



Receiving criticism without overreacting

What would be the implications of the following belief that men often hold...?

My partner has no right to criticise me!

The thinking behind this is usually that **'she has faults, so how does she have a right to criticise me'?** Is there anyone who is truly above criticism, who can walk on water and always does the right thing? How will we know what to change unless we are willing to hear criticism?

To check whether you are genuinely open to criticism identify one criticism that you hear quite often from your partner or someone else close to you. It's important to identify a genuine criticism.

We learn most from looking at a criticism we least like to hear from our partner or someone close to us, e.g. not listening, drinking/drugging too much, bad language, not cleaning up messes, bad habits, being inconsiderate/lazy, breaking promises, not calling if we're late home, not taking a fair share of housework/childcare, etc.

Here is a 'thought experiment' you can try now...

Imagine that you are responding to a criticism that really stirs you up. Then imagine responding in two very different ways. If you are brave enough you could role play this with a friend or other trusted person.

- 1. 'Take One' is a response without thinking - a knee-jerk, defensive reaction.**
Simply respond as you would without time to weigh up your words. It comes naturally to us to be defensive, for example to say, *"I was only trying to..."* or to point the finger back at the other person (counter-attacking or blaming) e.g. *"What about you, when you...?"*
- 2. 'Take Two' is a thinking response, using respectful language.**
This will show we heard the criticism and take it on board as something to think about, and to consider making changes about. This time the aim is to make a conscious effort to demonstrate that we have heard the criticism and are thinking about it and considering making a change in the behaviour that is being objected to, e.g. *"You're saying you're upset that I didn't let you know I'd be late - next time I'll phone."*

Guidelines for handling criticism positively

- **Listen reflectively.** Be an accurate mirror of what is heard from your critic.
- **Avoid arguing** or getting into the “did so” or “did not” sort of conflict.
- **Acknowledge learning** from the exchange: *“I’ve realised more how it is for you when I swear and bang the cupboards”*.
- **State intended changes clearly** about what you will do differently in future.