

# Changing perfectionism: A self-help workbook



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## Introduction

### A note on how to use this workbook:

This workbook will help you to better understand and manage perfectionism. With the support of your parent/carer, we suggest that you both complete 2 modules each week, over the next 4 weeks.

You can choose how to work through the program together with your parent/carer, working as a team to tackle perfectionism. Have a discussion now about what you prefer, for example you could:

- (1) Both complete the worksheets together at the same time - then discuss your results.
- (2) Complete the worksheet, then share it with your parent/carer - talk about how they could help you practice the strategy.
- (3) Complete the worksheet but not share the results with your parent/carer - talk more generally about how they can support you in working through the modules.

**Agree on a plan.** Decide which of these 3 options feels most comfortable. You can switch it up, find which method feels best for you. As a parent, try and go with what your teen wants, try and not push them and let them decide what works best for them. Also think about timing of when to complete the book. Sometimes when someone is very underweight it can be hard to think clearly, and trying to do this workbook at a time like during a hospitalisation would not be a good time.

Having a parent/carer work through the workbook with you can help you feel more supported. It's often easier to work on something if someone else is working on the same thing, especially when you lose motivation or want to give up. It's also fine if you don't want to do it with your parent/carer. You're allowed to want to keep some things private. **You deserve to be supported in the ways that are best for you!**

These are digital workbooks so you can fill them out on your computer, you can also print them. You can duplicate the workbook if there are other people in your family that want to join in. The more the merrier! **It's recommended to set aside 10 mins twice a week, over the next 4 weeks.** You can use the discussion points as prompts. Think of a time when you'll have energy and won't be too stressed and find a place that's quiet and not too distracting to complete the modules. Consider putting your phone on airplane mode for the discussion.

Be gentle with yourself, it's ok to make mistakes. It's ok to skip exercises that don't feel right, you can come back to them anytime or leave them. It's up to you! It's not always easy to look at your own patterns and make changes. Be gentle with yourself as you work through the workbook, and take breaks when you need. It can be helpful to approach this workbook with a different mindset: Instead of things being 'good' or 'bad', just think of it as trying to work out what works best for you. For example, instead of thinking "perfectionism is bad" try "some parts of perfectionism can be unhelpful for my health".

## Module 1. Understanding perfectionism

This workbook is a self-help program, that helps you manage perfectionism. You can learn skills to be more flexible, to be kind to yourself and to enjoy your life, without reducing your performance.

### Why change perfectionism?

Is it common for people to tell you "You're such a perfectionist" or "You have to do things perfectly"?

While we often seek high standards, it can also result in negative impacts for you.

For example, do you need to do things perfectly and attend to details in a way that takes up too much time? Perfectionism can be stressful if a lot of time is spent worrying about your performance, for example, in studies, sports, appearance or social situations. Perfectionism can result in self-criticism, focusing on eating/shape and weight and feeling anxious or down.

### What is perfectionism and why is it linked to problems?

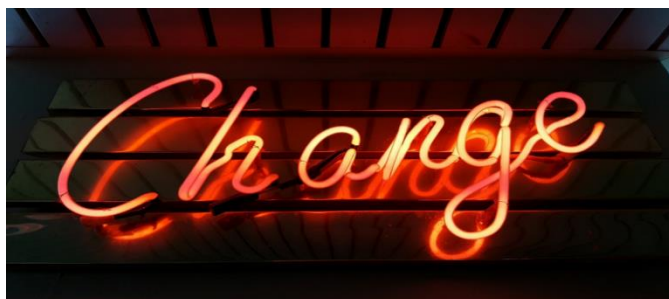
Everyone who is reading this has come on their own unique path. Some people might have heard about it and were keen to give it a try, others might feel a bit of pressure from a parent or carer who has suggested it.

It's normal to be unsure if you're ready to change perfectionism. It can feel hard to make changes, particularly if you doubt that managing perfectionism will be helpful. We just ask you give this workbook a go, and keep an open mind!

One important thing is that we are not suggesting that you lower your standards or goals. Rather we suggest you start to think about managing some parts of perfectionism, like self-criticism.

For a brief introduction to perfectionism, have a look at Youtube and watch Grace in this video [click this link]:

[Tracey Wade - Perfectionism in young people #ActiveIngredientsMH - YouTube](#)



## Ready for a Quiz?

Here is a quick quiz to see if you have perfectionism. Circle yes or no.

Q1. Do you continually try your hardest to achieve high standards?

Yes                      No

Q2. Do you focus on what you have not achieved rather than what you have achieved?

Yes                      No

Q3. Do other people tell you that your standards are too high?

Yes                      No

Q4. Are you very afraid of failing to meet your standards?

Yes                      No

Q5. If you achieve your goal, do you tend to set a higher standard next time (e.g. run a race in a faster time)?

Yes                      No

Q6. Do you base your self-esteem on striving and achievement?

Yes                      No

Q7. Do you repeatedly check how well you are doing at meeting your goals?

Yes                      No

Q8. Do you keep trying to meet your standards, even if this means you miss out on important things or it is causing other problems?

Yes                      No

Q9. Do you tend to avoid tasks or put off doing them in case you fail or because of the time it would take?

Yes                      No

*\*Discussion point: How many did you circle yes for? Did you circle yes for question 6? If you answered yes to some of the questions, managing perfectionism might help you.*

## Ready for another Quiz?

Tick which ones of these apply to you, to look at the effects of perfectionism:

- Tiredness or difficulty sleeping.
- Tense muscles.
- Upset stomach.
- Eating difficulties: having rules and self-criticism about your eating, shape and weight.
- Poor concentration.
- Thinking about a mistake over and over.
- Being really harsh on yourself.
- Low self-esteem.
- Avoidance.
- Procrastination: avoiding uncomfortable feelings and putting off stressful tasks.
- Checking your performance frequently.
- Unhelpful behaviours: avoidance, procrastination, repeated checking, being overly detailed or thorough, multi-tasking.

**\*Discussion point: What did you learn? What are the impacts of perfectionism?**

What difficulties did you find are associated with your perfectionism? It's interesting that even though it can have a negative impact, sometimes perfectionism can be difficult to change because for example other people admire your achievements.

### What is perfectionism?

Trying your best to achieve something is normal. But when someone sets very demanding standards for themselves, pursues them despite effects like feeling stressed or down, and bases their self-worth almost completely on how well these high standards are achieved, it can have a negative impact on you.

### What is the link between perfectionism and eating disorders?

Perfectionism can be something that makes it more likely you will develop an eating disorder. It can also be something that keeps the eating disorder symptoms going. This is because people often hold very strict rules and they expect perfection in terms of eating, shape and weight and their control. For example, commonly people have a perfect weight or clothes size they think they must be, then evaluate this in an 'all or nothing' way, for example,

*'I must weigh my perfect weight or I am a complete failure as a person'*. This leads to behaviours to try and achieve the strict rule for example dieting and weighing yourself regularly to achieve the perfect weight or clothes size you believe you should be.

### What is the impact of social media in my life?

It can be helpful to reflect on the impact of media and social media on perfectionism and eating disorders. Perfectionism is a societal issue as much as it's a personal issue.

Our society encourages perfectionism, and perfect images are celebrated in the media. While things are changing with a range of body shapes and sizes, we still see a lot of media focused on the thin ideal.

Lots of social media we engage with like Instagram also often makes us feel bad because people just post the best images of themselves and we often compare ourselves to others and feel we are not up to scratch.

Think about social media influencers who appear to have a 'perfect life'. Is that really true, or just an image?

Next time you are scrolling through social media, observe how it makes you feel and how different content and people you follow makes you feel. If you notice something makes you feel less than, that your body isn't the right shape, like you don't have enough friends, or that your life isn't as good as theirs, then stop and take a second to think. Observe your feelings and then think whether consuming this media on a regular basis is good for you. You don't have to take any action, but if you want, here are some ideas that might help you:

- Do a social media audit
- Mute the social media account for a week. At the end of the week, reevaluate whether you want to continue following them
- Unfollow/unfriend the account or page if you continually feel worse after looking at it
- Unfollow someone but remain friends with them
- On TikTok hold down the video and press 'not interested' to see less of the type of content that makes you feel worse
- Stop watching the show (its ok not to finish an episode)
- Try to avoid social media apps when you're in a low mood or feeling self-conscious
- Remind yourself before reading or watching anything that what you are looking at might not be reality and could be edited or hyped up
- Think about accounts that make you feel good and look at them instead, for example baby animals, comedy, or informative topics



**The good news is perfectionism can be managed, and without you achieving less!** Strategies you will learn in this workbook include changing thinking, reducing self-criticism, and increasing your self-worth, so that it is not based only on achievement.

Throughout the 8 modules, there will be some activities which will help you on your journey.

There is no right or wrong way of doing the worksheets! The best way to manage perfectionism is not how well you do these activities, just try the activities without having to complete them perfectly. If you find you don't want to do a particular worksheet, that is fine, just move onto the next one. You might find some exercises more helpful than others. You don't need to do every worksheet, or do them perfectly.

Perfectionism can also be difficult to change because of fear. Often, a perfectionist only feels good about themselves when they do well in something and they worry that if perfectionism is taken away, they'll lose themselves! Here are some common fears that people have:

- They will let themselves completely slip and not perform at all
- They will become lazy
- Others will think they are lazy
- Others will stop praising them for doing well
- They will lose something they value (e.g., studies)
- They will be filled with anxiety
- They will not achieve
- They will not progress in life
- They will be average

The good news is this workbook is NOT about lowering standards. **It's about giving you a choice to live your life, and helping you to feel good about yourself.** Often you can strive so hard and push yourself to such a degree that your performance can suffer due to burnout. Managing perfectionism can help you be more effective. We encourage you to discover what happens in your life if you make little changes.

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## Module 1. Key message

Perfectionism is different from aiming for excellence and becomes a problem when your self-worth is based on meeting these standards.

It can be helpful to observe what is influencing your perfectionism on social media and the media that you watch.

Perfectionism has three main parts:



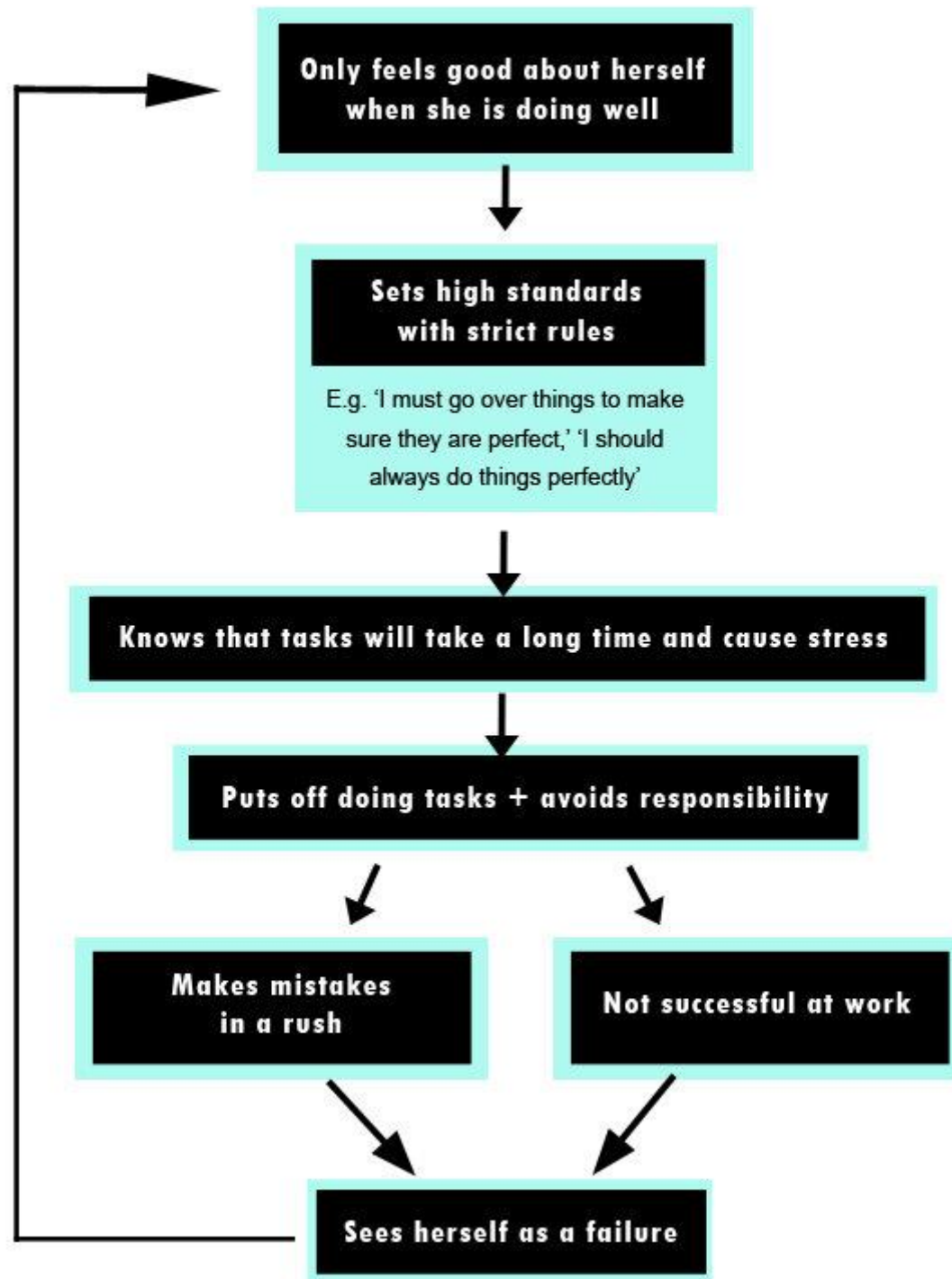
## Module 2: Your perfectionism cycle

Last module, we learnt about perfectionism and its effects as well as the reasons why perfectionism continues. In this module, we will discover the first steps to manage perfectionism.

*Taylor's Example: I'm 15, and since I can remember I've always been a procrastinator! I put off tasks until the last minute. No matter how small the task, like completing a small assignment, I only do it at the very last minute. Doing things at the last minute is a way to cope with my perfectionism. I believe that if I start earlier, I will check through my work right up until the deadline and feel too anxious. Because I always leave it until the last minute, I feel stressed and anxious near the deadline, and often have difficulty sleeping. I find myself making mistakes in my assignments because my tiredness makes it hard to concentrate.*

Doing things at the last minute is Taylor's way to cope with perfectionism. Taylor believes that if the task was started early it would result in checking right up to the deadline and increase feelings of anxiety. Here's a diagram that shows how Taylor's perfectionism is maintained:





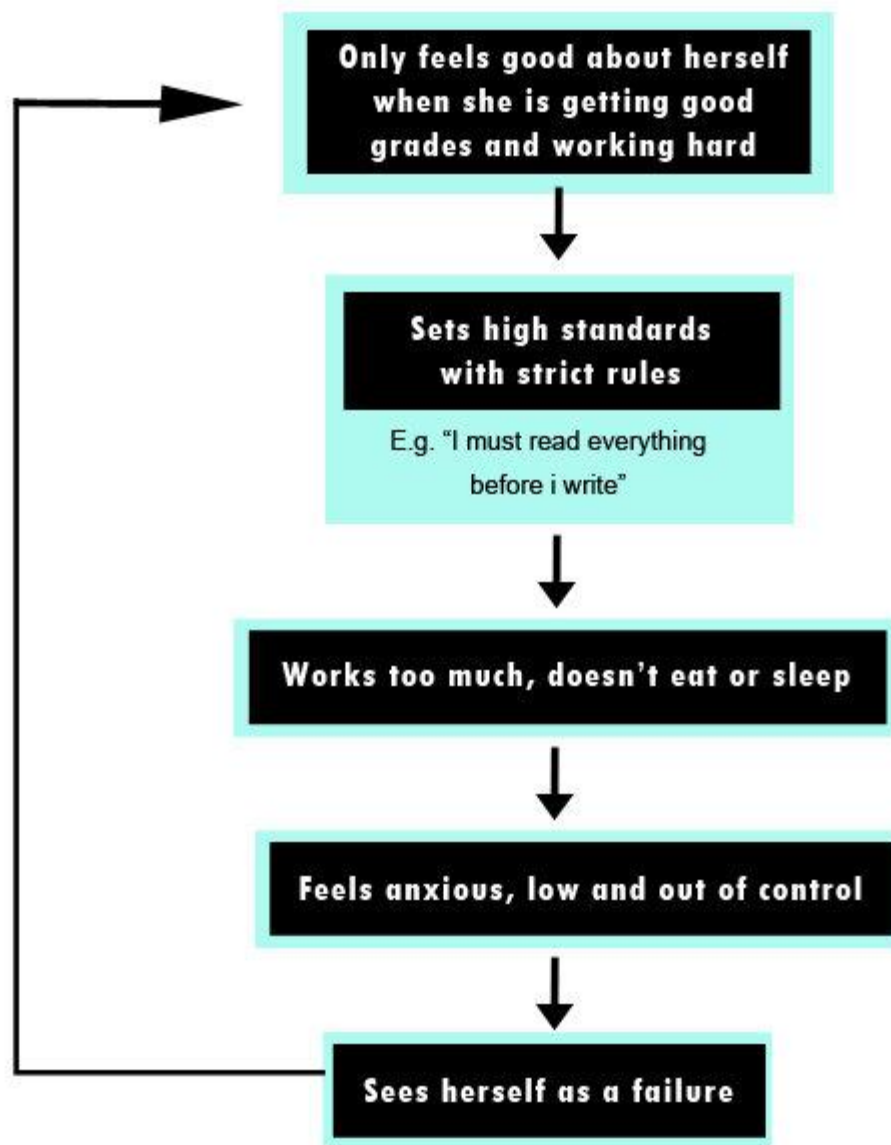
Here is another example of Chris:

*I am 17, and people tell me I am a “high achieving student”. I have won awards at school for maths, running, and flute competitions. My personal motto is ‘nothing is impossible if you try’. People tell me that I have it all. I am admired by teachers and friend, and I enjoy my studies and activities. At night however, I often have trouble sleeping, worrying if I have done my best in my running, flute practice, and homework, and if I could have done better.*

*At school, I don’t hang out with my friends as much now due to feeling tired and a bit down. I feel like my efforts are not good enough. I feel like I don’t deserve the awards as I feel like I could have done more than I did and achieved a higher standard. In my academic extension test for maths, I got in the top 5% in the state but was upset I was not in the top 1% and felt like a failure.*

*I feel that nothing I achieve will ever be good enough.*

Here is a diagram that shows how perfectionism is maintained for Chris:



You can think about perfectionism as a scale, with overworking at one end, and avoidance and procrastination at the other. Where do you think you sit on this scale? Often you might move up and down the scale for different areas of your life or at different times or depending on the tasks.

### Observing your thoughts and behaviours

Can you recognise any perfectionism in your life? Take some time to reflect and celebrate yourself when you do recognise perfectionism. Awareness is the first step!

### Module 2. Key message

Perfectionism is maintained by the thoughts and behaviours that we have.

Try and notice what areas of your life you have perfectionism in.



### Module 3: Preparing to work on perfectionism

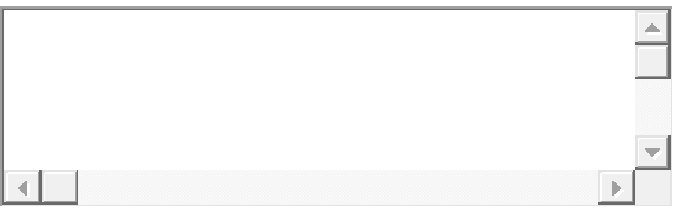
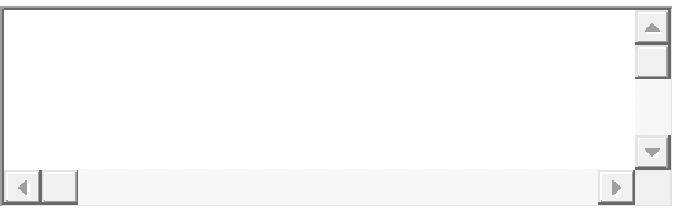
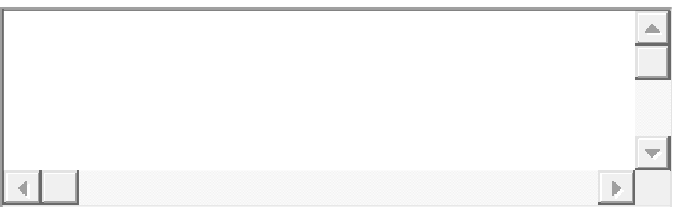
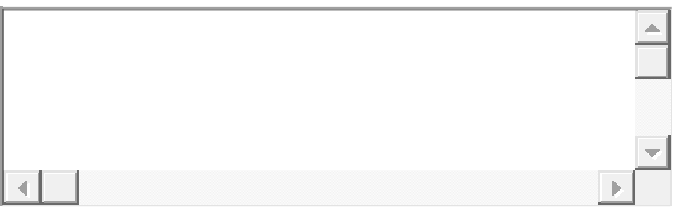
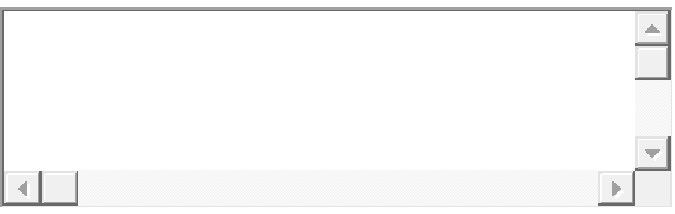
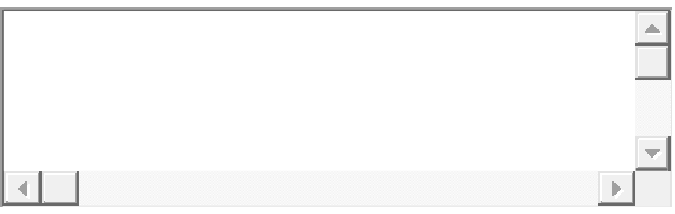
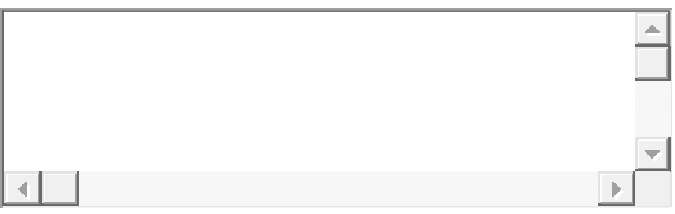
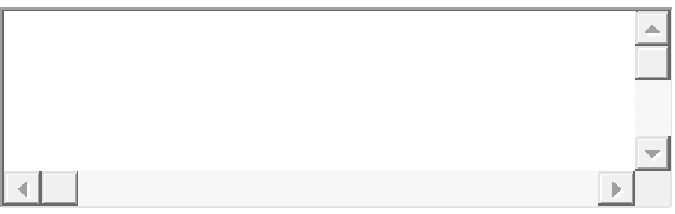
First, it's important to know it's not your fault that you have perfectionist tendencies, the world we live in encourages perfectionism, for example in school we are taught to strive and try hard to achieve and we can learn perfectionism by modelling of watching others around us work really hard.

#### But who you are is enough.

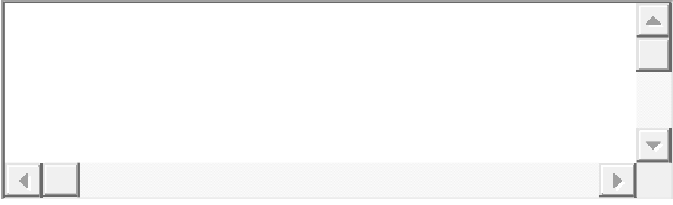
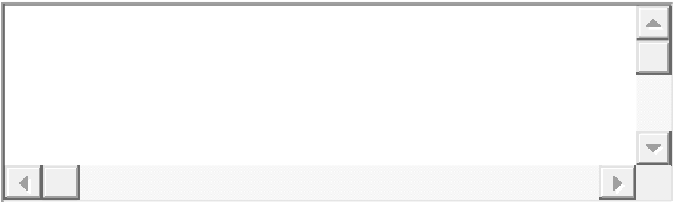
The purpose of this workbook is to help you navigate perfectionism, help you understand your thought patterns so that life can be easier, and you can experience more freedom and choice.

#### Diversify your interests

Diversifying your interests takes the pressure off needing to perform perfectly in one area, and instead gives you multiple areas to gain value and self-esteem from. Try this worksheet to think of how you would like your life to be like in the future.

Area of life	What do you want to be/do in this area?
My friends	
My work/studies	
My mental health	
My relationship with my close friends	
My relationship with my parents/siblings	
Doing my part for the community	
My spiritual life (if applicable)	
My hobbies	



My fitness, physical and nutritional health	
Others (please explain)	

**\*Discussion point:** What are the main areas of my life that I feel good about myself from? How can I spread this out so I am not putting all my eggs in one basket and only feeling good about myself from one or two areas? What areas can I judge myself in that don't involve achievement?

Even if you still have some doubts, we encourage you to try this workbook. You will soon be aware of change, and see the freedom and flexibility you will gain without a decrease in performance. Once you see that these changes are helpful and improve your life, you can decide if you want to continue with further change.

### Getting Started

The first step in managing perfectionism is to identify the areas in your life where it is a problem.

#### Example Areas of Perfectionism and Common Thoughts and Behaviours

Area of perfectionism	Thoughts	Behaviours
Eating	I must not eat high-fat food	Limit my eating
Shape	You can only look good if you are a small size	Reduce eating, increase exercising
Weight	I need to lose weight	Decrease eating, increase exercising
Friends	I must appear funny and clever	Rehearse jokes and stories
Checking locks, appliances	I must be 100% sure	Check and re-check
Ordering objects	Things must be in perfect order	Order and arrange objects daily
Organisation	I need to do things in the right sequence to be as productive as possible	Write overly detailed schedules or lists
Looks	I must look perfect	Always wear flawless makeup and ironed clothes
Hygiene	I must have perfectly clean hands	Wash hands over and over
Art	I need to paint perfectly	Re-do paintings
Music	I must not play a note wrong	Avoid playing in concerts
Sports	To perform my best, I need to train harder	Train more than coach recommends
Studies	I must always score high marks	Spend many hours editing assignment
Health and fitness	I must exercise everyday	Be very hard on myself when I do not exercise daily

## Which areas of perfectionism apply to me?

In the past month, which are the areas you have set high standards for?

It can be helpful to think of areas where you think you must do well, where you must always have things just right, or where you would feel very worried if you were to perform at a lower level.

Step 1: Tick each area you have perfectionism Step 2: What goes through your mind about this area (thoughts)? Step 3: What do you do in response to perfectionism in this area (behaviours)?		
Area of perfectionism	Thoughts	Behaviours
<input type="checkbox"/> Eating		
<input type="checkbox"/> Shape		
<input type="checkbox"/> Weight		
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends		
<input type="checkbox"/> Checking locks, appliances		
<input type="checkbox"/> Ordering objects		
<input type="checkbox"/> Organization		
<input type="checkbox"/> Looks		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hygiene		

<input type="checkbox"/> Art		
<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Sporting performance		
<input type="checkbox"/> Studies		
<input type="checkbox"/> Health and fitness		
<input type="checkbox"/> Others		

\*Discussion point: What are the main areas of perfectionism in my life?

### Module 3. Key message

Thinking about what areas of life you have perfectionism in, and other areas of your life in which you can judge yourself that are not all about achievement, or in just one or two areas can help you not put ‘all your eggs in one basket’ and improve your self-esteem.

### Module 4: Myth busting

#### Fact or Fiction?

We all hold beliefs about the “right” way to do things. These beliefs can be about simple tasks such as making your bed, or skin care routines to more complex tasks like studying. It can be helpful to consider whether a belief is true.

#### “The harder you work, the better you’ll do.”

Have you been told that you could achieve more if you worked harder? Have your teachers written a report saying that your grades could be improved with a little more effort?

Although it makes sense that someone who puts in no effort will perform worse than someone who puts in a lot of effort, it does not actually mean that the more you practise, work, or train, the better you will perform! Although some effort is required to succeed, other elements, such as passion, talent, privilege, family support, and mental health also impact how well someone does. Plus when you push yourself too hard you can become overtired and burnt out. A common example is overtraining among athletes. Athletes with perfectionism will often overtrain, adding extra training sessions on top of what their coach advises. Often, they believe that they will only do well if they train harder than others.

The problem is that there is only a certain amount of training athletes can do before they become exhausted and their body gets injured e.g., stress fractures from running too much, which can result in them being unable to train at all. Is it better to do ever more work and over-train, or a more balanced approach to train with enough rest days and follow the coach’s advice?

One secret to working well is not to work harder, but to work smarter!

Where in your life are you putting in a lot of effort? How can you work smarter in these areas and not harder?

Examples could be delegating tasks that you don't enjoy, asking for help instead of doing something completely alone, using software that edits your work, finding apps to help you with studying, time management and tasks, listening to language classes, or lines for a presentation/performance while you sleep, automating different procedures. What can you make easier in your life?

Try out a few different ideas over the next few days and see how different methods feel. The aim is to explore and try things out, rather than trying to do it perfectly.



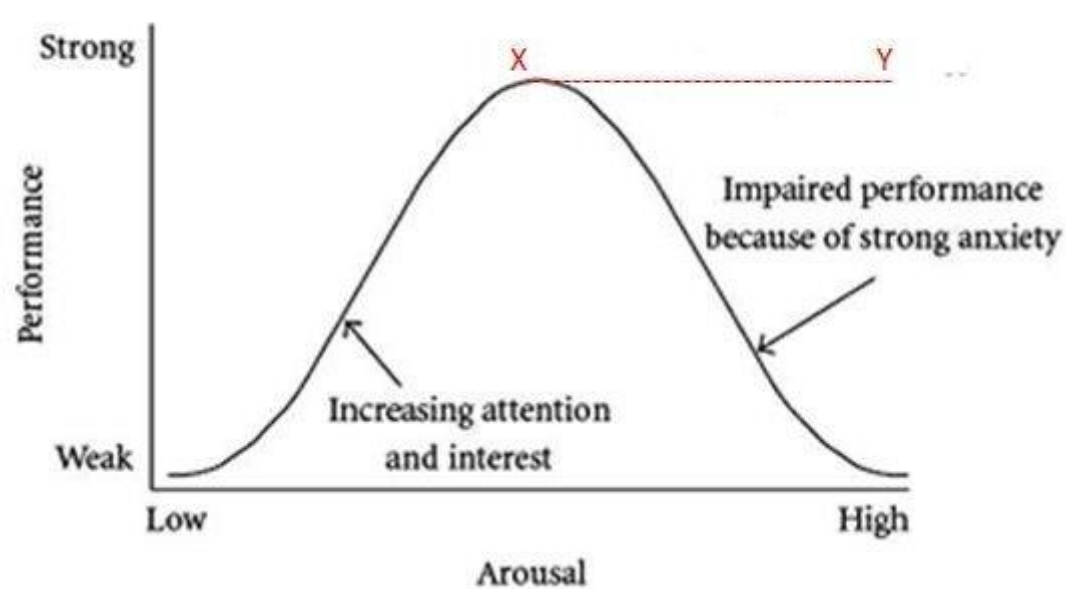
### Facts about perfectionism and performance.

While different people can handle different amounts of stress, we all follow the same pattern where our performance is best when there is balance between too much and too little stress (see the figure).

It is not that people with perfectionism are putting in so much effort that their performance is very poor. Rather, they are putting in much more effort and stress than they need to, and could achieve the same results with much less effort.

The dotted line on the graph, called the “Yerkes Dodson” law shows that if you are at point Y, you can move to point X without any impact on your actual performance – just lowering your stress levels.

### The Yerkes Dodson law:



Wherever you are at, it is important to know at which point does stress changes from being helpful for you to being unhelpful for you, and when does trying hard become unhelpful.

There is no right answer and the point can change from one person to another. Also, if a person has adverse reactions to perceived failure, mistakes or imperfection, it can affect achievement, as in the example of Alex.

### **Alex: Perfectionism as an athlete**

*My name is Alex and I'm a 15-year-old sprint runner, performing at a state level. I enjoy pushing my body and mind as far as I can. Recently though, perfectionism has been causing me sleep difficulties and low moods and is affecting my performance. At night I often had difficulty sleeping and I worried because I repeatedly replayed in my head my training session from that day. I criticized myself for having lost time, for example due to slow starts, and I kept thinking about all the places I should have pushed myself harder. I was not enjoying the sport anymore, because I was constantly worrying about improving my technique. I felt less motivated to train, and I didn't do as well in my races, which just made me feel sadder, and more frustrated. Slowly, I ended up losing contact with my club and friends because seeing them reminded me that I was a failure. Focusing on my mistakes and being self-critical had a negative impact on my performance and enjoyment of the sport. These perfectionistic thoughts also led to me feeling sad and frustrated which worsened my performance.*

Alex's pattern of focusing on mistakes was having a negative impact on performance and enjoyment.

This aim of this workbook is to help you feel good about yourself not only by the things you achieve but also in other areas of your life.

### **Module 4. Key message**

It is important to know what is fact and what is fiction.

Trying to do things perfectly does not always lead to better performance or achievement.

Think about how changing perfectionism might benefit your performance and mood.

### **Module 5: Experiments and changing 'all or nothing' thinking**

#### **EXPERIMENTS**

You may be starting to question some of your thoughts about perfectionism.

The next step is to question whether your perfectionist thoughts and behaviours are helping you or causing more problems than they solve. This can be done using experiments, where you gather information to test a belief about a behaviour. For example, if you believe that your work will receive a worse mark if you spend 3 hours on it instead of 6, that belief can be tested by handing in a piece of work on which you have spent 3 hours and then another (as similar as possible) which you have spent 6 hours on.

These experiments can be hard to do for a start – it takes courage to put yourself on the spot – but if you don't test how far your beliefs and behaviours match up to reality, it's not likely that you will change. Here's an example of an experiment for Taylor. We created one experiment where Taylor completed two essays. One was completed at the very last minute despite feeling that it "wasn't right". The other was completed ahead of time.

When Taylor submitted the essay ahead of time, Taylor felt a sense of achievement about it not being rushed and didn't view it to be either more or less right than the essay submitted right on the deadline.

#### **TAYLOR'S STORY**

*I'm Taylor – I'm 15 and have trouble procrastinating because I feel like my work is never good enough. To test out my feelings that the essays I need to submit aren't right, and my avoidance of doing them until the very last minute, I created an experiment where I completed two essays. One I completed at the very last minute even though I felt it wasn't quite right, and the other essay I completed ahead of time. I predicted that if I submitted the essay earlier, I would feel more discomfort with it not being right, and that that feeling would last longer, and I would feel more stress and upset, than if I submitted the essay last minute. In actual fact, when I submitted the essay ahead of time I felt a sense of achievement about it not being rushed. I also didn't view it as being more or less right than the essay I submitted right on the deadline. I learnt from this that submitting an essay ahead of time didn't increase my feelings of 'not right-ness' but it did give me a sense of achievement. It also reduced my worry because I found that the essay wasn't always on my mind.*

## Taylor's Experiment

My belief
Unless I can write my essays perfectly ("feels right"), there is no point in writing them at all.
2) My general prediction
If my essay is not perfect or "feels right" I will do badly and be a complete failure.
3) My prediction in details (specific behaviours and rate how strongly your beliefs and feelings are from 0 to 10):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unless my essay is perfect or "feels right" if I submit it the teacher will think that I am lazy and stupid (9/10).</li><li>• I will be miserable (8/10),</li><li>• I will think that I'm a failure as a person all day, every day, for at least a week (9/10).</li></ul>
4) Experiments
Try completing two essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One to be completed at the very last minute despite my feeling that it "wasn't right".</li><li>• The other to be completed ahead of time even if it didn't "feel right".</li></ul>
5) Results
When I submitted the essay ahead of time, I felt happy about it not being rushed. I didn't see it as more or less right than the essay I submitted right on the deadline. I also did better in the essay which I submitted it earlier.
6) What I've learnt
I learnt that submitting an essay ahead of time didn't increase my feelings of "not rightness" but gave me a sense of achievement. It also reduced my worry because the essay wasn't always on my mind. Moreover, the teacher didn't see me as lazy and stupid but praised me for handing it on time and doing better.
7) My new belief: (e.g., specific behaviours; rate how strongly your new beliefs and feelings are from 0 to 10)
I do not have to only start writing an essay when it "feels right" or perfect. Just starting it instead of procrastinating helps, and having done it, I felt happy and a sense of achievement (8/10).



## EXAMPLES OF EXPERIMENTS

Some experiments can be simple – noticing how anxious you will be in a situation, what will happen if you do something, how long a feeling will last, how other people might react. Others can be more complicated e.g., comparing of one behaviour with another. Here are more examples of perfectionist beliefs that can be tested in experiments.

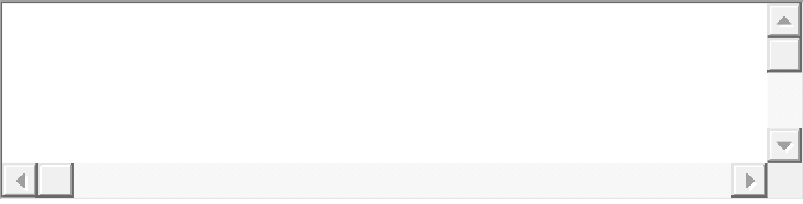
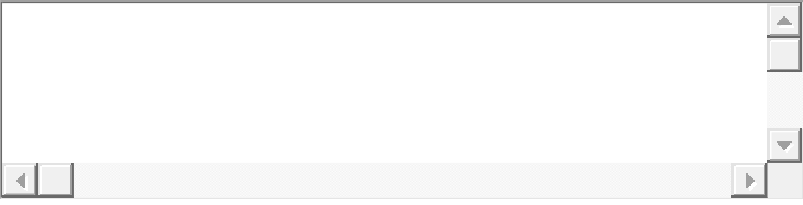




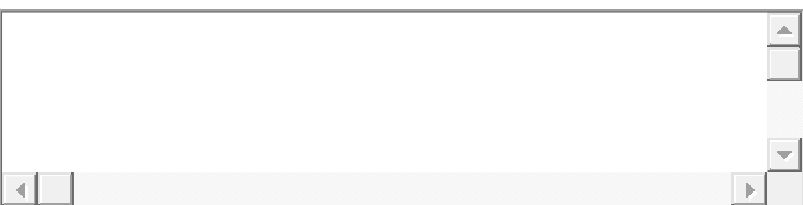
Belief / Prediction	Experiment
<p>Belief: I will do better if I work hard Prediction: I will get A if I work a lot more than others I will fail if I work less than others.</p>	<p>Work a lot more than others for one piece of work, as much as others for another and work less than others for a third.</p> <p>Is the outcome as you predicted?</p>
<p>Belief: If I don't come top, I'll feel like a failure for ages. Prediction: I will feel anxious, miserable and think that I'm a failure as a person all day, every day, for at least a week.</p>	<p>Don't come top in something trivial on purpose (e.g., a running race with a friend down a street).</p> <p>Is the outcome as you predicted? Try testing your prediction in more meaningful/important situations.</p>
<p>Belief: If I start something I have to finish it completely. Prediction: If I leave something half-done, it will be on my mind (100% of the time) and I won't be able to sleep for more than a couple of hours.</p>	<p>Leave something half-finished.</p> <p>Was it on your mind? How much? For how long? Did you sleep? For how long?</p>
<p>Belief: If I don't write everything down, I'll make lots of serious mistakes. Prediction: If I don't write down everything I need to do today, I'll forget something important like bringing my sports outfit to school.</p>	<p>Leave one thing off a list (such as your sports attire).</p> <p>Did you remember it? What was it like not writing it down? Can you write a shorter list with just very important things on it? How many mistakes did you make?</p>
<p>Belief: Training hard makes me happy because it is the right thing to do and I achieve more. Prediction: I'm happier when I train hard than when I don't and I will win more races.</p>	<p>Train hard for one week – really push yourself.</p> <p>How happy does it make you (0-10)? How unhappy does it make you (0-10)? What else did you observe? How did you do?</p> <p>Don't train as hard for a week and make the same notes. Compare the results.</p>

### Try your own experiment

Think of a perfectionism belief or behaviour you want to test out with an experiment.

It doesn't have to be perfect and there's no right or wrong answers so there's no need to avoid/procrastinate!

The point is to learn something new by trying to do something in a different way.

1) My belief

2) My general prediction

3) My prediction in detail (e.g. specific behaviours; rate how strongly your beliefs and feelings are from 0 to 10)

4) Experiment

5) Results

6) What I've learnt

7) My new belief (e.g. specific behaviours; rate how strongly your beliefs and feelings are from 0 to 10)


**\*Discussion point: What did you learn from the experiments?**

Experiments can provide meaningful information about your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour by turning your perfectionism “on” or “off” and seeing the effects.

This is a great way to decide what behaviours work best for you and allows you to have a more balanced life.

Keep trying to use the experiments as many times as you can!

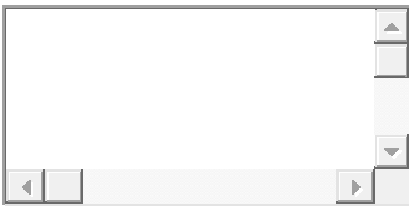
## From all or nothing thinking to flexibility and freedom.

Many people with perfectionism set strict rules and standards and decide how well they perform using “all or nothing thinking”, where they judge things in extremes, something is either “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong”, a “complete failure” or a “complete success”, without a middle ground.

Because the rules are so strict and hard to achieve (e.g., I must always score the best mark in maths class), often the person fails to achieve them and then thinks of their self as a “complete failure” (e.g., because came 3<sup>rd</sup> in the class). Moreover, when a person does reach their goal, instead of thinking that they are a “complete success”, they are likely to think that the goal was too easy and reset the next goal even higher (e.g., achieving top of the class for all subjects).

Here are some examples of all or nothing thinking in areas of perfectionism. Which ones sound like you?

### Which areas of all or nothing thinking apply to me?

Area	Example of all or nothing thinking	That's Me!
Eating/weight/shape	If I eat refined sugar then I have completely failed. If I don't reach my goal weight, I have completely failed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study	If I cannot get the whole assignment finished today, I might as well not even start it.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study	If I do not get a high grade, I am a complete failure.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appearance	If I do not spend a lot of time getting ready before school, others will easily see my flaws	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hygiene	Unless my hands feel perfectly clean, they are completely dirty and I need to wash them again.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sport	Unless I win an award, I might as well give up trying.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others		<input type="checkbox"/>

### \*Discussion point: What are the main examples of all or nothing thinking that happen?

Most people are surprised to find that even though they have been judging things in all or nothing thinking for a long time, they feel more relaxed and flexible in their thinking when they set less strict rules.

One of the ways to defeating all or nothing thinking is to create many experiments.

As seen earlier, Taylor's procrastination and avoidance in writing essays was an example of all or nothing thinking, and Taylor was able to challenge this through an experiment.



**Rules break, guidelines bend.**

People with perfectionism set very strict and high rules to measure their performance.

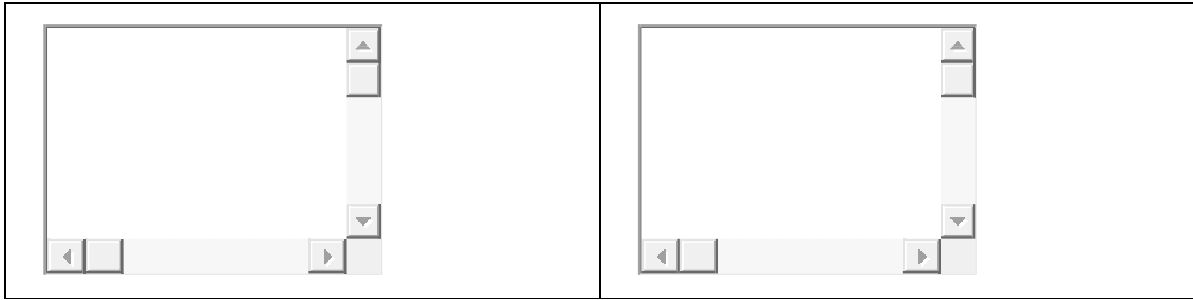
The problem is that a person who sets rigid, all or nothing rules (e.g., I must get top marks or I am a complete failure) can become trapped in a cycle of all or nothing. The person is likely to either think that they have completely failed at something (receiving lower mark than they wanted), or when they achieve their standard, reset their standards even higher (e.g., I must get top marks in every subject).

To stop this vicious cycle, we can replace rules with guidelines and accept less than perfect performance.

It is helpful to start noticing the rules you have for your performance and replace these with guidelines instead. For example, you might replace a strict rule such as “I must never eat chocolate” with a guideline that “I aim to eat healthily and not to eat chocolate every day, but if I eat it sometimes it is OK”.

Try writing down a list of your “rules”, “musts” and “shoulds” and changing them to guidelines.

I must/should always....	I aim to...
<div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
<div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; height: 80px; width: 100%;"></div>
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\*Discussion point: How could I keep turning unhelpful rules into guidelines?

## Even prisoners get time off for good behaviour.

Do you get time off from the prison of rules?

It's not the end of the world if your rule about eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day is turned into a guideline, if you sometimes forget a friend's birthday or if you don't pick up your clothes from the floor.

## Acceptance

A final way to free yourself from strict rules and all or nothing thinking is to learn to accept less than perfect performance. While doing your best at something is a way to feel good about yourself, basing how you feel about yourself on only one or two areas of performance can be problematic.

Becoming more flexible will involve you learning to accept that performance cannot always be perfect, and that to have a more balanced life you may need to accept a level of performance that you might not be entirely happy.

### **Think about Charlie's example:**

*I'm Charlie and 16 years old. I've always been a perfectionist in my studies and about my swimming, but to be more flexible and to have balance in my life I am now willing to accept less than perfect performance in both these areas. I notice that I'm less anxious and have time for other things in life such as meeting up with friends. While it would be very difficult for me to be the top student in my class or year, or to win every swimming competition I entered, by accepting that I can be a good student and a good swimmer, but not needing to be the best student or unbeatable in my swimming, I'm making a positive choice to have more balance in my life.*

We hope that you try to accept that your performance cannot always be perfect and relax your strict rules.

This will help you think and behave more flexibly, have more balance in your life and free you from strict rules.

## Module 5. Key message

Experiments can help you understand and challenge unhelpful beliefs, feelings and behaviours. The results will give you meaningful information about your perfectionist beliefs and behaviours, and help you live a more balanced life.

All or nothing thinking involves seeing yourself in extremes (either good or bad, either success or failure) with no grey area/middle ground. This thinking can be managed by doing experiments and drawing a line to challenge all or nothing thoughts.

You can be more flexible by replacing rules with guidelines and doing things less than perfectly, which gives you a sense of balance.





## Module 6: Changing thinking styles




### Focusing on the Negatives

Along with all or nothing thinking, perfectionism can often lead to thinking where people focus on the negatives.

Perfectionists have a tendency for evaluating their performance harshly, downplaying any positives, concentrating on flaws, and being extremely hard on themselves. You can become conscious of the areas where you focus on negative aspects your performance and expand your attention to manage this thinking style.

Focusing on the negatives tends to occur more in areas that people place a high value, e.g., work, study or athletic performance. Some common areas of perfectionism are shown below.

**Which areas apply to you? Tick the areas and include your examples.**

Tick	Area	Example of Focusing on the Negatives	Example
<input type="checkbox"/>	Looks	I look like a mess because my hair doesn't like right today.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Studies	I did poorly in my class presentation because I mispronounced one or two words.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eating / Shape / Weight	My body shape is too big overall because parts of me are too large.	



<input type="checkbox"/>	Sports	Although I placed in the race, I did not win.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Friendships	I do not have a good relationship with my friends because we argue sometimes.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social Situations	I made a fool of myself because I stumbled over my words at one point when talking to my friends.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hygiene	I will become contaminated if I don't wash my hands straight away.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Others		

**\*Discussion point:** Where are the main areas of life that I focus on the negatives?

This thinking style continues because focusing on the negatives maintains an anxiety about how well you do in that area.

### Broaden Your Attention

To manage this thinking style of focusing on negatives, choose an area you have ticked earlier and complete the table.

Try to broaden your attention by asking yourself:

#### What are some positive aspects that I am missing?

How can I focus my attention on things other than the negatives? e.g. noticing details around me, what can you hear or see in the moment?

**MEI'S EXAMPLE:** Here's an example of Mei who is 13 and anxious in social situations because of thinking of looking like a fool because of stumbling over words at one point in the conversation:

1) Write down your area of perfectionism.
Social situations
2) List your unhelpful thoughts and rate how strongly you believe in them (0-10).
People must think that I'm a fool because I stumbled over my words at one point in the conversation. (9/10)
3) Ways to broaden my attention in the situation. Ask yourself: a. What are some positive aspects of my performance that I am missing? b. How can I focus my attention on things other than the negatives e.g. noticing details around me.
a. I am ignoring the fact that people are saying they enjoy talking with me, and that they are still talking to me.

b. I can focus on my friends instead of myself, ask them questions instead of thinking that I'm a fool, and notice details around me (e.g. colour of my friend's outfits).

#### 4) Results

When I broaden my attention and not only focus on the negatives, I realised that people enjoy talking to me. Focusing on my friends instead of myself broadens my attention.



#### Here's your turn:

1) Write down your area of perfectionism.

2) List your unhelpful thoughts and rate how strongly you believe in them (0-10).

3) Ways to broaden my attention in the situation. Ask yourself:  
(a) What are some positive aspects of my performance that I am missing?  
(b) How can I focus my attention on things other than the negatives e.g. noticing details around me.

4) Results

**\*Discussion point:** How can I keep trying to broaden my attention and not focus on negatives?

Focusing on what is around you can be really helpful in drawing your attention away from any unhelpful thoughts.

For example, when you are talking to a classmate in school, instead of ruminating over how you look, bring your attention to what is around you. Can you focus on what your classmate is saying, what the colour of their shirt is, and what objects are around you at the time. Try to be actively involved in what is going on around you (e.g., notice what you can see or hear), rather than focus on what is going on inside your head.

**Ignoring the Positives**

Another thinking style that goes along with focusing on the negatives is dismissing the positives – for example, Samar dismissed the fact that friends were saying they enjoyed hanging out.

People with perfectionism also tend to dismiss the positives when their goal is reached. They often think “It was not that hard”; “Anyone could have done that”; “It was no big deal”; “If I can achieve this goal, it’s too easy, I need to make it harder next time”.

Someone who dismissed the positive areas of their performance and sets their next goal even higher, is putting themselves in a situation of feeling that they are always failing. If you have spent a lot of time focusing on the negatives, it is helpful to record actual information of your performance to find a balance.

Try to think of some situations in the last week and record the positives. Here are some examples.

Area	Positive Information	Lack of Negative Information
Study	Teacher commented that I did a good job on my presentation.	No one criticised my presentation or how I looked.
Appearance	Friend commented that I looked good tonight.	No one said that I looked bad.
Social	People approached me to talk.	No one said I looked anxious or that I was boring.

**\*Discussion point:** What are the main areas in my life where it would help to increase focus on positive information from others?

Hopefully this has helped you to notice the positives.

Because you have probably had a habit of downplaying positive successes for a long time, you need to search actively for positive information and the lack of negative information.

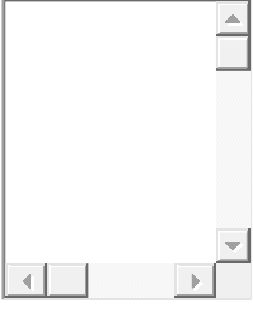
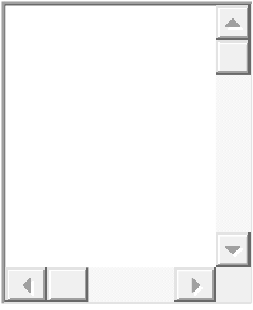
**Keep recording positives until you make a habit of noticing positives!**





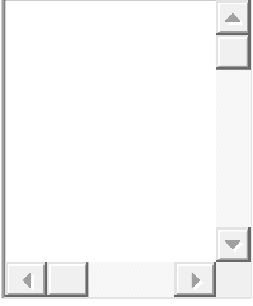
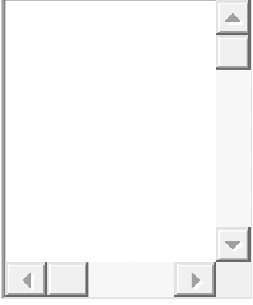
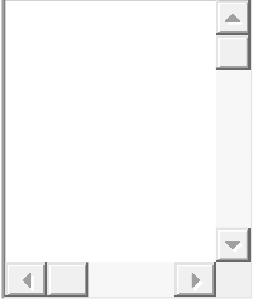

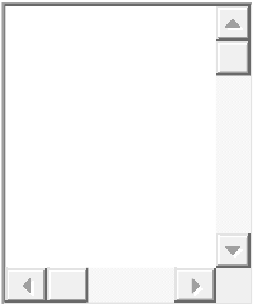
### Changing Thinking Styles

Unhelpful thoughts affect how you feel and what you do. For example, if you think that you might not know what to say and that no one will like you before going to a party, you might feel very anxious and avoid going to the party.

Here are some common unhelpful thinking styles that are related to perfectionism. Do any apply to you?

Unhelpful Thinking Style	What it Means	Example	Your Example	Things to Think About
Double standards	Where you have one set of harsh standards for yourself and another set of lower standards for others.	It is OK for others to make small errors e.g., a spelling mistake in an assignment, but not OK for you to make a spelling mistake.		Is it fair to yourself to have one harsh rule for you that is different from your rule for all other people? Why should rules be harder for you than others? How does that impact your mood?
Overgeneralising	When you conclude that because you have failed to achieve one goal, you are a failure as a person overall.	Feeling like a failure as a person if a cake you bake doesn't turn out well.		There are many areas to feel good about yourself. Is thinking you are a failure based on one occasion really true?



"Should" Statements	Strict rules for yourself. This puts a lot of pressure on yourself and makes you feel stressed.	"I should never make a mistake"		Try replacing "should" with guidelines (see previous module), to feel less stressed.
Thinking the worst	Thinking of the most terrible effects of a situation and blowing things out of proportion, thinking "What if..."	Submitting an assignment with a minor mistake and thinking the worst: "What if my teacher notices the mistake, thinks that I'm a terrible student and fails me? I will not be able to finish school and I will not be able to find a job and have nowhere to live!"		What are the chances of something like that really happening?
Emotional Reasoning	Basing your view on feelings rather than facts.	Before giving a presentation, thinking: "I feel anxious, therefore I will give a bad presentation." This is basing predictions on feelings rather than facts.		What are the facts? Am I basing my view of a situation on feelings or facts?
Labelling	Using negative labels about yourself.	When you make a mistake or don't reach a goal, saying words like "stupid", "loser", or "failure" about yourself.		Is it helpful to use self-criticism? How does it feel when you label yourself?
Personalising	Taking over responsibility without considering any other causes.	In team situations thinking: "It is my fault that the team did not do well today because I am not performing well", without considering everyone on the team has an impact on the final result.		Who else is involved? Am I the only person who is fully responsible for this situation?
Mind-Reading	Guessing what others are thinking without really knowing.	e.g., "My teacher is thinking that I have done a bad job on my assignment because he didn't say anything positive and must think that the other students assignments were better." This thought may not consider the teacher may have been busy and not had time to give feedback.		I can't know what someone is thinking unless I directly ask them.
Negative predictions	Making negative predictions about the future.	Thinking "I will fail the exam" even though you have no information on what the result will be, and have studied hard.		Is my prediction likely, when considering the past?

\*Discussion point: What are my common thinking styles?

In addition to experiments (see previous module), we can change unhelpful thinking styles by using thought diaries where we challenge unhelpful thinking by looking for evidence and seeing things from another point of view.

**Thoughts are not facts - we need to check out the reality.**

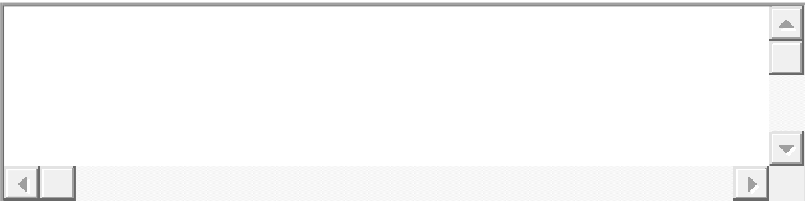
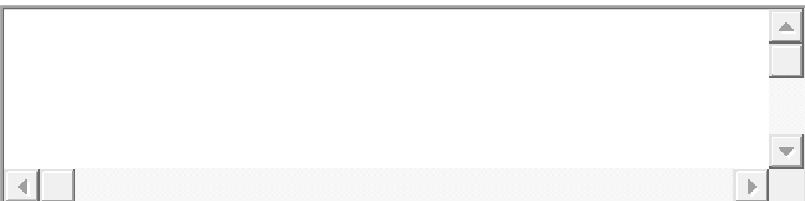
**THOUGHT DIARIES**

Jesse's thought diary. Here's an example of Jesse, who believed a birthday party was ruined because a cake did not turn out well.

1) Event: What was the event, situation, thought, image or memory?
Making a cake that looked bad for my friend's birthday party.
2) Beliefs: What went through my mind? What does it say about me as a person? Am I using unhelpful thinking styles e.g. double standards, overgeneralizing, should statements? Rate how strongly I believe in each thought 0-100%.
I have failed as a friend (90%) – focusing on negatives, dismissing positives. Because the cake looked wrong, I am a failure (90%) – over-generalising (70%).
3) Feelings: What was I feeling? (use the circle of feelings, and you can have more than one feeling) Rate how strongly you feel it 0-100%.
anxious 95%; sad 50%
4) Challenge the thought: What would a friend say? Is there another way of viewing this thought?
Everyone said they had a good time. One of my friends said the cake tasted good. I have not failed as a person, it is only a cake, being a good friend is more important in being supportive.
5) Result: How do you feel now? Rate how strong your feelings are now 0-100%.
anxious 60%; sad 30%

**IT'S YOUR TURN! CHALLENGE YOUR THINKING**

Think of a time recently when you felt upset for not meeting a goal. Follow the steps below to challenge your thinking:

1) Event: What was the event, situation, thought or image?

2) Beliefs: What went through my mind? What does it say about me as a person? Am I using unhelpful thinking styles e.g. double standards, overgeneralizing, should statements? Rate how strongly I believe in each thought 0-100%.




3) Feelings: What was I feeling? (use the circle of feelings, and you can have more than one feeling) Rate how strongly you feel it 0-100%.

4) Challenge the thought: What would a friend say? Is there another way of viewing this thought?

5) Result: How do you feel now? Rate how strong your feelings are now 0-100%.

**\*Discussion point: What was the result of challenging unhelpful thoughts?**

What did you discover? Could you notice unhelpful thinking and replace it with more balanced thinking? Did this reduce unhelpful feelings?

You may find this quite difficult for a start, its normal, once you have some practice, it gets easier. The key is writing the thoughts down and keep practising. Try completing 2 or 3 thought diaries over the next week when some strong feelings come up.

**Module 6. Key message**

Unhelpful thinking can result in negative feelings. It’s common for people with perfectionism to have unhelpful thinking style of all or nothing, focusing on the negatives, double standards, overgeneralisation and “shoulds”.

**However, thoughts are not facts.**

Thought diaries can help you manage unhelpful thoughts, along with experiments (see previous module), which can help you feel better.

**Module 7. Procrastination, problem solving and wellbeing activities**

**PROCRASTINATION**

It is very common to procrastinate. Can you think of a time recently where you put off something?

What were the things that were running through your head when putting off the task? Worried that you wouldn't do the work perfectly or that you could fail? You might have thought that it would take too long to perform the task to your exact standards. Or that you might feel overwhelmed? You can get a clearer idea about your procrastination by using a procrastination record, like Taylor:

Taylor worries about performance and compares work to classmates, often feeling disappointed in performance because it isn’t “good enough”. Taylor now delays starting assignments, putting it off for days.

**Taylor’s example:**

*“My classmates and teacher tell me I do well in English. I put a lot of work into my assignments. But I worry about my performance. I constantly compare my work to others. I think my work isn’t good enough. I delay writing assignments, spending a lot of time worrying and reading the question over and over. I have started missing due dates because of procrastination.”*

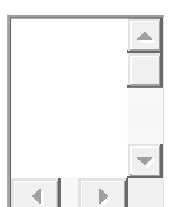



**Taylor’s example procrastination record:**

1) Perfectionism Area and Situation
Studies: Thursday night, thinking about writing my English assignment.
2) Record your Prediction. Ask yourself: "What was going through my mind when I decided to delay this task?" Rate how strongly you believe the thought (0: not at all, 10: completely believe).
I will not be able to write the essay to an excellent standard (9/10).
3) Record your behaviour. What did you do?
Went through the question again to see if I missed anything, which has the effect of putting me off starting writing. Texted my friends to see what they have written, which made me feel less confident and wanting to put off writing. Delayed writing because I am distracted.
4) Record your feelings e.g. anxious, sad, angry, ashamed, depressed, scared, embarrassed, irritated, happy, disappointed, excited. Rate your feelings (0: no feeling, 10: strongest feeling).
Anxious (8/10) Ashamed (6/10)

## The Cycle of Procrastination and Perfectionism

There is a cycle between procrastination and perfectionism. The more Taylor believed that achieving at school was the way to feel good the more Taylor thought tasks needed to be done perfectly and then procrastinated. Because of procrastination, Taylor started handing in work late, increasing worries of failure and having to work harder.

**Think about how procrastination and perfectionism are linked for you:**

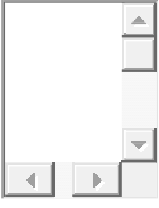
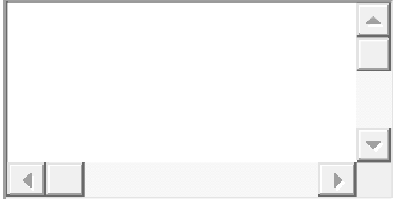
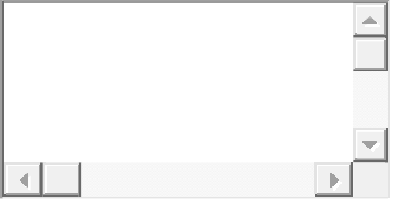
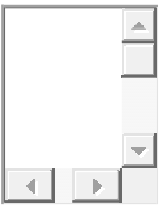


Perfectionism Area	Thoughts	Procrastination Behaviours	How Procrastination Keeps Going
Studies	I will not be able to write assignments to a high standard.	Delay writing. Go through question multiple time. Text friends. Look at Instagram. Don't hand assignment in.	The more Taylor procrastinated, the less time was available so didn't end up doing as well as Taylor could have, which increased the prediction of not writing assignments to a high standard, and more likely to procrastinate again.
			

**\*Discussion point:** What are some areas I could try and decrease procrastination in?

## Pros and Cons of Procrastination

The next step toward overcoming procrastination is to consider the pros and cons of putting things off. Often people put things off because they think they will feel less anxiety; but if you have a closer look, you may find it results in greater costs in the long run.

While anxiety may reduce in the short term, procrastination increases anxiety over the tasks building up and gives you less time. This might reduce your performance and make you feel overwhelmed. Use this worksheet to examine what procrastination is costing you.

Pros of Procrastination	Cons of Procrastination	Challenge the benefits: Is it true that these are benefits? What is the impact in the longer term?
Example: Reduces my anxiety.	Example: Feel like a failure because tasks are building up.	Example: Procrastination only reduces my anxiety for a short time, I feel more anxious after I put something off, so overall its worse for my anxiety
		
		

\*Discussion point: How could I keep challenging my procrastination?

## PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving can be used to manage procrastination and unhelpful thinking styles e.g., all or nothing thinking. Here's an example of Alex who used problem solving to not put off guitar practice.

1. Write down the problem. Describe it clearly and in detail.
I need to practise the guitar but it's too difficult. I will make mistakes and feel down.
2. Think of all possible solutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write down all the ideas you can think of without seeing them as good or bad.</li> <li>• Choose 2 or 3 ideas that seem the best.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not practise at all.</li> <li>- Pick one to practise for today and the next few days: Pick the easiest one to practise.</li> <li>- Practise all 3 songs.</li> </ul>
3. Decide on one idea to try out.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about the pros and cons of the top 2 or 3 ideas.</li> <li>• Choose the best idea.</li> </ul>
If I start with the most difficult one, I will feel down. I'll start with the easiest. I would like to only focus on the easiest piece for today and the next few days, so I feel more confident.
4. Plan the chosen idea.

Practise only the easiest piece every day for the next 3 days. If I get anxious from thinking about the 2 other pieces, I will distract myself by doing something else e.g., go for a walk.
5. Carry out the idea.
6. What was the effect?
I felt less stressed than usual and felt happy that I've mastered the easiest piece. My guitar teacher praised me for practicing. I feel more confident in learning the other two pieces.



**Your turn! Try problem solving:**

1. Write down the problem. Describe it clearly and in detail.
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 50px; width: 100%;"></div> </div>
2. Think of all possible solutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write down all the ideas you can think of without seeing them as good or bad.</li> <li>Choose 2 or 3 ideas that seem the best.</li> </ul>
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 50px; width: 100%;"></div> </div>
3. Decide on an idea.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the pros and cons of the top 2 or 3 ideas – how likely it is to solve the problem?</li> <li>Choose the best idea.</li> </ul>

4. Plan the chosen idea.

5. Carry out the idea.

6. What was the effect?

\*Discussion point: How could I use problem solving for areas in my life?

## WELLBEING ACTIVITIES

People who put a lot of emphasis on achievement often have little time for rest and relaxation. A balance between work and play is important in building a well-rounded and balanced life. Here is a list of wellbeing activities. Think of the ones you might like to do and try to come up with your own. These may be things you previously enjoyed but stopped doing, or something you always wanted to try, or something small that might make you feel good.

You could even make a list of your favourites and keep it close by for easy reminders, put it on your phone or write on a note by your bed.

### Try these wellbeing activities:

- Go for a walk
- Watch a movie
- Have a bath
- Make a gift for someone
- Light a scented candle
- Read a book
- Play with a pet
- See a friend
- Learn a new skill
- Go to a museum/art gallery
- Craft/Knit/Crochet/Macrame
- Photography
- Draw or paint
- Go to the movies
- Go to the park or beach
- Be in nature
- Watch a nostalgic movie from your childhood
- Listen to a new album/band
- Do some gardening
- Play Video Games
- Build/Refurbish Something



Gentle Stretches or Yoga (move your body in a way that feels good)  
 Water the garden  
 Use a weighted blanket and listen to rain sounds

Now that you have thought of a range of pleasant things you could do, include some of these over the next week. You might like to reflect had on your mood.

## Module 7. Key message

Procrastination and perfectionism are strongly linked. Putting tasks off usually increases perfectionism and stress. Problem solving can be used in many areas of life.

Making time to balance achievement and rest and including wellbeing activities in your life can improve your mood and how you feel about yourself.

## Module 8. Self-compassion and self-esteem

### The Self-Critical Voice

*“Lately I’ve been very self-critical and when I look at my drawings, I think they look awful. All I can think of is how others are so much better than me and how awful my drawing looks. I really like to draw but I am very self-critical. Because of this I don’t enjoy art as much as I used to. I start off feeling about my work but when I finish it, I think it’s not up to scratch. I like to look at other people’s art but whenever I do all I can think of is how theirs is so much better than mine.” – Bailey*

As you can see, Bailey was self-critical. Being self-critical can cause issues like low motivation, cutting yourself off from family and friends, low moods, and avoiding the problem which makes it worse.

Self-criticism is like your inner critic or bully, the voice in your head that always points out your mistakes. It calls you names like bad, stupid, hopeless, loser, useless or failure.

Do any of these describe you?	Tick
• I don’t live up to my own standards or how I’d like to be.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I tend to put myself down e.g. call myself stupid.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I find it difficult to accept that I have weaknesses.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I tend to be very harsh on myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>
• If I do well, it is probably due to luck, but if I do badly, it is probably my own fault.	<input type="checkbox"/>

### \*Discussion point: How often am I self-critical?

If most of the sentences describe you, it’s likely you have some self-critical thoughts. Many people believe that self-criticism is a way to motivate themselves. But is it helpful? What happens to you when someone criticises you? What about when someone praises you?

You've probably noticed that when someone criticises you, you feel self-conscious. When you make mistakes, you might call yourself names and criticise yourself while overlooking your successes. If you find that you do this, and it’s a pattern you’d like to change then learning to recognise when you're being self-critical and being able to shift those thoughts can be important steps in boosting your self-esteem.

Changing self-criticism is not about lowering your standards but deciding which voice you want to be the loudest – the critical one who will scold you until you feel like a failure; or the kind, understanding voice who will notice when you are trying and encourage you to learn from your mistakes.



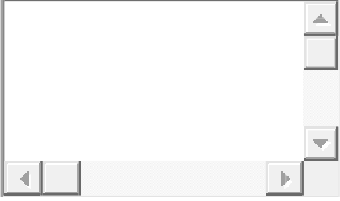
The goal is to decrease the noise and frequency of your self-critical voice and increase the power of your kind compassionate voice, just like controlling the volumes of two radio stations. In time, you’ll be able to befriend the inner critic and create enough safety for yourself so that the inner critic doesn’t feel it has to work so hard, or control as much, to do- it’s a job. It may never completely go away, but it will get a lot quieter.

### STEP 1: IDENTIFYING THE SELF-CRITICAL VOICE

One way to find it is to look for the thoughts that you would be unwilling to say to another person because they sound hurtful. When you are used to being so hard on yourself, it can be hard to identify the self-critical voice because you accept it as “truth” or how things really are. Try to notice the names you call yourself most frequently when something goes wrong. This

will alert you to the self-critical voice more quickly when it speaks up in the future. Your feelings can also give you a clue that this voice is unhelpful: If you are feeling ashamed or upset, it is unlikely that you will feel motivated to try again.

To identify the critical voice, record any self-critical thoughts you had in the past week.



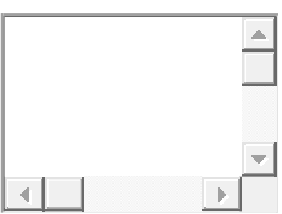
<u>Triggering event</u> Something someone does, something you do, or an upsetting image.	<u>Self-critical thoughts</u> What went through your mind? What does it say about you as a person?	<u>Feelings e.g. sad, anxious, depressed, angry.</u> What did you feel? Rate how strongly you feel from 0 to 10.
Bailey's example: Drawing something.	Bailey's example: My drawing is awful. It looks awful in comparison to others. I can never draw well. I am a failure.	Bailey's example: Upset (8/10).
		

**\*Discussion point:** What areas of my life am I most self-critical about?

**STEP 2: FIND THE KIND VOICE**

When people have been listening to the critical voice for a long time, they find it very hard to identify their kind voice. One way to help you find your kind voice is to think about the values you apply to people you care about (e.g., friends, families)

Look at the table below and see which ones are important to you in the manner you treat your friends and family. Add any others you can think of in the empty boxes.

Acceptance To accept my friends no matter what they do	Caring To be caring towards others	Kindness To be kind towards others
Courtesy To be polite and considerate to others	Forgiveness To be forgiving to others	Generosity To give people the benefit of the doubt
Helpfulness To be helpful to others	Hope To keep believing in my friends	Fun To have fun with friends and share a sense of humour with them
Justice To treat my friends fairly	Service To be of help to others	Respect To treat my friends with respect and not be harsh on them
		

**\*Discussion point:** What values do I apply to other people?

**Do you apply any of those values to yourself?**

Think how different your life would look if you applied the same values to yourself. The table below shows some suggestions about how you can apply the same values you use with friends and families to yourself. Add in your own ideas and values in the boxes.

Acceptance To accept myself as being	Caring To be caring towards myself	Kindness To feel concern for myself
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worthwhile no matter what I achieve		when I am feeling bad, and not beating myself up
Courtesy To be considerate of myself	Forgiveness To be forgiving of myself	Generosity To give myself the benefit of the doubt
Helpfulness To be helpful to myself, admitting that criticizing myself doesn't get the best out of me	Hope To keep believing in myself even when I don't perform as well as I would like	Fun Not to take myself too seriously and be able to laugh at myself
Justice To treat myself fairly and focus not just on what I do wrong but on what I like about myself	Service To be of help to myself by offering support rather than criticism	Respect To treat myself with respect and not be harsh on myself

\*Discussion point: What values do I apply to myself?

Over the next week, continue identifying your critical voice using the diary, but add 2 columns for your kind voice and your new thoughts and feelings.

Something someone does, something you do, or an upsetting image.	Self-critical Thoughts What went through your mind? What does it say about you as a person?	Feelings e.g. sad, anxious, depressed, angry. What did you feel? Rate how strongly you feel from 0 to 10.	Kind voice What would you say to a friend? How strongly do you believe in this thought (0 Not at all, 10 Completely).	Revised feelings How do you feel now? Rate how strong is the feeling you described earlier from 0 to 10.
Bailey's example: Drawing something	Bailey's example: My drawing is awful. It looks awful in comparison to others. I can never draw well. I am a failure.	Bailey's example: Upset (8/10)	Bailey's example: You've only started drawing for 1 year. Most famous artists take years. Cut yourself some slack! (9/10) It's good that you're trying and learning to better yourself. Keep going! You will improve. (6/10)	Bailey's example: Upset (6/10).

\*Discussion point: How can I increase my kind voice and tune out of my self-critical voice?

For now, you may find it hard to hear your kind voice, and the self-critical voice speaks loudly. That is normal. Like any muscle in your body, the kind voice will only get stronger the more it is used, and the self-critical voice will get weaker the less it is used. This takes time and lots of practice to be kind to yourself and less self-critical.

### STEP 3: HOW TO REACT TO THE CRITICAL VOICE WHEN IT STARTS SPEAKING

Imagine your self-critical voice as an overly critical safety officer that sees everything as a hazard. There are a few helpful ways to respond to this safety officer.

The first is to have a practised response ready to use when the safety officer pops up, so that you don't panic and metaphorically yell "FIRE" in a crowded cinema. The second is to observe but not react to the safety officer. When the self-critical voice is loud and strong, it is difficult to remember or hear the kind voice.

Try writing out the kind thoughts that helped you feel better on a card where you can carry it around in your purse or wallet, or put up on your wall. You can also try saying the words on the cards out aloud to help the kind voice get stronger. Some examples include:

*"When I don't achieve my goals, it doesn't make me any less worthwhile as a person."*

*"I don't judge others based on what they achieve so I will try not to judge myself based on what I achieve."*

*"Making mistakes is part of the learning process."*

*"It's really fun to be a beginner and to try something new"*

As you practise these techniques, you can expect the kind voice to get stronger and the self-critical voice quieter. Still, it may not mean that the self-critical voice will disappear, but it will get quieter. Some days it will be easier to listen to the kind voice than on others. On others, the self-critical voice gets louder and tries to get your attention. Don't beat yourself up when the self-critical voice gets louder. Instead, try and use the tools you have learnt.

## SELF-ESTEEM

Perfectionists usually set very high goals, to the point where their goals are impossible to reach. Also, the areas in which they seek to do well in decrease. They often end up judging themselves almost entirely in one or two areas of their life (e.g., how they do in school, the way they look). They feel good about themselves only when they are doing well in these areas. And when these areas aren't going well, they feel bad about themselves. Here are some ways to help you feel good about yourself no matter what happens:

### 1. Knowing that you can feel good about yourself, apart from how well you do in an area.

Write yourself a letter, taking the role of a kind person. This can be an imaginary person; a real person whom you consider to be kind but whom you don't know personally e.g., Dalai Lama; a real person whom you know and consider to be kind. Comment on what has happened in your life so far that makes you a good person worthy of being loved apart from your achievements.

Some ideas are photos of your family and you being happy, even when you were a baby or a toddler and not achieving anything, spending time with your childhood best friend, teacher encouraging you when your grades slipped and making sure you were OK, a best friend who was always there no matter what, good friends who would just enjoy hanging out with you no matter what your grades were.

### 2. Encouraging flexible and realistic goals.

We discussed turning strict rules into flexible guidelines e.g. turning "I must always be on time" to "I will always try to be on time but realise I can't control every situation all the time and may sometimes be late e.g. in a traffic jam". This flexibility without the use of "should" and "must" can help a person feel less stressed.

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### 3. Learning to feel good about yourself through as many areas of your life as possible.

Apart from the areas that you currently use to feel good about yourself, choose 4 more areas that you are interested in that can help you feel good about yourself. Use the table below to set yourself some short-term goals (e.g. can be achieved in 6 months) in these 4 new areas. Some examples could include spending more time with certain people, having a new hobby purely for enjoyment rather than achievement, returning to hobbies that you have stopped when you focused on doing well in fewer areas.

Remember to set flexible and realistic goals and avoid any use of "must" and "should". Choose small steps rather than large one, as the idea is to slowly build new areas in your life that you can feel good about, not to master a whole new area of life overnight.

### 4. Have more balance in what you pay attention to

Perfectionists are used to focusing on the negatives and ignoring the positives. A simple way to retrain your attention is to note down each day at least 1 thing you have felt good about that day. Train yourself to look for the small areas e.g., made time to walk the dog even though I was tired; started the essay I have been putting off because I didn't know how to proceed; spent time talking to my parents and siblings even though I was really stressed.

## Freedom

Perfectionism is related to self-criticism. This reduces your chances of doing well because it can lead to procrastination, avoidance, tiredness, self-criticism and feeling bad about yourself. Perfection is not a realistic or healthy goal. Instead, we can learn to try our best, celebrate our imperfections and experience greater freedom in our lives.

Changing strict rules into flexible guidelines can bring you on a journey to flexibility and freedom – greater freedom to do your best, to love yourself, to be kind to yourself and to enjoy your life.

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## Module 8. Key message

Balance your self-esteem by broadening it to not be dependent on only one or two areas of achievement.

Try and increase your self-compassion by treating yourself the way you would treat a friend and reduce the volume of your self-critical voice.

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## The End! Congratulations!

You did it! You've reached the end of the modules. You should be proud of yourself! Time to treat yourself to something nice, and maybe have a nap!

Again, it's completely fine if you didn't complete all the exercises or skipped some. You're welcome to go back and finish them anytime – or you can leave them - It's up to you! You can also revisit any of the exercises at any point you need a refresher.

### Here are some of the key messages that are helpful to come back to in the future:

- Perfectionism is different from aiming for excellence and becomes a problem when your self-worth is based on meeting these standards.
- It can be helpful to observe what is influencing your perfectionism on social media and the media that you watch.
- Perfectionism is maintained by the thoughts and behaviours that we have.
- Try and notice what areas of your life you have perfectionism in.
- Thinking about what areas of life you have perfectionism in, and other areas of your life in which you can judge yourself that are not all about achievement, or in just one or two areas can help you not put 'all your eggs in one basket' and improve your self-esteem.
- It is important to know what is fact and what is fiction: trying to do things perfectly does not always lead to better performance or achievement.
- Think about how changing perfectionism might benefit your performance and mood.
- Experiments can help you understand and challenge unhelpful beliefs, feelings and behaviours. The results will give you meaningful information about your perfectionist beliefs and behaviours, and help you live a more balanced life.
- All or nothing thinking involves seeing yourself in extremes (either good or bad, either success or failure) with no grey area/middle ground. This thinking can be managed by doing experiments and drawing a line to challenge all or nothing thoughts.
- You can be more flexible by replacing rules with guidelines and doing things less than perfectly, which gives you a sense of balance.
- Unhelpful thinking can result in negative feelings. It's common for people with perfectionism to have unhelpful thinking style of all or nothing, focusing on the negatives, double standards, overgeneralisation and "shoulds". However, thoughts are not facts.
- Thought diaries can help you manage unhelpful thoughts, along with experiments, which can help you feel better.
- Procrastination and perfectionism are strongly linked. Putting tasks off usually increases perfectionism and stress. Problem solving can be used in many areas of life.
- Making time to balance achievement and rest and including wellbeing activities in your life can improve your mood and how you feel about yourself.
- Balance your self-esteem by broadening it to not be dependent on only one or two areas of achievement.
- Try and increase your self-compassion by treating yourself the way you would treat a friend and reduce the volume of your self-critical voice.

**Have a good day and be kind and gentle with yourself! 😊**



