know what triggers my negative self-talk, I can prepare myself for those situations by using calming techniques like deep breathing or grounding exercises. I could also practice self-compassion ahead of time, reminding myself that it's normal to feel insecure but that I don't have to believe those thoughts.

PART 3:   Develop Coping Strategies

Identify coping strategies that can help you stop your negative self-talk in these situations. To learn more about coping skills you can use, scan the QR code below.

- When you notice negative self-talk, ask yourself if these thoughts are factual or based on assumptions. Look for evidence that supports or contradicts them, and consider alternative, more balanced perspectives.
- Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend.
- Replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations that reinforce your strengths and capabilities.
- Make a list of your strengths, skills, and past achievements. Review this list when negative self-talk arises to remind yourself of your worth and capabilities.

- Avoid comparing yourself to others, especially on social media. Focus on your own progress and the positive qualities that make you unique.
- Keep a journal to write down your negative thoughts and analyze them. This practice can help you identify patterns and triggers, making it easier to challenge and change them over time.
- Regularly reflect on the things you're grateful for. Focusing on gratitude can help shift your mindset from negative to positive and remind you of the good in your life.
- Engage in hobbies or activities you love. It can boost your mood and reduce the frequency of negative self-talk.

Scan or click here to learn more about stopping negative self-talk

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our strict editorial standards ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com

300+
Companies Reviewed

2,350+
Hours of Firsthand Experience

1,150+
Data Points Analyzed

Best Online Therapy

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

Best Online Psychiatry

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

Best Mental Health Apps

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

Therapist Directory

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

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