



Module Three: Let's Experiment!

This module will cover:

- What behaviour experiments are, and how we can use these to test our beliefs.
- Considerations around sleep, pleasant activities, and social media.

Behaviour experiments

Behaviour experiments are strategies we can use to test whether our beliefs are backed up by evidence. When we do a behaviour experiment, we identify a belief to test, design an experiment to gather evidence that will help us to decide whether the belief is true/useful, then review the results to decide what it tells us about the belief we were testing. The following short video briefly introduces behaviour experiments. Clicking on the thumbnail will open the video in your browser, but if you can't access it that way, you can also reach it from this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jysqmgkJ6r8>



Behavioral experiments



You could use behaviour experiments to test beliefs related to the usefulness of anxious behaviours (e.g., list-making, repeated checking, repeating tasks) or thinking biases, such as:

- *Tunnel vision for imperfections* – for example, thinking we always “fail” (and not paying attention to our successes)
- *Catastrophising* – for example, thinking something horrible will happen if we don’t meet our standards



Stage 1: Planning the experiment

In the first stage, we carefully set up the experiment, so it provides us with the most useful information possible. Being very specific about what we are testing and how we will test it helps prevent unclear results of experiments that make it hard to draw conclusions.

1: Identify the specific belief you want to test.

If you are testing a belief about a behaviour, it is useful to include both the specific behaviour (e.g., I need to study math for 3 hours every day after I get home...) and a clear outcome of that behaviour (e.g., ... or I will feel terrible and will fail my math tests). A belief related to a thinking bias may be simpler to express (e.g., I always make mistakes).

2: Design an experiment that can test whether that belief is true.

- What will you do? Identify the specific behaviour. For example, “I will study math for 3 hours every day”.
- Where will you do it? For example, at the dining table at home.
- When will you do it? For example, every day this school week (i.e., Monday to Friday), starting from 4pm.
- What evidence do you need to collect? It is important that you can identify clear pieces of evidence, otherwise it might be difficult to figure out what the results of the experiment were. An example of evidence to collect is: “I will rate my mood each night before bed from 0 (I feel awful) to 10 (I feel great) and I will record whether I pass my weekly math test when I get my results.”

3: Make specific predictions about what the outcome of the experiment will be.

You can include both events (e.g., I will pass the weekly math test) and how you will feel (e.g., I will rate my mood an average of 7 out of 10 or higher). Impacts on feelings are often especially important to people. If you think your child would struggle to rate their feelings, an online search for “feelings thermometer” should help you find some child-friendly pictures you could print or show them on your phone/tablet to help them with rating their emotions – they could use picture-based ratings instead of number-based ones.



Stage 2: Conducting the experiment

Carry out the experiment in the way you planned it! Try to solve any problems that arise so you can still complete the experiment and gather the information you need to test your belief (e.g., do it for four days instead of five if something prevents the experiment from going ahead one day). If a problem comes up that you can't solve, you might need to stop the experiment and come up with a new way of testing the belief.



Stage 3: Reviewing the results of the experiment

1: Review the evidence against the predictions. Did your predictions come true?

2: Consider what the outcomes of your experiment mean.

- What have you learned from conducting the experiment?
- What do you know now that you didn't know before?
- Do you still believe what you originally believed?

Example behaviour experiments

For homework, we will ask you to set up an experiment in collaboration with your child, requiring you to guide them through the steps outlined above. This might be daunting at first! So, we will provide some examples of experiments, and then we will give you an opportunity to practise creating a behaviour experiment without your child being involved.

Belief/prediction	Experiment
<u>List-making behaviour</u> Belief: I need to make detailed to-do lists for every subject and assignment for school or I will forget important things. Prediction: I will feel totally relaxed (0) and will remember to do everything on the week when I make my lists. I will feel stressed (8+) and forget important tasks when I don't make my lists.	Create a detailed to-do list for every subject and assignment for one week. Record your stress each night from 0 (totally relaxed) to 10 (completely stressed out). Make a note of any important tasks that get forgotten. For the subsequent week, only keep a simple list of homework assigned and due dates. Again, record your stress each night and any important tasks that get forgotten. Do your stress levels, and the number of important tasks forgotten, differ between those two weeks?

Belief/prediction	Experiment
<p><u>Repeated checking behaviour</u></p> <p>Belief: I must check my bags several times before I leave for cricket training and matches, or I will forget to bring important items.</p> <p>Prediction: I will feel less anxious (0) and will remember to bring everything I need when I check my bag several times. When I don't check my bag extra times, I will feel more anxious (7+) and will forget things.</p>	<p>For two weeks, check your cricket bags five times before you leave for training and matches. Rate your anxiety from 0 (not anxious at all) to 10 (the most anxious possible) about the idea that you've forgotten something after the last time you check the bag, before you leave. Note down any instances of forgetting to bring something important.</p> <p>For the subsequent two weeks, check your cricket bag just once before you leave for training and matches. Again, rate anxiety levels after checking the bag before you leave, and any times you forget something.</p> <p>When you compare the results of these strategies, what do you notice about your anxiety levels? And the frequency of forgetting things?</p>
<p><u>Selective attention thinking bias</u></p> <p>Belief: I always mess things up.</p> <p>Prediction: Each day I will make at least 10 mistakes.</p>	<p>Spend five days recording every time you make a mistake, as well as any new thing you learned that day. For the new things you learned, make a note of whether a mistake helped you to learn that thing.</p> <p>After those five days, review the evidence you collected. How do the numbers of mistakes match up to your predictions? What does this say about how often you make mistakes? Were mistakes ever helpful for learning something new? Does this make you feel any differently about making mistakes?</p>
<p><u>Catastrophising thinking bias</u></p> <p>Belief: I must work hard all the time, or I can't be productive.</p> <p>Prediction: I will not feel anxious (0) and will be able to get all my work done when I do homework for 3 hours per day and don't take breaks. For the week when I take breaks, I will feel anxious (7+) and will not be able to get all my work done.</p>	<p>For one week, try to work productively on your homework for 3 hours a day after school and on weekends, without taking any breaks. Rate your anxiety from 0 (not anxious at all) to 10 (the most anxious possible) after the 3 hours are done. Note down any instances of failing to finish your work.</p> <p>For the subsequent week, spend the same amount of time on your work, but take a 10-minute break at the end of every hour of work – you could walk away from the desk/table, stretch, or drink some water. Again, rate your anxiety levels after the 3 hours of work are done, and note down any instances of failing to complete your work.</p> <p>When you compare the results of these strategies, what do you notice about your anxiety levels and productivity? Are they different each week?</p>

Behaviour experiments can be a little tricky to get your head around at first, but the more that you practise setting them up and completing them with your child, the better you will get at them. They can also be a lot of fun because of the creativity you can use in setting them up! So, let's take some time to practise setting up a behaviour experiment.



What aspects of your child's perfectionism cycle could you target with a behaviour experiment? You may wish to refer to the information in the previous modules. Try to set up a behaviour experiment using the steps above and the handout titled '*Let's Experiment!*'. You can use the ideas in the table above as a basis, but we also encourage you to try being creative and coming up with some of your own ways to test these beliefs.

How did you go with setting up the behaviour experiment? What challenges, if any, did you experience? Can you foresee any barriers to implementing the behaviour experiment you set up? If so, how could you tackle them? Please write a brief reflection in the box below:

Wellbeing considerations

The authors of this program are psychologists who have worked with people who experience perfectionism. We have noticed that people experiencing perfectionism often struggle with their sleep, keeping up a schedule of pleasant activities, and managing their social media use. These are aspects of your child's life for which behaviour experiments could be used to challenge potentially unhelpful beliefs. We provide more information on each of these topics in the following sections.



The Australian government recommends that 5-to-13-year-old children aged get 9 to 11 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night¹. Sleep is an important factor in mental health and performance. However, we know that sleep disruptions are common in people who experience perfectionism. An expert on sleep, Dr Michael Gradisar, provided the following tips for improving sleep, which you can share with your child and help them to implement:

- Stop using your phone at least two hours before bed (swap to other devices), and at least an hour before bed, turn off video games, YouTube, and social media. Try reading a book or watching a movie or TV show instead.
- Lower the brightness on your phone and computer screens at night. Apple's Night Shift is one way to do this.
- If you find it hard to wind down, try a mindfulness exercise like one from the Smiling Mind app, or a 15-minute body scan exercise from the Insight Timer app. This helps your brain "switch gears" from busy thinking mode and start to settle.
- Try to sleep at the same time and for the same amount every night. One hour more or less every now and then is fine, but any more can confuse your body clock.
- If you need to get up during the night, try to avoid turning on bright lights and hop back into bed quickly.
- Avoid caffeine (present not only in coffee, but also things like black and green tea, chocolate, and energy drinks) for at least six hours before you go to bed.



Regularly engaging in pleasant activities is important for mental wellbeing. In fact, evidence shows that behavioural activation, which is a therapy that increases engagement in pleasant activities, is effective at treating depression and increasing wellbeing! There are other reasons why making time for pleasant activities might help people with perfectionism.

We discussed in the first module that evidence suggests that after a certain point of effort and stress, our performance decreases rather than increases. Intentionally making time for enjoyable activities could help people with perfectionism to curb the urge to continue working on something beyond the point where this benefits them and their performance. Additionally, making time to engage in other activities could help people with perfectionism to broaden the parts of life that contribute to their sense of self-worth and thereby reduce their vulnerability when setbacks occur (we will discuss this more in the final module).

¹ Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. (2021, May 6). *For children and young people (5 to 17 years)*. <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/physical-activity-and-exercise/physical-activity-and-exercise-guidelines-for-all-australians/for-children-and-young-people-5-to-17-years>

We have included a handout titled '*Fun Activities*' that you could go through with your child to come up with activities for them to try. It can be helpful to try a variety of them over time to keep things interesting. We recommend establishing a regular schedule for pleasant activities. The exact timing will depend on your schedule, but as a starting point, you might consider designating an hour on weekdays and a few hours on weekend days.

Participating in these activities *with* your child may be beneficial. It provides opportunities for you to have fun experiences together. Additionally, you can model for your child that you also take time out from work to do enjoyable things, which can make them feel like it's more acceptable for them to do the same.



Social media

Perfectionistic beliefs can be confirmed by what people see online. They see what other people post (which are typically the highlights of their lives and may represent a very “polished” version of their experiences) and compare themselves to these unrealistic standards for appearance and lifestyle. This can provoke self-criticism and reinforce ideas about their own perceived failures and the need to reach higher standards to be more like others or more acceptable to others.

It is important for us to note that many social media platforms require users to be at least 13 years old. You may or may not already be aware of this!

Parents often reports concerns over their children’s social media use. These concerns are partially backed up by research, which has reported negative effects on body image, depression, and anxiety associated with social media. However, the evidence has not been consistent, with some studies finding little to no impact and others finding positive impacts!

Regardless of whether the effects of social media are negative, neutral, or positive, we know that adolescents are an age group in which there is a high rate of social media use. Knowing that social media are likely to be part of your child’s life soon (if not already), it’s important for you to understand the potential impacts of social media use and consider a long-term strategy to managing your child’s social media use. Please read the article at the following link, then answer the brief questions below:

<https://www.npr.org/2023/02/16/1157180971/10-things-to-know-about-how-social-media-affects-teens-brains>



What points did you take away from the article that can inform your approach to managing your child's social media? Record your reflections in the box below.

Testable beliefs about sleep, pleasant activities, and social media

We encourage you to keep an eye out for potentially unhelpful beliefs related to the themes listed below, which you can test with your child using behaviour experiments:

- The benefits of sacrificing sleep to make time to pursue standards
- The impact of sleep on mental health
- The benefits of not doing pleasant activities to make time to pursue standards
- The impact of regularly engaging in pleasant activities on mental health
- The impact of social media use on their wellbeing
- Your child's ability to reduce their social media use (i.e., their self-control)

We have now finished Module 3! We summarise the key information below:

Key points from Module 3

- Behaviour experiments can be used to test perfectionistic beliefs about the usefulness of behaviours (e.g., list-making) and thinking biases (e.g., catastrophising).
- Your child's wellbeing may be improved if they get enough sleep to meet recommendations and regularly engage in pleasant activities.
- It's useful to familiarise yourself with research on social media and plan for how to manage your child's social media use to reduce negative effects on their wellbeing.



How do these key points relate to your child? Write any reflections you have here. The reflection could include things you learned or things you already knew but have a greater understanding or appreciation of.



Module Three Homework Exercises

There are two parts to this module's homework.

First: Help your child learn about behaviour experiments and try testing their beliefs, using:

1. The information sheet titled '*You Can Be A Scientist*', which your child can read with you to learn about behaviour experiments.
2. The worksheet titled '*Adam's Experiment*', which your child can complete with your assistance to set up a behaviour experiment for an imagined peer.
 - o Kindly be aware that two variations of the '*Adam's Experiment*' worksheet are available. The first version includes examples and language designed for children who lean toward the younger end of the 7–12-year-old age range. We encourage you to exercise your judgment in selecting the version that best suits your child's needs.
3. The worksheet titled '*Let's Experiment!*', which your child can complete with your assistance to set up and undertake a behaviour experiment for themselves.

Tip: You could target a belief related to the area of perfectionism you and your child identified as the focus of the program, or you could choose a belief about sleep, pleasant activities, or social media use. You can use the worksheet titled '*Fun Activities*' to help you come up with pleasant activities to try if you do an experiment about pleasant activities.

Second: Help your child learn about sleep and being social media savvy, using:

1. The information sheet titled '*The Science About Sleep*', which your child can read to learn about the important role of sleep.
2. The information sheet titled '*Being Smart on Social Media*', which your child can read to get some tips to reduce negative effects of social media (*if relevant to your child*).

Important Note: It is not necessary to complete the module and homework exercises in one sitting. Dependent on your child's needs, you may want to work through the module and exercises in blocks throughout the week.

Let's Experiment!



What idea do you want to test? Write it in the box below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the user to write their experimental idea. The box is positioned centrally on the page, below the instruction text and above the decorative wavy lines at the bottom.



How can you test your idea? Plan your experiment in the box below.

Include:

- What you will do.
- Where you will do it.
- When you will do it.
- What evidence you need to collect.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for students to write their experimental plan. It occupies the central portion of the page below the instructions.



What do you think will happen when you do your experiment? Write your predictions in the box below. You can make predictions about events. You can also predict how you will feel.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the student to write their predictions. The box is white and occupies the central portion of the page.



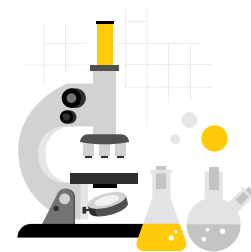
It's time to do the experiment! Write your evidence in the box below:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for students to write their experimental evidence. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the middle section.



Well done on doing your experiment! We have some questions for you now.

Did your predictions about the experiment come true? Write the answer in the box below.



This is the last question! What did you learn from doing the experiment? Write the answer in the box below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the student to write their answer to the question.



Fun Activities

Scientists say that doing fun things more often helps us feel better! We have some ideas for fun things you can do. Please tick the ones you want to try. You can also write down your own ideas.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going for a walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Going outdoors (like to a park or the beach) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going for a bike ride | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching a movie | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching a TV show | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing video games |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having a bubble bath | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing board games |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making something for someone | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading a book or comic | <input type="checkbox"/> Building with blocks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing with a pet | <input type="checkbox"/> Playing sports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spending time with a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Doing martial arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing a musical instrument | <input type="checkbox"/> Flying a kite or a model plane |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going to a museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Camping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing crafts (like knitting or crochet) | <input type="checkbox"/> Singing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking photos | <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing | <input type="checkbox"/> Joining a club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Painting | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to a sports match |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing in a journal |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Going bowling |



- ☐ Going somewhere you've never been before
- ☐ Playing mini golf
- ☐ Going for a picnic
- ☐ Looking at family photos and videos
- ☐ Solving puzzles or riddles
- ☐ Writing someone a letter or email

Do you have any ideas to add? You can write them down here!

You Can Be a Scientist

Everyone has different ideas about what we think is true.

Some of these ideas are helpful for us. Other ideas may not be helpful for us.

We can test if our ideas are helpful by being a scientist and doing experiments!

There are three steps to making an experiment:

1. Planning the experiment
2. Doing the experiment
3. Thinking about the results of the experiment



Planning

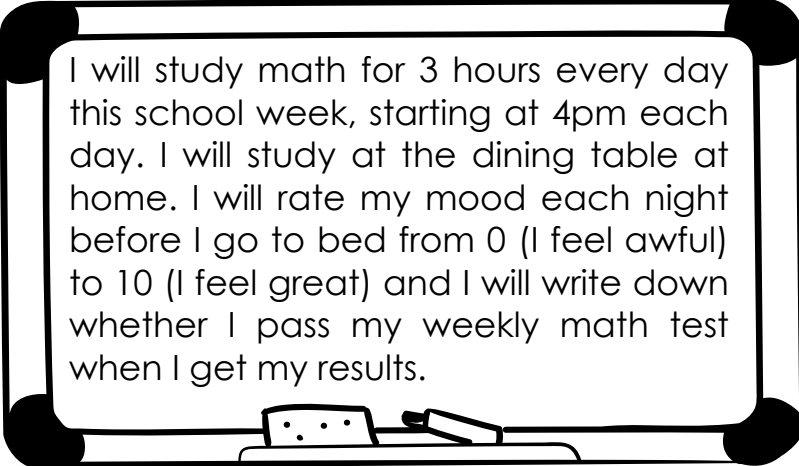
We start by choosing an idea we want to test.



I need to study math for 3 hours every day after I get home, or I will feel terrible and fail my test.

Then we plan an experiment. We choose:

- What we will do to test the idea
- Where we will test the idea
- When we will test the idea
- What evidence we need to collect to test the idea



I will study math for 3 hours every day this school week, starting at 4pm each day. I will study at the dining table at home. I will rate my mood each night before I go to bed from 0 (I feel awful) to 10 (I feel great) and I will write down whether I pass my weekly math test when I get my results.

Then we say what we think will happen during the experiment.



I think I will pass the weekly test and I will rate my mood 7 out of 10 or more for this school week.

Doing

We do the two parts of the experiment, just like we planned!

Thinking about the results

After we do the two parts of the experiment, we think about our results.

Were the results the same as what we were expecting?

What did we learn?

What do we know now that we didn't know before?

What idea do we believe in now?



Do you want to be a scientist?

Being a scientist and doing experiments can be lots of fun! Your parent or caregiver can help you to make experiments and test your ideas.

Adam's Experiment!



Do you remember Adam? He's an 8-year-old boy who loves playing videogames. Now that you've learned about being a scientist, can you help Adam make an experiment?

Adam believes that he needs to keep practising his videogame until he can win ten times in a row. If he makes a mistake, he has to start again from zero. Sometimes, this means that Adam goes to bed very late. His eyes also hurts a little after practising as he is staring at the screen for long periods of time. Adam gets worried if it takes him a long time to get ten wins in a row.

Adam is scared that if he can't win the game ten times in a row, he will be too worried to sleep and he will lose all his his future videogame matches.

What idea can Adam test? Write it in the box below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the student to write their idea for Adam's experiment. The box is positioned in the lower half of the page, above the decorative wavy orange and yellow patterns at the bottom.



How can Adam test his idea? Plan his experiment in the box below.

Include:

- What he will do
- Where he will do it
- When he will do it
- What evidence he needs to collect

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for planning an experiment. It occupies the central portion of the page below the list of requirements.

Adam's Experiment!



Do you remember Adam? He's a 12-year-old boy who loves playing tennis. Now that you've learned about being a scientist, can you help Adam make an experiment?

Adam believes that he needs to keep practising his tennis serve until he can do it perfectly ten times in a row. If he makes a mistake, he has to start again from zero. Sometimes, this means that Adam leaves tennis training late. His arm also hurts a little after practising so many times. Adam gets worried if it takes him a long time to get ten perfect serves in a row.

Adam is scared that if he can't do his tennis serve perfectly ten times in a row, he will be too worried to sleep and he will lose all his tennis matches.

What idea can Adam test? Write it in the box below.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin orange border, intended for the student to write their idea for Adam's experiment. The box is positioned in the lower half of the page, above a decorative orange and yellow wavy pattern.



How can Adam test his idea? Plan his experiment in the box below.

Include:

- What he will do
- Where he will do it
- When he will do it
- What evidence he needs to collect

The Science About Sleep

Everyone needs sleep – kids, adults, even our pets!

Have you ever wondered why we sleep? How much sleep we need? Or what happens if we don't get enough sleep?

Why do we sleep?

There are scientists who study sleep. They tell us that sleep is really important! Sleep helps our body and brain to:

- Get more energy
- Stay healthy
- Think and focus
- Make memories



Your brain and your body are still active while you sleep! For example, your heart keeps beating and your brain makes dreams.

How much sleep do we need?



Everyone is different. Some people need more sleep than others. Our age also affects how much sleep we need.

If you are between 5 years old and 13 years old, you need about 9 to 11 hours of sleep each day.

As you get older, you will need less sleep, but even adults need 7 hours each night. Sleep is important no matter how old you are!

What happens if we don't get enough sleep?

We don't feel very good when we don't get enough sleep. It's okay to not get enough sleep sometimes. But it can be a problem if that keeps happening.

If you don't get enough sleep...



You might feel sleepy or tired all day.



You might feel worried.



You might feel sad.



You might get angry.



It might be hard to think or concentrate.

How to sleep better

- Stop using your phone, playing video games, and going on social media for an hour before you go to bed.
- Do something relaxing for an hour or two before you go to bed, like reading a book or watching a movie or TV show.
- Go to bed at the same time every day. Try to wake up at the same time every day, too.
- If you need to get up during the night, try not to turn on bright lights and hop back into bed quickly.

Being Smart on Social Media

Do you use social media sites, like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok? Or do you want to use social media websites in the future?

We have some tips to help you be smart when you use social media!

Tip 1: Think about who you follow.

Some social media accounts make us feel good about ourselves. But other accounts can make us feel bad.

If any of the social media accounts you follow make you feel bad about yourself, it might be a good idea to “unfriend” or “unfollow” them.



Tip 2: Not everything you see is true...

Many people only post good things on social media. So, you might think that good things are always happening for other people and not for you. Remember that things go wrong for everyone sometimes. We just don't always post about it on social media!



This includes photos. Many photos on social media have been edited. Or people might take lots and lots of photos and only post the ones where they look good. So, social media websites make people look better than they do in real life. Because of this, comparing yourself to people on social media isn't helpful!

Tip 3: Spend less time on there.



Social media websites are made to be addictive. So, it can feel really hard to get off of them. But scientists have found that people feel better if they spend less time on social media.

Try turning off notifications or putting your phone or computer in another room. Instead, you could read, go for a walk, or be with your friends or family.

Tip 4: Be careful about what you post.

You don't always know who you're talking to online. Don't share information that might help strangers find you. This includes things like your phone number, where you live, or which school you go to. Also, don't accept friend requests from people you don't know in real life.



It's also important to think about what you say to people you know on social media. The things we say can hurt other people's feelings. If you think something you are going to say will make someone else feel bad, discuss it with an adult before you say it.

Tip 5: Get help if you need it.



It's important to talk to an adult you trust if someone says something on social media that upsets you. You should also talk to them if you think that social media is making you feel bad about yourself.

We hope these tips help you to have fun and stay safe on social media!
