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We all judge things that happen, we judge other people, and we judge ourselves. Judging is perfectly human, and we all use judgments for a good portion of the time.

There are certain advantages to judging: When we judge things as “good” or “bad”, this helps us organize our experience and perception into categories. Judging something as “bad” may keep us in line and prevent us from doing something that’s harmful. It is also a way of reducing ambiguity in life. Ambiguity is often anxiety-provoking and can be hard to tolerate. Most people don’t like it when things are ambiguous, up in the air, or not clearly defined. Therefore, judgments can help us feel safe in some ways, by making the world seem orderly (categorized in “good” or “bad”), and by it making it seem as though the anxiety-provoking ambiguity is reduced.

Judgments are also a way of expressing a preference, and of using a short-cut in order to communicate. I could say “This movie is bad”, or I could say “I didn’t like the movie, because I felt that it did not accurately reflect the synopsis of the book it was based on.” I could say “Drinking alcohol is bad”, or I could say “When people drink alcohol, it makes them intoxicated and tends to make people act more impulsively.” The first statement is a judgment, the second statement is a non-judgmental description of facts and of consequences. Notice the difference?

There are downsides to being judgmental, though. When we are judgmental of other people – that is, when we are critical, demeaning, or contemptuous – these sorts of judgments can affect our relationships with others. Very frequently, in one way or another, people can pick up on the fact that we’re judging them. If you’ve ever been on the receiving end of someone judging you, you probably have experienced how uncomfortable it is to feel judged by someone else.

Where judgments tend to get us into the most trouble, though, is typically when it comes to judging ourselves. Most of us tend to be extremely harsh and judgmental with ourselves. The ways we talk to ourselves, our internal dialogue, can be so very critical and often rather mean. Some examples of common judgmental ways in which people think to themselves are things like: “I am such an idiot!”, “I can never get it right!”, “Why can’t I just grow up and get over it!”, “I really shouldn’t be such a lazy coward!” Have you thought similar things to yourself? Then you can probably relate to how talking to yourself in that way would just make you feel lousy? Most of would not talk to a friend in same critical and demeaning way in which we often think to ourselves...