WORKSHEET 73 · FOR THE PSYCHOLOGIST

# More flexible rules

Loosening perfectionism: from “I must” to “I would like to”

**AIM**

Identify the rigid rules of perfectionism, examine their costs and benefits and come up with more flexible rules, to be tested through experiments.

**WHO IT IS FOR**

Perfectionism that causes anxiety, procrastination, exhaustion or self-criticism.

**DURATION**

20 min in session; experiments over two weeks

## HOW TO RUN IT

1. List the person’s rules (“I must always…”, “I must never…”).
2. For each one: real benefits and costs (time, stress, relationships, health).
3. Come up with a more flexible rule (“I would like to do it well, and doing it well enough is acceptable here”).
4. Test it with an experiment (handing in work that is “good enough”, sending a message without rereading it three times) and observe.

## POINTS TO WATCH

> Don’t try to eliminate high standards, which often have benefits: the aim is flexibility. Intense perfectionism is a transdiagnostic factor and deserves in-depth work.

## REFERENCES

Egan, S. J., Wade, T. D. & Shafran, R. (2011). Perfectionism as a transdiagnostic process: A clinical review. Clinical Psychology Review, 31(2), 203-212.

Beck, J. S. (2020). Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Basics and Beyond (3rd ed.). Guilford.

## PSYCHOLOGIST’S NOTES

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WORKSHEET 73 · WORKSHEET TO HAND OUT

# More flexible rules

Perfectionism runs on rigid rules: “I must”, “I must never”. They push you to do well, but they come at a high price. You can loosen them without giving up your standards.

1. My rules: “I must…”, “I must never…”.
2. What they give me and what they cost me.
3. A more flexible rule: “I would like…, and… is acceptable.”
4. An experiment to test my new rule: _____

| Rigid rule | What it costs me | More flexible rule | What happened when I tested it |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
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**What happened when I did it “well enough”?**

These exercises do not replace therapy. If you are in distress or having suicidal thoughts: 112 (European Union), 3114 (France) or the emergency number of the country where you live.

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