

Top Tips for Perfectionism

Look at the Pros and Cons

Take a closer look at your perfectionism. There can be positives associated with perfectionism – feeling effective and in control, high performance – but at what cost? Think about how your perfectionism affects your enjoyment of life, your personal and professional relationships, and your overall quality of life. Next consider whether success is possible without perfectionism. How much of what you're doing now is actually adding to your performance and how much is redundant? Being clear on your reasons for change will help you to change your perfectionism.

Understand Your Perfectionism

The first step in changing perfectionism is to identify the situations that trigger it. Keep a perfectionism diary – watch for times when you feel anxious, stressed, frustrated or disappointed with yourself. Also be on the lookout for times when you feel like you've failed. Write down what happened, who you were with, what you were doing, and why you felt this way. Doing this will help you to have a greater insight into your perfectionistic thoughts.

Re-evaluate Your Standards

Look at your performance standards. What expectations do you have of yourself at work/university, with health and fitness, in terms of your appearance and self-care, or the running of your household? Are these expectations realistic and achievable? If you're unsure ask 5 of your family members or friends what they think.

Figure out a more reasonable standard to work towards. For example, if your unrealistic standard is "I must keep the house tidy at all times" a more reasonable standard to work towards might be "I will try to keep the house as tidy as possible". Once you've got your new standards, have a plan for how you'll put these new standards into practice.

Change Your Behaviour

Look at what you do to achieve perfection. For example, do you check your work multiple times? Do you seek reassurance from others that you've completed the task correctly? Do you avoid delegating tasks so that you can make sure things are done the right way?

Set goals to change your perfectionistic behaviour. If you're worried that doing this will have a negative effect on your performance or change how others view you, make small changes to begin with. For example, check your work once at completion instead of multiple times throughout and see what happens. You might be surprised at how little a change like this affects your performance but how much of an impact it has on your available time and your level of stress.

PERFECTIONISM

Most people assume that striving for perfection and setting high goals is a good thing, but that's not always true.

Perfectionists may excel in their pursuits whether at work or at home, but most perfectionists won't derive satisfaction or a sense of fulfilment from their achievements and their relentless quest for perfection often comes at a high cost.

Common signs of perfectionism are:

- A fear of failure
- Relentlessly striving to meet high, unrealistic standards regardless of cost
- A bias towards noticing imperfections and mistakes
- Self-criticism over small mistakes
- Procrastination
- Sensitivity to perceived criticism
- Expecting perfection from others
- Difficulty delegating tasks to others
- Taking longer than necessary to complete tasks
- Reassurance seeking

Unhealthy levels of perfectionism causes:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Low self-esteem

Perfectionism may help you to be efficient and successful, but it can also be time consuming and have a negative impact on your relationships and your overall level of happiness. Where this is the case, consider seeking the advice of a clinical psychologist.