

Can YOU cope with criticism?

Whether it makes you cry or come out all GUNS BLAZING, find out the best ways to deal with a C-BOMB ATTACK BY HELEN RUSSELL

Don't take offence, but... No phrase sets off the panic klaxons quite like this one. It means you're about to get a load of criticism and it'll be impossible not to take it to heart. Sigh. "Criticism is a fact of life, but that

doesn't mean it doesn't cut to the core," says psychologist Anjula Mutanda. "The people who cope best with criticism are those who learn from it."

Take our quiz to discover how you deal with a dressing down, then read our expert advice. So the next time someone drops the C-bomb, you'll be ready...

The criticism QUIZ

How would you react in these scenarios? Tot up your A, B and C totals at the end.

Your boss points out a mistake you made at work. You...

A Feel panicky, cry, then offer to resign.

B Apologise for your mistake and promise to make amends.

C Lie. Say it wasn't you who messed up and demand an apology. You've always suspected your manager has it in for you.

You try on a friend's dress but can't do the zip up. She says it's too small! You...

A Blush. A lot. And immediately change. Into a full-length kaftan.

B Laugh, and resolve to lay off the Kit Kat Chunkys.

C Tell her it's clearly shrunk in the wash and she shouldn't buy such cheap clothes.

Your mum's round for Sunday lunch and announces that you've overcooked the chicken. You...

A Tell her you're sorry, you're a terrible cook and grab the takeaway menus.

B Smile sweetly and let it slide. Mum always thinks her roasts are the best.

C Shout, Gordon Ramsay-style, for her to keep the truck out of your trucking kitchen. Only using a much ruder word than truck.

Your other half finds a stash of shopping receipts and accuses you of overspending. You...

A Fess up and promise to cut right back. Charity shop chic's in, right?

B Admit you've had a splurge, but tell him it's none of his business what you spend your dosh on.

C Accuse him of snooping and tell him if he didn't spend so much time down the pub, you wouldn't have to amuse yourself by shopping.



Mostly As: The Inner Critic

You're a sensitive soul who takes offence easily and lets it really upset you, but it's important to think about where the criticism is coming from. "Running through 'who, what, why, and where' when someone criticises you will give you a good sense of whether or not it's justified," says Anjula. "If

your boss takes you to a quiet corner to tell you about a mistake, chances are they're trying to be helpful. If they shout it across the office or do it in earshot of others, they're probably having a bad day too."

CURB THE CRITICISM Time out alert! Take a moment before you react, and really think about what's being said. "In a work scenario, perhaps say something like: 'That's a lot to take on board. I'd like to think about it, so can we pick this up later?'" advises psychologist and confidence expert Dr Rob Yeung. "Then go away and decide how you'd like to respond to it before tackling it in a more composed frame of mind." Do you often forget what you want to say in tricky situations? Compose a clear, concise email. Leave emotions out, they're not for the work place.

When it comes to critical family members, be analytical. "Is anyone else saying your roast's horrible?" asks Anjula. "Or is your mum saying it because she's convinced she's the better cook or is a bit jealous? If the criticism is unjustified, set her straight." Here, focus on feelings, explain it makes you happier when she's supportive. And if she can't be, suggest she cooks next Sunday. Ha!

NO OFFENCE KNOW-HOW Building up your self-esteem will help you cope better with criticism. Download the Build Confidence With Andrew Johnson app (£1.99, iTunes) for a daily pocket pep talk from psychotherapist Andrew.

Mostly Cs: The Killer Critic

You're someone who rolls up your sleeves at the first whiff of criticism, ready for a fight. Underneath it all, you're super-sensitive, and only want to do your best and not have people think badly of you, but your coping mechanism isn't healthy. "Becoming defensive, getting aggressive, or thinking people have it in for you is a toxic way to live," says Anjula. "You're more likely to be snappy and give out negative vibes that then make people react badly to you."

Admitting when you make mistakes and accepting that no one's perfect is the first step to coping better with the C-word.

CURB THE CRITICISM Stop, collaborate and listen. Vanilla Ice wasn't the coolest kid on the block, we admit, but we can learn from his words. "Listen, listen, and listen some more," advises Rob. "Avoid going on the attack, and don't justify yourself until the other person has finished talking." If you're feeling all fired up, chances

Mostly Bs: The Objective Critic

You can listen objectively without getting offended and have built up a rhino-esque hide to cope with life's knocks and the people that deliver 'em. "Those who know how to take the sting out of criticism tend to cope better than those who take it to heart or become aggressive. But you still need to be careful," says Anjula. "Especially when it comes to relationships." Being objective and assertive might work well in the boardroom, but the bedroom calls for a different tack as feelings make us more vulnerable. This is also true with friendships, as you're more invested long-term in the relationship than you would be with a boss or colleague.

CURB THE CRITICISM Research carried out by psychologist Dr John Gottman found that happy couples gave each other five compliments for every one criticism. This applies to friends too. "It's a good thing to remember when your partner or a mate has said something negative," says Anjula. "Try to turn a criticism around. So say: 'Thank you, I know it took a lot of courage for you to say that...'. Then, explain how you feel by saying: 'I really like it when you do this...'. But when you say or do this... it hurts my feelings." Afterwards, try other ways of delivering your extra compliments to up your positivity quota. Jot down nice things on Post-it notes and leave them in random places, such as on the milk, between boring bills, or inside their shoes. Friend or lover, the smiley result will be the same.

NO OFFENCE KNOW-HOW Sign up to The Happiness Project email set up by author Gretchen Rubin (Happiness-project.com). She dishes out quotes daily to remind you of all the good things in life, which should get you in the mood for complimenting others.

*Don't automatically
take offence – THINK about
how to RESPOND to criticism*

are you won't be thinking straight so, excuse yourself, grab your iPod and make for the nearest exit. Listen to one track – try calming Emeli Sandé rather than Eminem – and concentrate on the words and the instruments. This cognitive behaviour therapy technique takes you out of the moment, and helps you calm down. On your way back into the situation, remember to take 10 deep breaths before you speak. "This allows the rational part of your brain to catch up and get to a place where you can think clearly," adds Anjula.

NO OFFENCE KNOW-HOW Still seeing red? Make like Bridget Jones and start a diary. Studies show that those who regularly write down their thoughts and feelings are better at putting things into perspective. Review what you've written each month by skim-reading it, and what you can learn from the criticism will jump out from the page. **f**