

Mental Notes

A Newsletter about Mental Health

How to Kick the Habit of Perfectionism

Create a Healthier Headspace

Part of the problem of perfectionism comes from the way we think about day-to-day situations. Here are some helpful thought-swaps and other tips to get in you in the habit of thinking in a healthier, happier way.

Practice mentally repeating realistic statements to yourself. It is not easy at first to break the cycle of perfection-oriented thinking. This is why it is important to make a conscious effort to think more realistically about situations. For example, instead of thinking *"I made a mistake and this makes me a failure"*, replace this train of thought with a new, more realistic statement, such as *"It is normal to make mistakes. Mistakes help me to learn and improve."* While you may not feel convinced at first, this mental repetition will help to strengthen a more healthy way of thinking over time.

- Try to view your situation from another person's perspective. It can be difficult to recognize when you are thinking in an unhealthy way because your own thought patterns make sense to you. When you try to think like another person, you may realize that problems you believed to be a big

deal are actually much less significant, and they may even take on a positive spin. For example, rather than thinking *"I am a failure because I had to take those two sick days off from work last week"*, think, *"My co-workers appreciate the fact that I didn't get everyone else sick. They have all taken sick days from time to time and no one would fault me for taking the time I needed to recover."*

- Make sure you frame individual events in the grand scheme of things. Ask yourself how much one situation matters when compared to the bigger picture and then don't sweat the small stuff. You can also try thinking ahead and asking yourself how much one incident will matter in a day, a week, a month, or a year from now.
- Make some compromises with yourself about your standards. Instead of setting one extra high bar of achievement and counting anything less as a failure, make some compromises with yourself and set some lower standards that, even if you don't achieve your ultimate goal, you can count as achievements in the right direction. For example, instead of saying that you *must* spend an hour on the treadmill tonight or you've failed to meet your standard, decide that while an hour is ideal, a half hour would

also suffice and you would still feel good about the work you've put in toward improving your fitness. To make this easier, you can lower your standards of achievement in gradual steps until you reach a healthy, realistic level.

Face Those Failure Fears

Practicing positive thinking is a great start! But exposing yourself to your fear of failure is another highly effective method for overcoming perfectionism. Here are some ideas for how you can intentionally commit small mistakes that will help you overcome your larger fears of failure in the future.

- Try something that you may or may not be good at, like a new activity or a class that interests you.
- Let someone know when you're feeling an emotion that you consider to be a sign of weakness such as being sad or stressed out. These are normal and part of being human!
- Leave a few bits of clutter around your house.
- Wear an article of clothing around that is noticeably stained
- Intentionally let an awkward silence fall over a conversation
- Send a message to someone in which you've intentionally left a spelling error or two
- Strike up a conversation with someone you've never spoken to before

You should also keep in mind that it never hurts to ask someone without perfectionism to help you set more realistic goals for yourself. This may be particularly helpful if you're unsure as to how to form lower, more realistic standards. REMEMBER: lower standards don't mean you don't care about doing well. They help you to work toward your goals while leaving room to enjoy life!

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