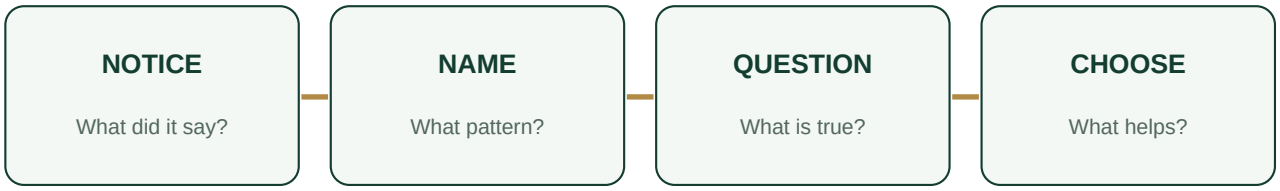
The Gremlin Process

Recognising the inner critic and choosing a kinder response

A “gremlin” is a playful name for an unhelpful inner-critical voice. It might say you are not good enough, predict rejection or demand perfection. This is a metaphor, not a separate being or diagnosis.

The aim is not to silence thoughts by force. Instead, notice the message, understand what triggers it, check the facts and choose a helpful action.

The Gremlin Process



An example

Trigger: I made a small mistake. **Gremlin message:** “I always mess things up.” **Check:** One mistake is not “always.” **Choice:** Correct what I can and speak to myself respectfully.

In this five-page guide

1. Understand the gremlin process and visual map
2. Spot your inner critic
3. Understand its triggers and impact
4. Challenge the message with evidence
5. Make a compassionate action plan

Worksheet 1 | Spot My Gremlin

Notice the exact words of a recurring self-critical thought. Write them as a thought, not as a fact.

What happened just before the thought appeared?

What did my inner critic say, word for word?

How did I feel in my body and emotions?

What did I feel urged to do?

Tip: “I am having the thought that…” can help you create distance from the message.

Worksheet 2 | Find the Pattern

An inner critic often becomes louder around mistakes, uncertainty, comparison or exhaustion. Some concerns may reflect real problems, so consider your context.

Situations that make my gremlin louder

Its favourite rules or predictions (“must”, “always”, “never”)

How the message affects my choices or relationships

What might I actually need in these moments?

Examples: reassurance, a clearer instruction, rest, practical help or a boundary.

Worksheet 3 | Question the Message

You do not need to argue with every thought. Choose one that is affecting you and examine it gently.

The gremlin message I want to examine

Facts that support it (not guesses)

Facts or experiences that tell a fuller story

A fairer, kinder thought I can practise

Example: “I struggled today” can be true without “I am a failure” being true.

Worksheet 4 | My Gremlin Response Plan

Choose a realistic response for the next time the inner critic appears. The goal is flexibility, not perfect positive thinking.

My early sign that the gremlin is active

A phrase I can use to notice, not obey, the thought

One small supportive action I can take

A person, adjustment or resource that may help

What I want to remember after a difficult day

A gentle reminder

Self-critical thoughts can be learned responses to stress or past experiences. You deserve practical support and respect, not blame. If distress is persistent or severe, consider discussing it with a qualified professional.