

INTRODUCTION TO REDUCING PERFECTIONISM

*A Fluff-Free Guide® by
The Wellness Society*

INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism, defined as “as a combination of excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations”, is officially on the rise.

Our growing perfectionistic tendencies have been identified as a leading driver of poor mental wellbeing in millennials.

As Nicky Lidbetter, CEO of Anxiety UK, explains:

“Individuals who experience high functioning anxiety are often very driven, high achievers who set incredibly high standards for themselves. They can find themselves constantly striving for perfection in everything they turn their hand to.”

When we put too much pressure on ourselves, we’re essentially signaling to our brain that our demands outweigh our resources.

Our brains interpret this as a danger, which triggers our stress response.

Brené Brown, author of [The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You’re Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are](#), offers us a compelling insight into understanding the root causes of perfectionism.

Shame and Fear of Judgement Are at the Heart of Perfectionism

“Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfect, look perfect, and act perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgement, and shame. It’s a shield. It’s a twenty-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us when, in fact, it’s the thing that’s really preventing us from flight.” – Brené Brown

“Healthy striving is self-focused: How can I improve? Perfectionism is other-focused: What will they think?” – Brené Brown

Many people who struggle with perfectionism have had [difficult childhoods](#). They’ve been given the message that they lack inherent worth and that it has to be earned somehow.

Perfectionism is therefore akin to a coping mechanism. It’s our attempt to avoid feelings of shame and unworthiness. It runs deep!

Nonetheless, over time, it’s possible for us to reduce it.

Keep reading to discover four methods for reducing perfectionism.

1. Reducing Perfectionism Through Affirmations

Anti-perfectionism affirmations are one of the many tools available for changing the way you think.

For affirmations to be effective, it's important to choose one that holds genuine meaning for you.

It's also important to develop the habit of using them regularly. Check out the appendix for some free printable affirmation cards.

10 Anti-Perfectionism Affirmations

- » I let go of the need for other people's approval.
- » I love and accept myself.
- » I am enough. This is enough. I have enough.
- » I am worthy.
- » I am whole.
- » I focus on my own journey and my unique path.
- » My worth does not depend on my work.
- » My worth does not depend on my productivity.
- » I own my story.
- » I trust the process.

2. Reducing Perfectionism Through Mindfulness and Cognitive Restructuring

As Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), notes:

“Most people don't realize that the mind constantly chatters. And yet, that chatter winds up being the force that drives us much of the day in terms of what we do, what we react to, and how we feel.”

Do you notice your mental chatter or are you completely entangled with it?

Many people spend their lives fused to their thoughts. And here's the thing: You are not your thoughts. You are not your mind. You are the person who can notice their mind.

Mindfulness practice is all about becoming aware of this. Once you've developed your mindfulness skills, you'll gain insight into your cognitive distortions – the unhelpful thinking patterns associated with perfectionism, anxiety and low mood.

One type of cognitive distortion related to perfectionism is black and white thinking, also called 'splitting' or 'all-or-nothing thinking'. This refers to the tendency to use either/or categories.

Examples include: always/never; success/failure, good/bad; right/wrong, fair/unfair; always/never; and everyone/no one.

For example, you might notice thoughts such as “I should *always* impress everyone with my

presentation.” “Should” and “must” language is also related to perfectionism.

To reduce perfectionism, try focusing on reframing these thoughts in a way that uses less extreme language. For example, “I’d prefer it if I could perform well on this presentation, but it’s not a disaster if I don’t.”

For comprehensive guidance on understanding and dealing with unhelpful thinking styles, see The Thinking Slow Method in [The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#).

3. Reducing Perfectionism Through Taking Action

It’s likely that perfectionism is preventing you from realising your full potential, given that it often leads to procrastination.

Here are some affirmations that can help facilitate a mindset shift that reduces your tendency to procrastinate. Why not stick one of these up on a post-it somewhere in your workspace?

10 Action-Oriented Affirmations

- » Done is better than perfect.
- » Progress, not perfection.
- » Nothing works unless you do.
- » One day, one step, at a time.
- » Feel the fear and do it anyway!
- » Stop thinking about what could go wrong and get excited about what could go right.
- » What you do today can improve all of your tomorrows.
- » There is no such thing as perfection, only improvement.
- » I am not afraid to make mistakes. I embrace mistakes as learning opportunities.
- » There is no such thing as failure, only learning.

4. Reducing Perfectionism Through Remembering Your Achievements

Keeping track of positive events is particularly helpful for people prone to perfectionism due to their tendency to focus on their perceived shortcomings.

Think about it: How quick are you to move onto the next thing once you’ve achieved something? How often do you slow down, step back, and take a moment to celebrate your progress? Or are you always chasing the next thing?

The more you celebrate your progress, the more worthy you’ll feel. This is important because self-worth is the antidote to shame, the underlying driver of perfectionism. If you’d like to focus on building self-worth, consider keeping a Small Victories Log.

See the included A4 and A5 worksheets for this in the appendix.

SUMMARY

Perfectionism is often a deeply rooted pattern of thinking and behaving that can negatively impact your mental wellbeing and life satisfaction.

The good news is that awareness is the first step to positive change.

Here's a short summary of four methods for reducing perfectionism:

- 1. Use daily affirmations.** Use affirmations that resonate with you such as, "I let go of the need for other people's approval." Over time, this can help transform your thinking and reduce perfectionism.
- 2. Reframe your thoughts.** Focus on reframing your thoughts when you notice your mind using black and white language such as "always/never", "success/failure," and "good/bad". Black and white language puts excessive, unfair pressure on yourself while taking you on an emotional rollercoaster.
- 3. Focus on taking action.** To reduce the impact perfectionism has on your behaviour, practice leaning into discomfort and taking action regardless of how you feel. Remember: Done is better than perfect!
- 4. Remember your achievements.** Train your mind to focus more on your achievements. The pride you feel from paying attention to your small wins can reduce the shame underlying perfectionism – helping you address the root cause of the issue.

APPENDIX

SMALL VICTORIES LOG

DATE	SMALL VICTORY

MY FAVOURITE ANTI-PERFECTIONISM AFFIRMATIONS

SMALL VICTORIES LOG

DATE

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MY FAVOURITE ANTI-PERFECTIONISM AFFIRMATIONS

*I LET GO OF
THE NEED
FOR OTHER
PEOPLE'S
APPROVAL.*

*I AM ENOUGH.
THIS IS ENOUGH.
I HAVE ENOUGH.*

*There is no
such thing as
failure, only
learning.*

**DONE IS
BETTER
THAN
PERFECT.**

**MY WORTH
DOES NOT
DEPEND ON
MY WORK.**

*Progress not
perfection.*