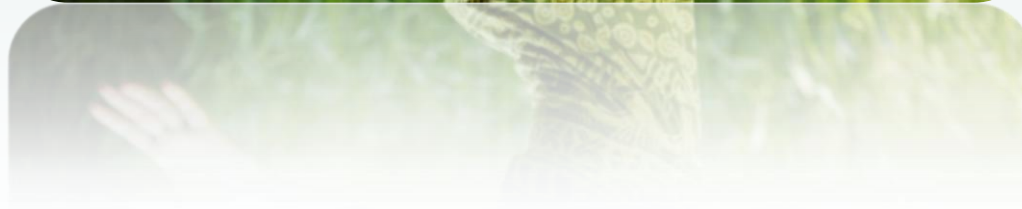# Helping Clients Stop Self-Sabotaging

with Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

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THE GLENDON
ASSOCIATION

PSYCHALIVE

(For Professionals)
www.glendon.org

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Poll #1:

In what areas does self-sabotage affect your clients?

- Work
- School
- Relationships
- Personal Goals
- Family Life

Self-Sabotage at Work

- A 2007 study showed that how people view their abilities in the workplace impacts their success. People who thought of their abilities as fixed were more likely to become anxious and disoriented, causing their performance to suffer.

- A study from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that a positive self-image was strongly correlated with overall career satisfaction, higher pay and better health.

Self-Sabotage in Relationships

- According to the American Psychological Association, about half of U.S. marriages end in divorce.

- According to data collected by WotWentWrong, an app that tracks why people break up, the most common reason for splits in couples who'd dated longer than six months was "too much fighting."

Self-Sabotage and Addiction

"Giving up smoking is the easiest thing in the world. I know because I've done it thousands of times."

- Mark Twain

- 90 percent of people who lose a lot of weight gain it back.

- 60 to 90 percent of smokers trying to quit relapse within the first year.

The Prevalence of Procrastination

- Procrastination has quadrupled in the past 30 years.

- 85-95 percent of students have problems associated with procrastination.

- A 10-year study released in 2007 showed that procrastination makes people "poorer, fatter and unhappier."

- 1 out of 5 people procrastinate so badly, it could jeopardize their jobs, relationships and health.

The Unconscious Fear of Success

Ogilvie's five observations of why athletes may have "success phobia:"

1. Social and emotional isolation
2. Guilt over asserting themselves in competition
3. Fear of discovering their true potential
4. Anxiety about the possibility of surpassing a previous record established by an admired performer
5. Pressure of constantly having to match or exceed one's previous best performance

The Unconscious Fear of Success

**Our observations of why people limit themselves:**

1. Fear of challenging one's critical inner voice

2. Fear of breaking a "fantasy bond"

3. Fear of existential issues

4. Fear of surpassing one's parents/ breaking with family norms

Definition of the Voice

The critical inner voice refers to a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward our selves and others. The "voices" that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our maladaptive behavior. This internal enemy fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities. The critical inner voice effects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, our personal and intimate relationships, and our performance and accomplishments at school and work.
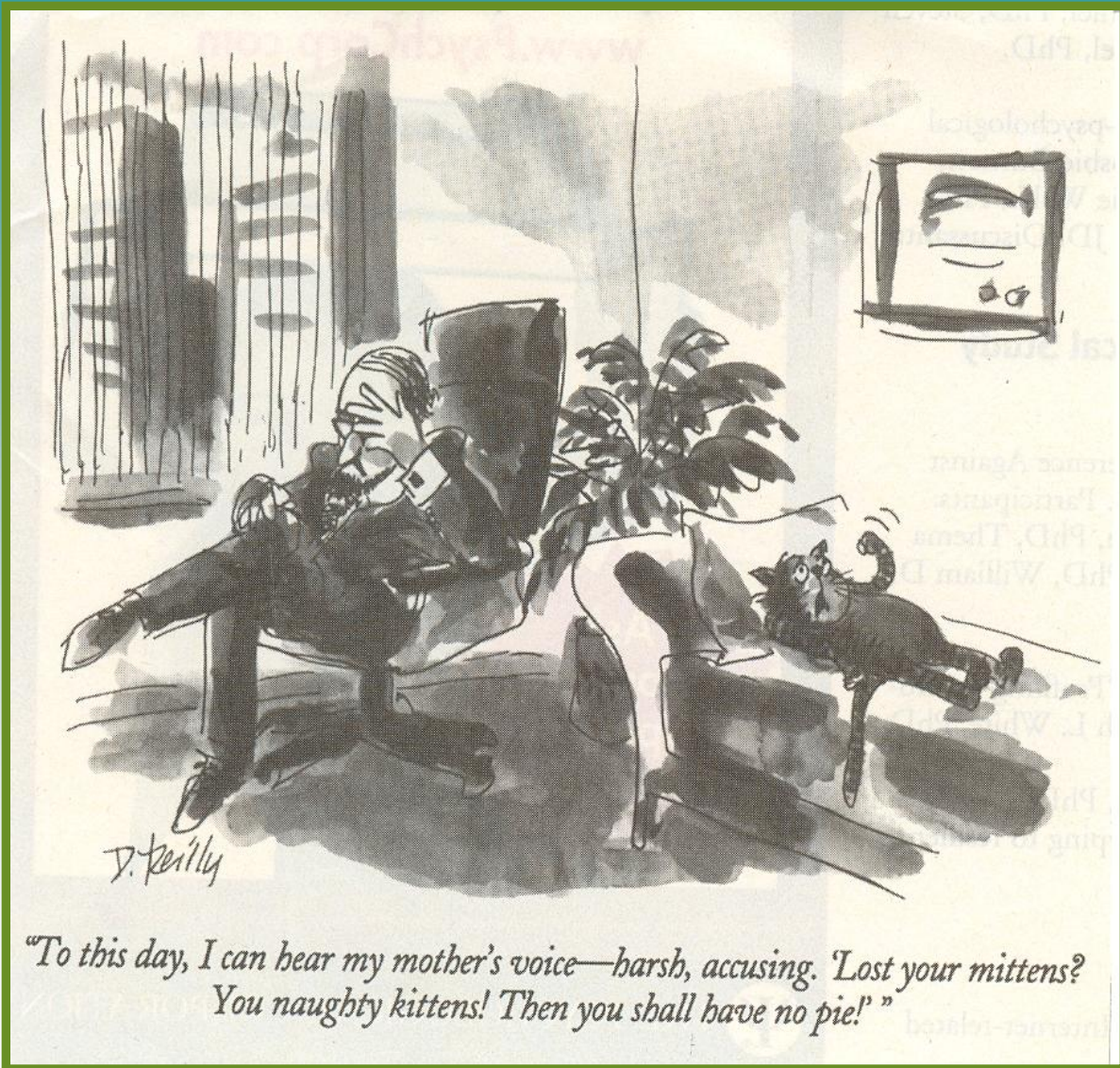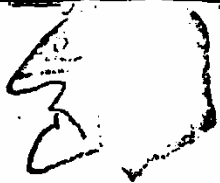
"To this day, I can hear my mother's voice—harsh, accusing. 'Lost your mittens? You naughty kittens! Then you shall have no pie!'"
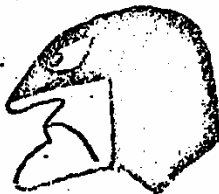
Common Critical Inner Voices

About Yourself:

You're ugly.

You're stupid.

You're not like other people.

You'll never succeed, so why even try?

About Your Career:

You'll never be successful.

No one appreciates how hard you work.

You are under too much pressure; you can't handle this stress.

About Your Relationship:

He doesn't really care about you.

You're better off on your own.

Don't be vulnerable, you'll just get hurt.

Poll #2:

Do your clients commonly express having these critical inner voices?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Part One:
Where Do Critical Inner Voices Come From?

How Voices Pass From Generation to Generation

Separation Theory
Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

❖ Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought

❖ Two kinds of emotional pain:

- Interpersonal
- Existential

❖ The core conflict

❖ Defended versus undefended lifestyles

❖ Formation of defenses in childhood

❖ The concept of the **Fantasy Bond**

❖ The concept of the **Critical Inner Voice**

Attachment Theory

Sir John Bowlby, Ph.D.

Harry Harlow, Ph.D.   Rene Spitz, M.D

Mary Ainsworth, Ph.D.

Mary Main, Ph.D.   Erik Hesse, Ph.D.

Adult Attachment Interview:
predicts the baby's attachment to
the parent with 80% accuracy before
the baby is even born

Where do voices come from?

Patterns of Attachment in Children

Category of Attachment

❖ **Secure**

❖ **Insecure – avoidant**

❖ **Insecure- anxious/ambivalent**

❖ **Insecure - disorganized**

Parental Interactive Pattern

❖ **Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive**

❖ **Emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, unresponsive and rejecting**

❖ **Inconsistently available, perceptive and responsive and intrusive**

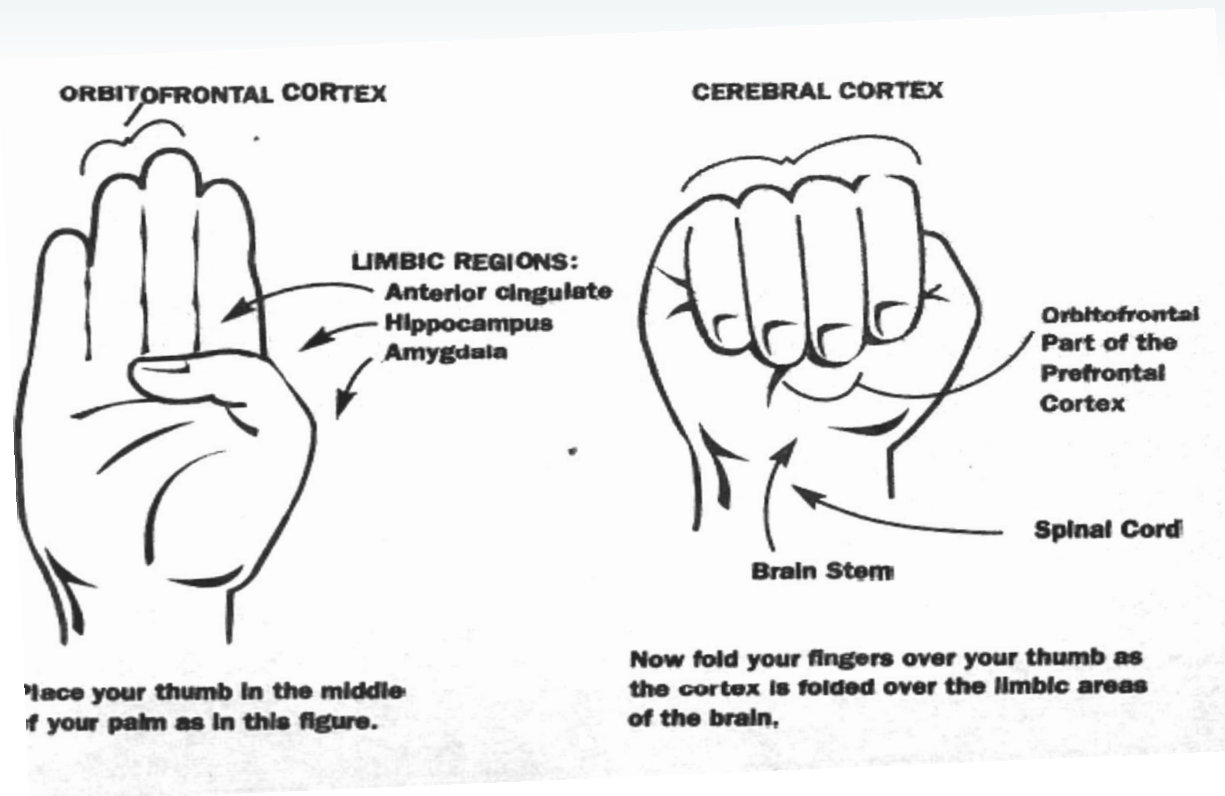❖ **Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming**

Attachment Figures

- **Low Risk Non-Clinical Populations**
  - ❖ **Secure**   **55-65%**
  - ❖ **Ambivalent**   **5-15%**
  - ❖ **Avoidant**   **20-30%**
  - ❖ **Disorganized**   **20-40%**
    - **(Given a Best Fit Alternative)**

- **High Risk, Parentally maltreated**
  - ❖ **Disorganized**   **80%**

The Brain in the Palm of Your Hand

Daniel Siegel, M.D. – Interpersonal Neurobiology

ORBITOFRONTAL CORTEX

LIMBIC REGIONS:
Anterior cingulate
Hippocampus
Amygdala

Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

CEREBRAL CORTEX

Orbitofrontal Part of the Prefrontal Cortex

Spinal Cord

Brain Stem

Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain.

9 Important Functions of the Pre-Frontal Cortex

1. **Body Regulation**
2. **Attunement**
3. **Emotional Balance**
4. **Response Flexibility**
5. **Empathy**
6. **Self-Knowing Awareness (Insight)**
7. **Fear Modulation**
8. **Intuition**
9. **Morality**

Division of the Mind

Parental Ambivalence

Parents both love and hate themselves and extend both reactions to their productions, i.e., their children.

Parental Nurturance

Parental Rejection, Neglect Hostility

Prenatal Influences

Disease Trauma
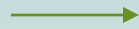
Substance Abuse/ Domestic Violence

Birth

Trauma

Baby

**Genetic
 Structure
Temperament
Physicality
Sex**

Self-System
Parental Nurturance

Unique make-up of the individual (genetic predisposition and temperament); harmonious identification and incorporation of parent's positive attitudes and traits and parents positive behaviors: attunement, affection, control, nurturance; and the effect of other nurturing experience and education on the maturing self-system resulting in a sense of self and a greater degree of differentiation from parents and early caretakers.

Personal Attitudes/Goals/Conscience

Realistic, Positive Attitudes Towards Self

Realistic evaluation of talents, abilities, etc...with generally positive/ compassionate attitude towards self and others.

Goals

Needs, wants, search for meaning in life

Moral Principles

Behavior

Ethical behavior towards self and others

Goal Directed Behavior

Acting with Integrity

Anti-Self System

- Unique vulnerability: genetic predisposition and temperament

- Destructive parental behavior: misattunement, lack of affection, rejection, neglect, hostility, over permissiveness

- Other Factors: accidents. illnesses, traumatic separation, death anxiety

The Fantasy Bond (core defense) is a self-parenting process made up of two elements: the helpless, needy child, and the self-punishing, self-nurturing parent. Either aspect may be extended to relationships. The degree of defense is proportional to the amount of damage sustained while growing up.

Anti-Self System
Self-Punishing Voice Process

Voice Process

1. Critical thoughts toward self

2. Micro-suicidal injunctions

3. Suicidal injunctions – suicidal ideation

Behaviors

Verbal self-attacks – a generally negative attitude toward self and others predisposing alienation

Addictive patterns. Self-punitive thoughts after indulging

Actions that jeopardize, such as carelessness with one's body, physical attacks on the self, and actual suicide

Anti–Self System
Self- Soothing Voice Process

Voice Process	Behaviors
1. Self Soothing Attitudes	**Self-limiting or self-protective lifestyles, Inwardness**
2. Aggrandizing thoughts toward self	**Verbal build up toward self**
3. Suspicious paranoid thoughts towards others	**Alienation from others, destructive behavior towards others**
4. Micro-suicidal Injunctions	**Addictive patterns. Thoughts luring the person into indulging**
5. Overtly Violent thoughts	**Aggressive actions, actual violence**

Part Two:
Challenging the Critical Inner Voice

Helping Your Clients Identify Their Critical Inner Voice

Help Clients:

1. Recognize the events that trigger their Critical Inner Voice
2. Recognize the specific outside criticisms that support their Critical Inner Voice
3. Become aware of times they may be projecting their self-attacks onto other people
4. Notice changes in their mood

Identify Negative Thinking

Are you...?

⌘ **Filtering:** You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones.

⌘ **Personalizing:** When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself.

⌘ **Catastrophizing:** You automatically assume and anticipate the worst.

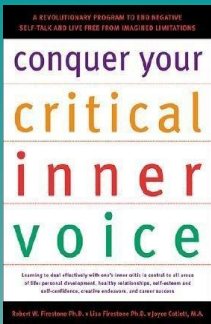⌘ **Polarizing:** You see things only as either good or bad. There is no middle ground.

Source: Mayo Clinic

Exercise 1.1:
Visualizing the Real You

All exercises from <u>Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice</u>

❖ **My physical abilities**

❖ **My positive qualities**

❖ **My interests and activities**

❖ **My long-term goals:**

❖ **My short-term goals:**
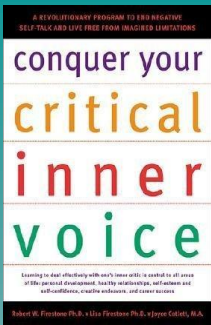
❖ **Where do I stand in relation to my goals?**
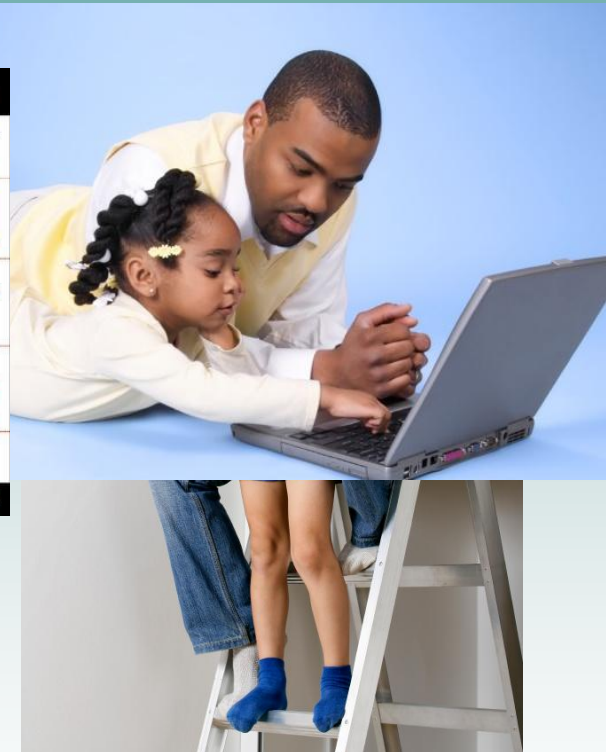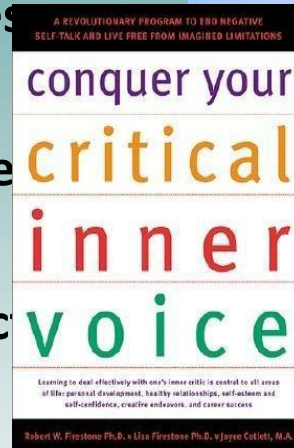
Exercise 1.2:
Your Critical Inner Voice Attacks

❖ **Self-critical attacks as "I" statements**

Example: "I don't think I'm an attractive person."

_____

_____

_____

_____

❖ **Self-critical attacks as "you" statements**

Example: "You're not attractive."

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise 1.3:

Keeping a Journal:
Your Critical Inner Voice/The Real You

❖ **My critical inner voice**
   as "you" statements

Example: "You're so stupid."

_____

_____

_____

❖ **The real me**
   as "I" statements

Example: "Sometimes I struggle with work, but I catch on quickly and then usually do a good job."

_____

_____

_____
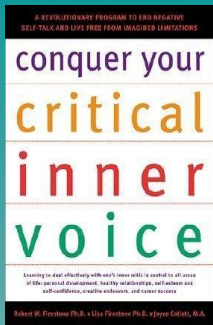
Exercise 1.4:
A Plan for Action

❖ **Actions dictated by my critical inner voice**

Examples:
"Have another piece of cake."
"You should just be on your own."
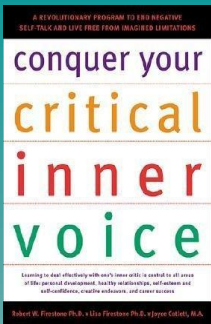"You can't trust anyone, so don't get too
 close."

❖ **Actions to take that reflect the real me**

Examples:
"I want to eat healthy and take care of
myself."
"I don't want to be isolated and will seek out
friends"
"I want to stay vulnerable in my close
relationships."

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise 2.1:
Seeing Your Parents Realistically
A. Describing Your Parents' Traits and Behaviors

1. Did you experience any long-term separations from your parent or parents during your childhood? Through death? Divorce? Illness? If so, describe your reactions at the time.

2. What do you think your parents offered you that has been the most valuable to you in your adult life? Describe these traits, values, or ideals.

3. What faults or weaknesses did you dislike in your parent or parents? Describe these traits.

4. Were your parents strict or overly permissive in their discipline of you and your siblings? Describe an example of how they disciplined you.
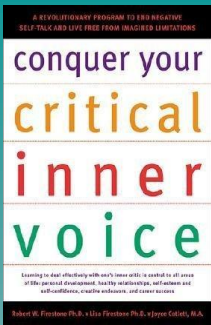
Exercise 2.1:
Seeing Your Parents Realistically
B. Your Parents' Behaviors That May Have Caused You Shame or Guilt

Mother	Father	
Yes No	Yes No	As a child, were you beaten or scolded in the presence of others?
Yes No	Yes No	Did your parents show with words and gestures that they liked you?
Yes No	Yes No	Did you ever feel humiliated by things your parents did or said in front of others?
Yes No	Yes No	Did your parents begrudge you things you needed?

Poll #3:

Do you use homework assignments as an adjunct to therapy?

- Yes
- No

Assessment Instruments

❖ Firestone Assessment of Self-Destructive Thoughts (FAST)
❖ Firestone Assessment of Suicidal Intent (FASI)
❖ Firestone Assessment of Violent Thoughts
❖ Firestone Assessment of Violent Thoughts - Adolescents

Voice Therapy

Cognitive Affective Behavioral Approach
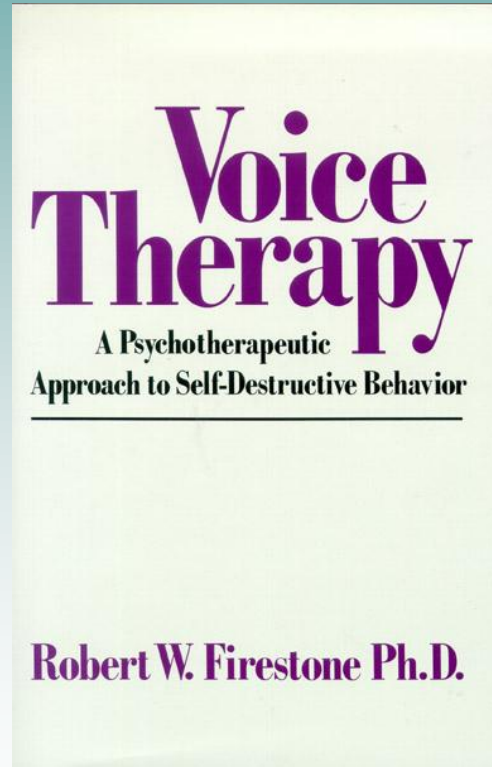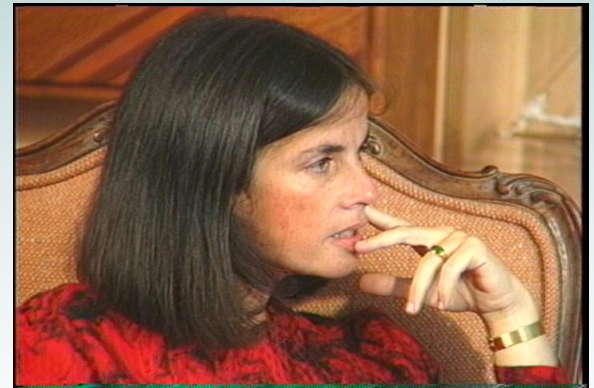
The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step I

Identify the content of the person's negative thought process. The person is taught to articulate his or her self-attacks in the second person. The person is encouraged to say the attack as he or she hears it or experiences it. If the person is holding back feelings, he or she is encouraged to express them.

Step II

The person discusses insights and reactions to verbalizing the voice. The person attempts to understand the relationship between voice attacks and early life experience.

The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

Step III

The person answers back to the voice attacks, which is often a cathartic experience. Afterwards, it is important for the person to make a rational statement about how he or she really is, how other people really are, what is true about his or her social world.

Step IV

The person develops insight about how the voice attacks are influencing his or her present-day behaviors.

Step V

The person then collaborates with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors. The person is encouraged to not engage in self-destructive behavior dictated by his or her negative thoughts and to also increase the positive behaviors these negative thoughts discourage.
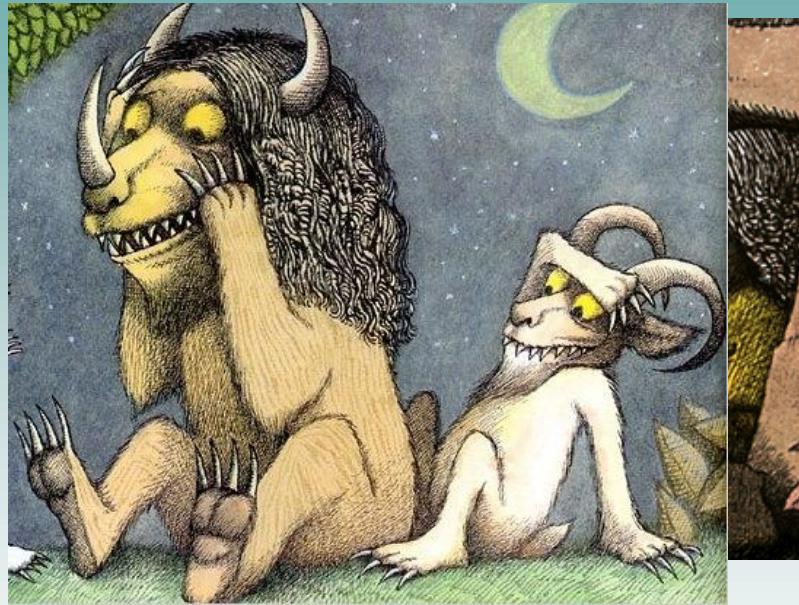

If you are interested in attending a voice therapy training or in getting training materials please contact jina@glendon.org or visit www.glendon.org.
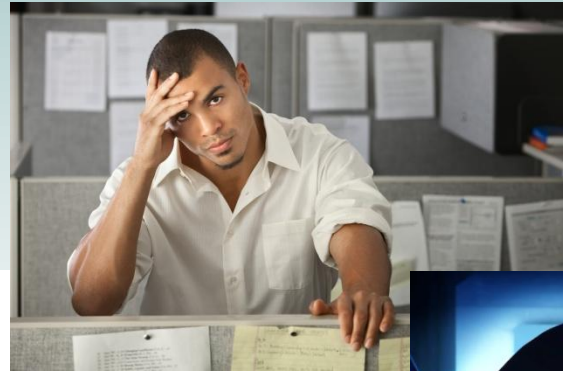
Self

Anti-Self

Reactions to Change

- **Fear** of the unknown or unfamilar
- **Anxiety** over living free from your inner critic
- **Guilt** over surpassing people from your past
- **Sadness** about the preciousness of life

Curious

Open

Accepting

Loving

Self-Compassion Vs. Self-Esteem
Research from Dr. Kristin Neff:

Self-Esteem

- Self-esteem refers to our sense of self-worth, perceived value or how much we like ourselves.

- Low self-esteem is problematic, however trying to have higher self-esteem can also be problematic.

- The need for high self-esteem may encourage us to ignore, distort or hide personal shortcomings so that we can't see ourselves accurately.

- Our self-esteem is often contingent on our latest success or failure, meaning that our self-esteem fluctuates.

Self-Compassion Vs. Self-Esteem
Research from Dr. Kristin Neff:
Self-Compassion

- Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluations.

- People feel compassion for themselves, because all human beings deserve compassion and understanding, not because they possess some particular set of traits.

- Research indicates that in comparison to self-esteem, self-compassion is associated with greater emotional resilience, more accurate self-concepts, more caring relationship behavior, as well as less narcissism and reactive anger.

Studies show that self-compassion has a significant positive association with:

- Happiness
- Optimism
- Positive affect
- Wisdom
- Personal initiative
- Curiosity and exploration
- Agreeableness
- Extroversion
- Conscientiousness

Hardiness

In 30 years of research, Hardiness Institute founder Dr. Salvatore Maddi found that what predicts how well we will do in life, our relationships, careers, etc. isn't how much money we have or even how many obstacles we face; it's a matter of how hardy we are.

Three C's of Hardiness

Commitment

Control

Challenge

Differentiation

Child Self   Real Self   Parent Self

Steps of Differentiation

Step 1: Break with internalized thought processes, i.e., critical, hostile attitudes toward self and others

Step 2: Separate from negative personality traits assimilated from one's parents

Step 3: Relinquish patterns of defense formed as an adaptation to painful events in one's childhood

Step 4: Develop one's own values, ideals, and beliefs rather than automatically accepting those one has grown up with
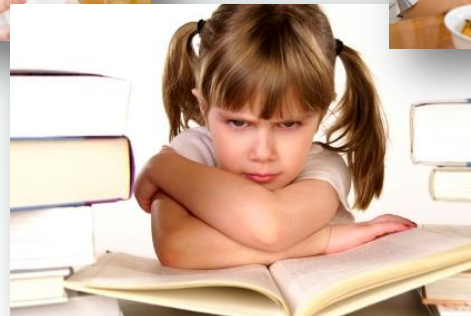
Guidelines for Continued Personal Development

- ❖ **Be Aware of the Fear That Accompanies Change**

- ❖ **Realize That Psychological Pain is Valid**

- ❖ **Develop a More Realistic View of Your Parents**

- ❖ **Differentiation – Unlearn Old Behaviors, Learn New Behaviors**

- ❖ **Become More Aware of Specific Defenses Against Feeling**

- ❖ **Recognize the Value of Friendship**
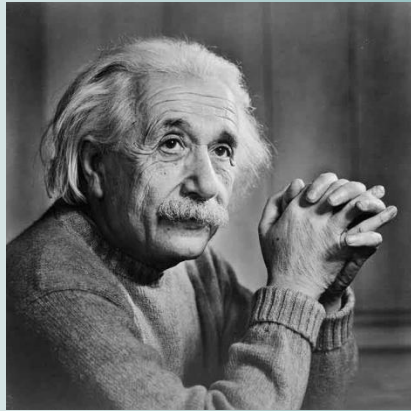
- ❖ **Seek Your Own Personal Meaning in Life**

Guidelines for Further Developing a Meaningful Life

❖ **Practice Being Generous in All Your Relationships**

❖ **Become Aware of Existential Realities**

❖ **Develop a Spiritual Perspective and Appreciate the Mystery of Existence**
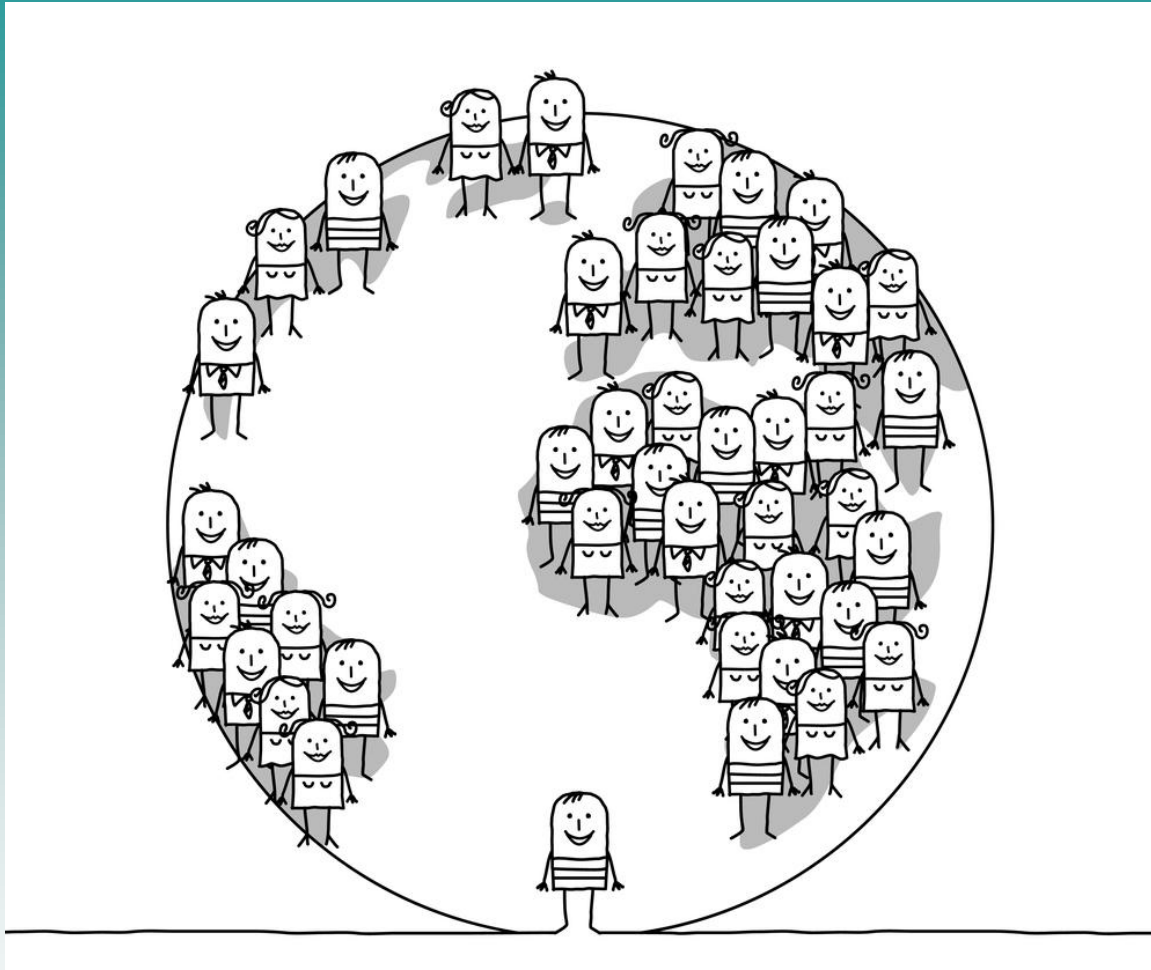
We create the world we live in.

A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."
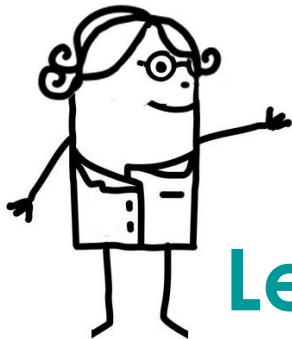
- Albert Einstein

Resources: Books
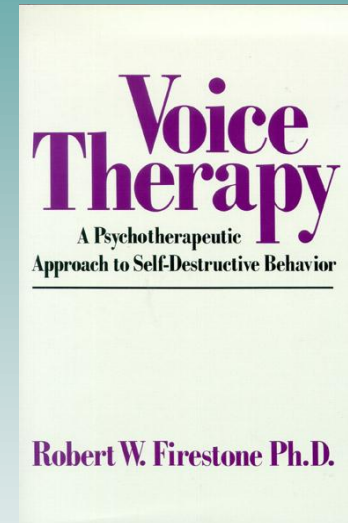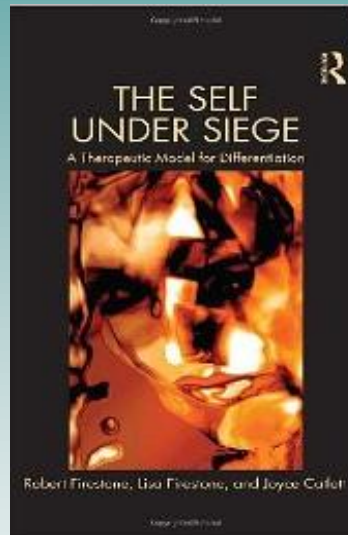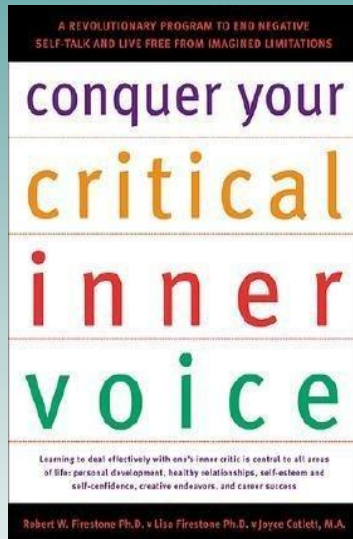
Visit www.psychalive.org for resource links

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* A recording of this Webinar will also be available online. Those unable to attend this live Webinar may view the recording and read an accompanying assignment to receive 3 CE Units for $35. A link to this recording will be sent to you as well.