

# perfectionism behaviours



A hallmark of perfectionism is the tendency to judge your self worth largely on your ability to achieve high standards. To meet their unrelenting high standards, perfectionists tend to engage in a number of perfectionism behaviours (e.g., repeatedly checking work for mistakes), which may serve to maintain perfectionistic beliefs.

## Perfectionism Behaviours

Perfectionism behaviours can be divided into two categories - the things you **actively do** as a result of your perfectionism and the things you **avoid doing** as a result of your perfectionism.

### Perfectionism Active Behaviours

Most perfectionists engage in actions aimed at reaching the unrelenting standards they have set for themselves, and perhaps others. They are so concerned about reaching these high standards that they engage in behaviours that they see as necessary but that often seem excessive to other people. Examples include:

- ◇ Excessive checking,
- ◇ Excessive organising,
- ◇ List making,
- ◇ Correcting others.



### Perfectionism Avoidance Behaviours

Many perfectionists also attempt to meet their unrelenting standards and avoid 'failure' by *avoiding doing* tasks. Although this may not seem like perfectionism, it is really the other side of the same coin as engaging in actions aimed at meeting your unrelenting standards. When perfectionists fear that they will not be able to reach their high standards, they may be too afraid of failure to try. Some may procrastinate by putting off a task, often indefinitely, while others will wait to the last minute before doing a task. Other examples include:

- ◇ Giving up too soon,
- ◇ Indecisiveness,
- ◇ Avoiding tasks you fear you are unable to do adequately.

## How these Behaviours maintain Perfectionism

Perfectionism behaviours keep you from learning whether or not your perfectionistic beliefs are true. For example, a person who has difficulty delegating tasks to colleagues may hold the belief that this is necessary to maintain their high standards in the work place. By continuing to *not* delegate work, the perfectionist is unable to test out whether their beliefs are accurate.

Perfectionism Behaviours can also be problematic in that: they are often time consuming; they are sometimes done at the expense of other important activities; they can impair relationships; and sometimes can actually interfere with attempts to meet the standard set.

## Reducing Perfectionism Behaviours\*

One way to test the accuracy of perfectionistic beliefs is to see what happens when you behave differently.

### Stepladders Towards Change

- ◇ Choose a specific goal behaviour to change,
- ◇ Break the goal down into small steps by changing who is there, what you do, when you do it, where you do it, and how long you do it for.
- ◇ Complete each step, one at a time, beginning with the least difficult and working your way up.
- ◇ Do a step frequently and repeatedly, to make sure you are comfortable with it before you move on.



### Behavioural Experiments

 Behavioural Experiments help loosen the grip of your perfectionism and test out the accuracy of your perfectionistic beliefs by seeing what happens when you change your perfectionism behaviours.

*We encourage you to try reducing your perfectionism behaviours. You may be pleasantly surprised at how much more time you have, and how little it affects your performance!*

\*For more detailed information regarding the use of these techniques see Perfectionism in Perspective Module 5.