Twitter Thread by anna phylaxis



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Beginning to learn and understand that my "inner critic" - the voice that harshly criticizes and shames me - is only and has always only been attempting to protect me, to act to curtail or stop behavior that in the past has gotten us harmed - has made dealing w/it much easier.

Not "easy" or "pleasant," because the inner critic still shows up only when it wants to yell that we need to stop doing something immediately b/c of how we have previously been hurt. As a protector it still attempts to mostly communicate with goads of fear and shaming.

But understanding the roots of that fear and shaming, that self-policing behavior, has allowed me to respond to it with compassion, and that has been transformative. Being able to hear and endure the shaming as what it is - a protective reflex born from a child's fear & pain;

has enabled me to view it in that proper context, the same way I would view a child screaming in fear, and receive it gently and warmly, thank it for trying to protect me, and attempt to de-escalate the fearful predictions of catastrophe.

Not having to receive these still-aversive messages from a place of anger and hurt - from a place of "why is this voice saying such terrible things, I am so angry at this piece of myself that wants to protect me," has reduced the stress of inner critic interruptions considerably.

Now I know that those rigid, harsh critical interjections come from a child's conception of safety and danger, from a child's world view of a hostile existence full of unpredictable and dangerous adults who had to be placated or avoided, b/c they could never be fought.

Now I know that I should no more be yelling at the inner critic in my head than I should yell at a child in real life, for being hurt and afraid of receiving future hurt. Not only is it a harmful response, but an ineffective one. You cannot terrorize a child into fearlessness.

Now, I do want to say - that doesn't make it "okay" that the inner critic communicates to me in the way that it does. It is a thing I am still attempting to gently, patiently reshape. Learning how to not hate and fear it has been an important part of that work.

Because, ultimately, in the end - even though that voice is not "me" per se, in the sense of personality and identity, it is still a voice that exists inside my brain, my head. There is no way for me to be mad at "it" without directing that anger at myself. And I don't need that.