

Are you exercising good judgment or being judgmental?

Exercising good judgment is essential to our physical and mental health, but being judgmental isn't.

There are ways to maintain the integrity of our convictions without being judgmental of others. And we can learn to deal with others who are judgmental.

Judgment is helpful; being judgmental is not

Judgment is a natural and necessary component of [decision-making](#). You see the line of cars in morning rush hour and judge that there will not be enough time to stop for coffee. You see a job posting and judge that it is a promising opportunity to explore.

Judgments also keep us constant with our values, beliefs and needs.

Exercising judgment moves into being judgmental when we embrace an attitude of moral superiority, and even [contempt](#), when we profess to know better or, worse, to be better.

We can be judgmental out of envy, fear, anger or some combination of these. It is both a way to avoid dealing with our own insecurities and a critique of another person so we can feel more secure and righteous.

Like many attributes, being judgmental is a learned behavior. We can work toward being less critical and judgmental and engage with others with greater compassion and curiosity. It can help our well-being as research shows that being judgmental correlates [with diminished mental health](#).

Here are some tips to get started, along with signals to help recognize when you are being judgmental yourself.

Beware of certainty

Curiosity is the antidote to being judgmental. If you find yourself tempted to jump to conclusions because it appears someone's beliefs or attitudes do not align with yours, pause and get curious.

Engage with empathy

Assume good intent on the part of others and be mindful of your language in response. Specifically, respond in a way that reflects your perspective rather than your judgment. Extending grace may sound like an old-fashioned idea, but it is helpful.

Avoid moral superiority

In moments of tension, anger or embarrassment, retreating to moral superiority ("I know better; I am better.") creates divides rather than bridging them. While emotions are important pieces of information and might influence how we react to tense situations, they do not have to dictate our response. Express your beliefs clearly but without imposing a sense of superiority. If this becomes difficult because emotions are too high, consider ending the conversation.

Remember it's not really about you

Judgment is often a strategy people use to empower themselves by diminishing others. But judgmental commentary reflects on the judge (their insecurity, anger, envy or other big feelings) far more than it reflects on you. Remember that you can simply let this be the other person's issue, not yours.

We cannot control anyone else's thoughts, actions or judgment. But we can all take ownership of our own.