

## **The Internal Bully:**

Depression, anxiety, and stress are very often a sign of the degree to which we have a poor relationship with ourselves. When we are distressed over things in our life it is not uncommon for us to engage in a form of self-bullying. We can bully ourselves in many different ways:

1. **Self-blame:** Self-blame is when we are over-responsible for negative events and therefore accuse and blame ourselves for causing them. This kind of personalization ensures that we take full responsibility for things that are only partly our fault. In a strange way we tend to do this because we like to feel that we are in control of everything. What we often need to learn is that there are many things in life that we cannot control – like other people – and therefore need to stop blaming ourselves for things that, if we were to be truly honest, we know we cannot control.
2. **Self-guilt.** Guilt is such a strong and pervasive emotion but so hard to pin down. Guilt-prone people tend to have a subconscious belief that if bad things happen then it is because they have done something wrong. The guilt-prone person has this over-casting belief that they are being punished for their failures in life. So, again, they give themselves a very hard time when things go wrong.
3. **Self-criticism:** While we can blame ourselves for certain actions self-criticism is a bit more personal in its attack. We put ourselves down because we feel inadequate and unworthy. Our internal bully can become relentless as it engages in constant put downs. Our internal self-criticism is typically entirely disproportionate to who we are and what we strive to do.
4. **Self-attack:** We all have a tendency to be self-critical however when we begin to label ourselves as useless, worthless or weak we slip into depression, anxiety, and stress. This is a form of self-contempt that makes us feel pathetic. Just as the bully in the school yard gradually breaks down the will of his victim, the bully in your head can gradually break down your confidence and self-belief.
5. **Self-comparisons:** Often our negative self-attacking arises when we look at others and compare ourselves disparagingly with them. In fact humans and animals use this social comparison test constantly in order to assess who they need to avoid or be close to. Social comparisons are fine if they are confined to practical things like comparing, for example, how someone else got on in their driving test. However, when we generalise our comparisons in such a way as to diminish our self esteem then we are in trouble.

So your inner bully is at work observing everything we do and capable of passing contemptuous judgement of your efforts. The net effect of all this negative bullying is to make you feel bad, which makes you shut down and stop doing things with confidence.

The worst thing about your inner bully is that he/she will kick you when you are down – like any effective bully would. Bullies are more abusive of you when you are at your weakest! So he/she will be whispering to you things like “I knew you

were useless”, “You are on the floor now because that’s what you deserve and you know it.”

We attack ourselves without realising what we are doing. To climb out of the cycles of depression, anxiety, or stress we must really confront this insidious undermining of the self. Self-criticism is sulphuric acid for one’s self-esteem.

What is needed is a form of inner healing that results in us creating an inner hero who stands up against the bully for the self that you feel is weak.

Did you not always want to stand between the bully and the frail kid at school and speak up on his or her behalf – to say “STOP – you not getting away with this any longer!” To face down the bully is one of the archetypal achievements of the Hero in all mythologies and stories for this very reason. In life we all have to confront the dragon within that threatens to overwhelm us with negativity and fear.

So stop giving yourself such a hard time. You are as worthy and capable as anyone else on this planet. When God was allocating units of worth to each person created he gave a TEN to everyone – equally to the pauper and the King, to the whore and the princess. To see all people as having equal status is in fact the cornerstone of humanism, democracy, and Christianity. If you really believe this maybe you will treat yourself with a little bit more self-respect. Maybe you will realise that no-one deserves of the kind of constant criticism you dish out against yourself.