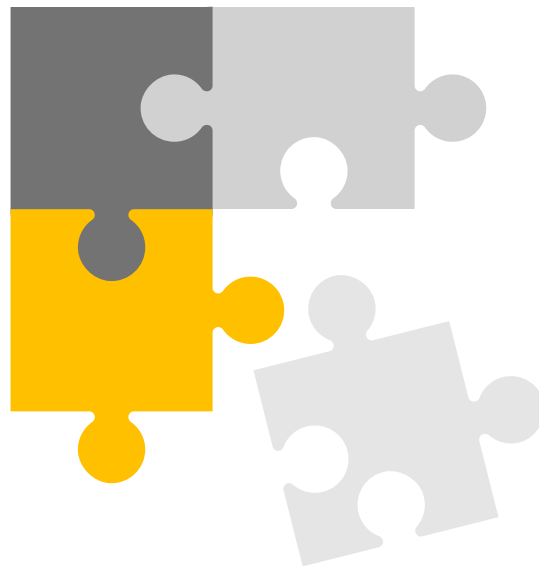


Playing with Perfectionism

Supporting Parents and Caregivers to Experiment with
New Approaches to Achievement with Your Child



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Shafran, R., Egan, S.J, & Wade, T.D (2018). Overcoming perfectionism: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques, second edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group. <https://www.littlebrown.co.uk/books/detail.page?isbn=9781849014403>.

Introduction to This Program



Welcome to the Playing with Perfectionism program! We hope you find it helpful.

Who is this program for?

This program is for parents/caregivers who want to support their child to manage perfectionism. Your child may benefit from this program if they...:

- Feel bad about themselves if they don't do *very* well at things (e.g., school, hobbies).
- Set goals for themselves that seem difficult or impossible to reach.
- Procrastinate, or put things off, even though they feel bad about it later.
- Spend a lot of time thinking about their mistakes or any errors in what they do.

What does the program involve?

The program includes six modules, each of which contains:

- Information for you about perfectionism.
- Activities for you to complete on your own.
- Handouts for you to give to your child and discuss with them.
- Exercises that you and your child can complete together.

The handouts are included at the end of each module. We suggest keeping the completed handouts, so you can go back to them later if needed.

Things you may be worried about...

It's okay if you have some worries or concerns about doing the program – we will discuss these in Module 1. Here are some common concerns before starting and our responses:

Concern	Response
My child will lower their goals/won't achieve as well.	We aim to help children to pursue meaningful goals whilst reducing distress – not to lower their standards.
It will take up too much time.	You can spend more or less time on this than we suggest – you know your child and your schedule best.
It sends the message that I don't accept my child for who they are.	This isn't about changing who your child is as a person – rather, it's about experimenting with new ways of doing things together and seeing if they are helpful.

How do I help my child through the program?

We suggest doing one module a week for six weeks. Each week, you could set aside:

- 30 minutes to read the modules.
- Up to 60 minutes to speak to your guide.
- 10 minutes a few times a week to do the homework exercises.

We have broken homework up into parts as a suggestion so neither you nor your child get overwhelmed trying to do it all in one go. You could take breaks in between the parts of the homework, or you could do different parts on different days. You could break the homework up depending on your child's attention span and engagement. Please do whatever you think will work best.

There are two main parts to this program:

1. Discovering new ways of thinking about perfectionism and achievement.
2. Trying out some new behaviours and seeing what the effects are.

We invite you to explore these ideas playfully with your child, as opposed to viewing this as something you do to your child. You may be wondering what we mean by this. Here are some suggestions for ways you and your child can work through this program as a team:

- Before starting, discuss and come to an agreement with your child on the best time to do the activities each week. Some factors you might like to consider:
 - After-school activities like sports and music lessons – your child may need a rest after getting home from these things. Could you do a short activity in the morning, or at the table after eating dinner, to break things up?
 - Potential distractions, such as phones, computers, noise, and favourite television programs – these might impact *when*, *where* (e.g., a room with fewer distractions) and *how* (e.g., making a rule that you will both turn your phones on silent) you choose to do the activities together.
 - Being flexible in how you deliver this – if your child is unwell, stressed, or too tired, this is a great opportunity to model flexibility by agreeing on a different time to do the program with them when they are feeling up to it.
- When you talk about this program with your child, try to use language that includes both of you – for example, “what we are learning”, not “what you are learning”.
- In previous research about a version of this program for adolescents, parents said that it helped them recognise elements of perfectionism in themselves. You could join your child in completing homework activities and discuss your reflections with them (in an age-appropriate manner). This may reduce a sense of pressure or embarrassment for your child, because you are both doing the activities and learning together.

- It is beneficial to engage in this program as a collaborative effort between caregivers and parents when you intend for multiple caregivers to be involved in guiding your child through it. It is essential to ensure that all members of the team possess a comprehensive comprehension of the program's objectives and methodology.

Please watch and discuss the following videos with your child.

[Grow your brain: make mistakes visible](#)



[Think Like A Scientist](#)



Program Information

What is this program?

This program is for parents/caregivers who want to support their child to manage perfectionism.

What are perfectionist behaviors?

- When a child feels bad about themselves if they do not do very well at things (e.g., school, hobbies).
- When a child sets goals for themselves that seem difficult or impossible to reach.
- When a child tends to procrastinate, or put things off, even though they feel bad about it later.
- When a child spends a lot of time thinking about their mistakes or any errors in what they do.

What is the design and approach of the program?

The program includes six modules, each of which contains:

- Information about perfectionism.
- Activities for the caregiver to complete independently.
- Handouts for the caregiver to give to the child and discuss with them and exercises that the caregiver and child can complete together.

Important Notes

- We aim to help children pursue meaningful goals whilst reducing distress – not lowering their standards.
- The program focuses on trying new approaches together, not changing a child's core identity.
- Designed so the child explores new thoughts, behaviors, and evaluates their effects on perfectionism.
- Caregivers identifying perfectionism in themselves can reduce pressure and embarrassment for the child, promoting joint learning.

Modules	Summary	Activity Highlights
1: Learning About Perfectionism	Perfectionism: Self-worth tied to achievement, high standards, harms emotions, social life, health, academics. The goal is to aim for excellence, not perfection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish perfection from striving for excellence. Recognize perfectionism signs in the child and understand associated negative consequences.
2: What Keeps Perfectionism Going?	Our thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected. Positive changes in thoughts and behaviors can enhance emotions. Emphasize personal qualities to help children combat perfectionism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on past situations: thoughts, emotions, actions, outcomes. • Re-frame negative experiences with positive alternatives for personal growth.
3: Let's Experiment	Use behavior experiments to challenge perfectionism, prioritize sleep, pleasurable activities, and manage social media for child's well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about behavior experiments, test beliefs by planning, predicting, doing, evaluating, and reflecting on outcomes for personal growth.
4: Developing Self-Compassion	Self-criticism harms mental health and goal achievement, while self-compassion, rooted in kindness and understanding, benefits both mental health and goal progress. Cultivating self-compassion can be aided by imagining self-treatment like one would treat others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying “mean” and “nice” self-talk. • Practice self-kindness by speaking to ourselves as we would to a loved one.
5: Problem-Solving	Procrastination and avoidance temporarily soothe discomfort but reinforce fears, causing long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use problem-solving: identify, brainstorm, evaluate, choose, plan steps, execute, and assess

Maintenance Factors	anxiety. Similar patterns occur in perfectionism and can be addressed through problem-solving.	effectiveness to solve problems effectively.
6: Expanding Self-Worth	Enhance self-worth for better mental health and academics. Perfectionists often tie self-worth to limited achievements. Help children diversify self-evaluation factors and invest in various life areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visualize self-worth as a circle with sections representing positive and negative aspects. Identify the most prominent sections in your self-worth "pie." • Discuss the self-worth "pie" desires with a caregiver. Plan to adjust the slices, invest more time in different areas. Write your plan.