

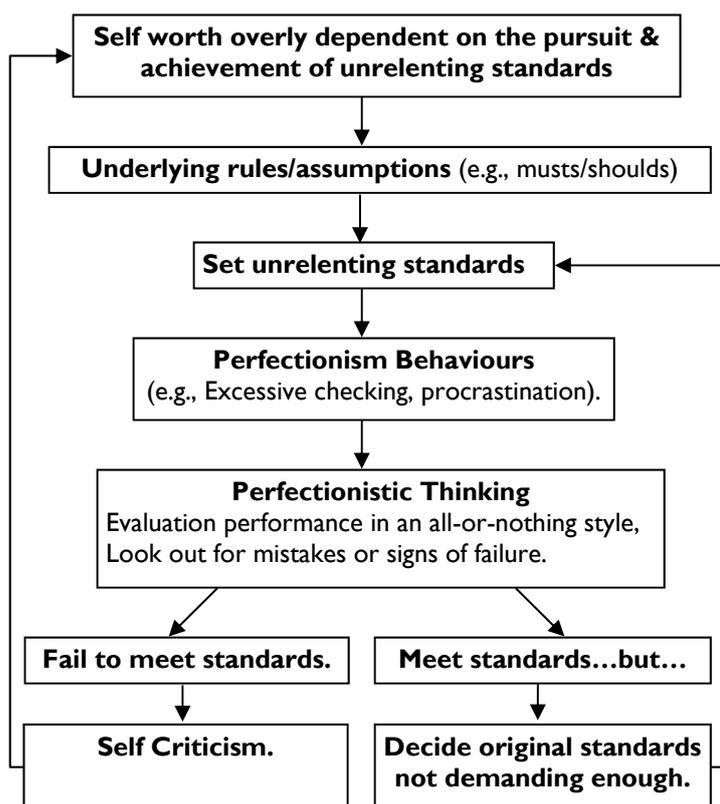
what maintains perfectionism?



Perfectionism involves: The relentless striving for extremely high standards; Judging your self-worth based largely on your ability to achieve these standards; And continuing to set demanding standards despite the cost associated with striving for them.

Sometimes when a person's self worth depends on their achievements they push themselves to attain unrealistically high standards. They may act in ways intended to ensure that they meet these standards (e.g., checking, correcting); judge themselves harshly and focus on their mistakes. They may criticise themselves when they fail to meet their standards, affecting their self worth. If they meet their standards they may suggest that they were too low and set higher ones.

Model of Perfectionism: Maintenance



Underlying Rules & Assumptions

Rules and assumptions that are flexible and accurate provide helpful guides for living. However, rigid rules such as “the job is not done unless its perfect” and inaccurate assumptions such as “if I make a mistake the business will fail”, tend to cause people to focus single-mindedly on doing things ‘perfectly’.



Unrelenting Standards

Unrelenting high standards are so unrealistically high and inflexible that we are unlikely to be able to meet the standard, or will only be able to meet the standard at considerable cost.

When an unrelenting high standard is not met, instead of concluding that it was unrealistic, perfectionists will conclude that they did not work hard enough or failed. In future, some will give up altogether while others will try even harder. Unfortunately, even if a high standard is achieved, most perfectionists do not feel happy about this for very long. Some might see it as a “fluke” or decide that the standard set was not high enough, and set a higher standard the next time.



Perfectionism Behaviours

Perfectionists also engage in a range of unhelpful behaviours to make sure they continue to meet the high standards they set for themselves. E.g., procrastinating, avoidance, checking, correcting, list-making, slowness etc. These behaviours keep perfectionistic thinking going because, if you keep behaving this way, you never have the opportunity to test out whether your perfectionistic thinking is true. These behaviours may be time-consuming, done at the expense of other important activities and may even delay or interfere with attempts to meet the standard set.

Perfectionistic Thinking

We usually tend to attend to and interpret things according to what we expect. Perfectionists tend to pay attention to any evidence that they are not achieving so they can correct these immediately. Perfectionists also have an extreme view of what success and failure is, with no middle ground, causing them to judge themselves more harshly than others would.

Often perfectionists evidence a pattern of **unhelpful thinking styles**, including:

- ◇ Black & white thinking: seeing only extremes - no shades of gray;
- ◇ Shoulding & Musting: putting unreasonable demands on self and others;
- ◇ Catastrophising: blowing things out of proportion;
- ◇ Jumping to conclusions: assuming that we know what others are thinking, or can predict the future.

For more information regarding what maintains Perfectionism see Perfectionism in Perspective Module 3.