

PERFECTIONISM

INFOGRAPHIC

The definition of perfectionism can be quite varied in the literature and the term 'perfectionistic' is something that is frequently used in our everyday conversations. Let's delve into what perfectionism is and isn't.

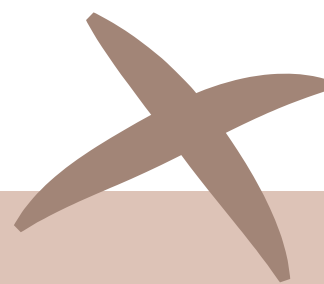


Perfectionism is striving to meet often **unrealistic** and **unrelenting** self-imposed high standards and demands **despite negative consequences** that are associated with this. These standards and demands may be in one area of life or across several life domains. It leads to preoccupation with performance and achievement and can lead to significant marginalisation of other life areas.

Perfectionism involves a response of **self-criticism** when the high self-imposed standards or demands are not met. The inner critic voice is **harsh, critical** and **unrelenting**. This leads to feelings of failure and inadequacy.

Perfectionism is problematic when it is unrelenting and when an individual's self-worth is almost exclusively **defined** by **how well they meet** these self-imposed and **unrelenting standards**. For example, feeling completely inadequate in response to getting a B instead of an A+ on an assignment.

There are many **behaviours, thoughts** and **rules** associated with perfectionism as well as many **negative consequences** related to this pursuit of perfection. For example, perfectionism is strongly associated with **black and white thinking, avoidance, procrastination** and **excessive checking**.



Perfectionism is not the same thing as **self-improvement**. This is because perfectionism is focused on **avoiding failure and judgement** as well as seeking external **approval** or a sense of **acceptance**. It leads to a belief that you are only as good as what you achieve. Self-improvement on the other hand involves focusing on how you might **learn** or **improve**.

Perfectionism is not the same as **'doing your best'**. It is not focused on growth and learning. It can sometimes have the opposite effect as over time **performance is impaired** due to **stress, pressure, and anxiety**. It can even prevent people from even starting or giving something a go.

Perfectionism is **not helpful or motivating**, contrary to popular belief. It often leads to many **negative consequences** (stress, exhaustion, feeling worthless, self-criticism & spending excessive time on tasks at the expense of other areas of life) which **decrease motivation** and can **increase anxiety, avoidance** and **isolation**.

Perfectionism does not lead to avoiding feelings of failure, shame and disappointment, despite this often being the aim. These feelings are inevitable for all, no matter how hard you strive to meet unrelenting and high standards. It is unrealistic and impossible for one person to always perform highly.

HELPFUL WAYS TO ADDRESS PERFECTIONISM

01

EXPLORE THE ORIGINS AND FUNCTION

What are some key experiences related to perfectionism? What are the messages the client may have received? What has been rewarded for the client? How has it been helpful in the past? Does it serve the same usefulness now? What might be the function of this for the client?

What might be some of the pros of perfectionism and what might be some of the cons? How does it benefit the client and what are the negative consequences that come with perfectionism? What might be important to the client in their life and how does perfectionism fit?

02

EXAMINE THE PROS AND CONS

03

EXPLORE SELF-EVALUATION AND SELF-WORTH

How is the client's self-worth defined? How much influence does perfectionism have? Complete a self-evaluation pie chart with client. Explore how the client wants to evaluate their self-worth. Consider ways to enhance how the client evaluates themselves.

Identify beliefs and thoughts associated with perfectionism and what keeps it going. Set goals to reduce perfectionistic behaviours that the client identifies. Identify and challenge perfectionistic rules for living (and eating). Re-evaluate and create new, more realistic rules and beliefs.

04

CHALLENGE & REDUCE BEHAVIOURS / RULES

05

DEVELOP SELF-COMPASSION

Perfectionism can be hard to change. For some, this will continue to be a part of their life. While we cannot get rid of perfectionism, we can support clients to change how they respond to themselves. Activating the soothe system via self-compassion can be helpful in moving away from the threat system, pressure and self-criticism.