Session 7

1. Assessment
2. Review homework on adjusting rules
3. Discussing over evaluation of achievement
4. Pie chart examples
5. My Self-worth worksheet
6. Areas of your life you would want to expand your self worth
7. Homework: Extending other areas of life worksheet

Perfectionism in Perspective

Module 8

Re-evaluating the Importance of Achieving

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Introduction

You have now started to make changes in terms of your perfectionistic thinking and your perfectionism behaviours. In this module we will take a step back and look at the impact of perfectionism on your life. Firstly we will examine the tendency to over-evaluate the importance of achieving your unrelenting standards and offer you some strategies to create a more balanced life and a more balanced basis for judging your self-worth. We will then be looking at another way of thinking about perfectionism: as an overarching set of beliefs, or a *mindset*.

Identifying Over-evaluation of Achieving

People who are perfectionists tend to be overly concerned with achievement and the pursuit of unrelenting standards. We are now going to consider the impact of perfectionism on the way perfectionists judge themselves and their self-worth. Most people evaluate their self-worth (or self-esteem) based on a variety of things, such as their relationships, hobbies, leisure activities, achievements at school or work, and other abilities. They might evaluate how happy they are based on how well important things in their life are going. Let's take the example of Mary.

> *Mary, 21, works as a clerk for a telephone company. She shares a unit with a friend and has been with her boyfriend, Jack, for 2 years. Mary and Jack both play basketball. Mary loves to play soccer and is a member of a women's soccer club. She has elderly parents whom she visits regularly and she is close to her sister, although they only talk on the phone as her sister lives in another state. At times Mary is bored at work but she doesn't really mind as her job helps pay her bills. She is saving up for an overseas trip with Jack. She is also putting money aside for one of her future goals, which is to go to university. Mary is often concerned about her appearance as she is tall and appears to have "big bones." She thinks she doesn't look very feminine but Jack has told her he likes her as she is. Let's see how Mary judges her self-worth. This will be illustrated using a pie-chart, which shows how important the various things in her life are to her.*

Mary's Self-worth Pie Chart

You can see from the relative sizes of the pieces of this pie chart that the most important things in Mary's life are her family, being a good friend and partner, sport, and her future goals. Travel, her job, her body shape and future goals are important to her, but less so. In general, people with different interests in their lives might have pie charts similar to the example of Mary's. When judging their self-worth, they might consider their *personal qualities* such as kindness, loyalty, willingness to help people, sense of humour, *relationships* with family, friends, partner, and *skills* such as achievements, ability to play sport, cook, or play a musical instrument.

Perfectionists tend to judge their self-worth based almost entirely on achieving their unrelenting standards. They *overvalue* achieving and achievement. They may have other interests, but over time these seem to take a lesser place in their lives. This system of self-evaluation may have developed through particular life experiences and/or positive reinforcement from people around them. People who try hard and are successful are often rewarded by others (e.g., praise, high marks, promotion at work) so achieving can become equated with being hard-working, conscientious, and intelligent – in short, being of worth. Perfectionists come to believe that they are only of worth if they are pursuing or achieving the high standards they set for themselves. Activities involving achievement take up a very large part of their pie chart, and become overly important in their lives. They begin to judge their self-worth largely on their ability to achieve. Below is an example of what Polly's pie chart for self-worth might look like.

Polly's
Self-Worth Pie Chart

This pie chart shows how people who are perfectionists, like Polly, put most of their "eggs in one basket," so to speak. They are banking on this ONE area of their life to work out for them so that they can be happy and believe that they are of worth. Doing this is very risky! If they judge their self-worth largely on their achievements and they are having problems with this, they will be likely to judge themselves negatively and think they are of no value. What do you think would happen to Polly's sense of self-worth if she became injured and was no longer able to play elite sport?

When people base much of their self-worth on only one thing in their lives, they are putting a **tremendous** amount of pressure on making sure that it works out. That's why it's not surprising that perfectionists tend to be very focused on achieving the high standards they set themselves. It is also not surprising that they often feel stressed, irritable, depressed, anxious or guilty, and think negatively about themselves. When a goal is achieved they may feel relieved but they don't tend to feel happy for very long. In fact, perfectionists tend to dismiss their success ("I was just lucky") or conclude that the standard set was too low ("anyone could have done that") and re-set the standard higher for next time.

Overleaf you will find a worksheet. Take a few minutes to work out the things that might be important to your self-worth so you can draw your own pie chart. As you work through this exercise, ask yourself what you notice about how YOU judge your self-worth. How much of your self-worth is based on achieving or achievement?

My Self-Worth

What are the things that you judge your self-worth against? Jot down some areas in your life that contribute to your sense of self-worth. How many of these relate to achieving or achievement?

Now, rank the items for self-worth in terms of their importance. One way of working out the importance each item is to ask yourself, *"If something goes wrong in this area, how much does it get to me, and how much does that affect the way I judge myself as a person?"*

Things that are important to my Self-Worth

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Now draw your Self-Worth pie chart, making each item a 'slice' of the pie, with items that are more important taking up bigger slices, and so on.

My Self-Worth Pie Chart

How did that go? Was your pie chart balanced or was it unbalanced? We will now be looking at ways of changing your self-worth pie chart so that it becomes more balanced and less heavily dependent on high achievement for your sense of self-worth

Tackling the Over-evaluation

Revisiting your self-worth pie chart

Take another look at your self-worth pie chart from Page 4. What are the things that are important to your self-worth? How many 'slices' have you got in your self-worth pie chart? Is your largest slice striving for and achieving extremely high standards? Is it very much larger than the other slices? If this is the case, then you are banking on this ONE area of your life to work out for you so that you can believe that you are of worth. You may also have other interests in your life, but over time, perhaps these have taken a lesser place.

One way of loosening up your unrelenting standards is to begin to broaden the ways in which you evaluate yourself – enlarging the other slices of your pie, so to speak. When you start doing this and keep at it, you will find that your life becomes more balanced and you will feel more content over time.

Extending other areas of your life

Use the worksheet on the following page to help you do this. Begin with identifying the other areas of your life that might be important to your self-worth but have now taken a lesser place (or become smaller slices in your pie charts). Now choose one area you would like to start with and then think of some activities you could engage in to help you do that.

Sometimes before you begin an activity, you might find yourself thinking that you don't feel like doing it and want to put it off until you do. People often want to wait until they feel motivated before they act. However, another important thing to bear in mind is, motivation may not come on its own, but when you ACT first, motivation will then follow. Remember, ACTION before MOTIVATION, and you'll soon find that your life will be more balanced. You will be less preoccupied with only one aspect of your life, and less dependant on that success and achievement for your self-evaluation.

Try and use a new "Extending Other Areas of My Life" worksheet every week and plan to repeat some activities and add new ones. After some time, you may want to extend or enlarge another area of your life and you can use the worksheet to plan your activities for this new area as well.

Extending other Areas of My Life

Begin first with identifying one or two areas of your life you would like to begin extending, and then plan activities in these areas of your life you can engage in. Consider activities that involve other people. Then, using the 0 – 8 scale provided below, rate how much pleasure you experience BEFORE and AFTER doing these activities. This is important because you are more likely to repeat activities that are fun. These activities will not only help you extend these areas of your life but will also help you develop a more balanced sense of self-worth.

Areas of my life I would like to extend or enlarge:

1. _____ 2. _____

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Absolutely None	Minimal	Slight	Mild	Moderate	Much	Higher	Very High	Extreme

		Pleasure
Date: Activity:	Before:	_____
	After:	_____
Date: Activity:	Before:	_____
	After:	_____
Date: Activity:	Before:	_____
	After:	_____
Date: Activity:	Before:	_____
	After:	_____

The Perfectionism Mindset

What is a mindset?

In the previous section, we talked about the over-evaluation of achieving and achievement. Another way of thinking about the impact of perfectionism is considering it as an overarching set of beliefs, or a *mindset*. A mindset is a collection of thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, underlying rules and assumptions, emotions and behaviours that influence how you see yourself and the world. All these things that make up the mindset can influence and maintain one another. Let's use the example of a DVD player and DVDs to understand more about mindsets.

Think of our minds as a combined DVD player and monitor. What we see on the screen depends on what DVD is being played. We can think of a mindset as the DVD being played in the DVD player. Everyone has mindsets, everyone sees things in particular ways, and everyone has different mindsets within themselves.

How do mindsets work?

Mindsets influence how you see things. They are like a pair of spectacles you put on. If the lenses of the spectacles are pink, everything you see will be pink. However, does that mean that everything really is pink? Of course not! It is important to understand that **mindsets influence how we interpret and experience life**. They create their own 'reality' and filter experience. As a result, they affect how you behave – they act like guidelines for living. Some mindsets are helpful or neutral, and some are unhelpful. Furthermore, they keep themselves going by creating a vicious cycle.

For example, depressed people tend to see things in an extremely negative way (a depressive mindset). They are playing a 'Depressive DVD', which contains negative messages such as: "I am worthless and people don't like me". This keeps the depression going by affecting how they view the world, others and themselves. It is easy to imagine that it would affect how they react to others – by withdrawing, which reinforces their sense of social isolation. It is, therefore, an unhelpful mindset creating its own vicious cycle.

The Perfectionism Mindset/DVD

Perfectionism can also be seen as a particular mindset. A perfectionist will see the world, others and themselves in relation to their own unrelenting high standards (a *perfectionist mindset*). The perfectionism mindset can include particular unhelpful attitudes, rules, assumptions, beliefs, and thoughts. Their 'Perfectionism DVD' might contain messages such as "I need to achieve highly in everything I do". As you can imagine, this unhelpful mindset maintains the perfectionism, perhaps encouraging setting even higher standards, which contributes to the vicious cycle.

Identifying Your Perfectionism Mindset

In Module 2 and the last module we saw that the attitudes, assumptions, rules and thoughts that make up the perfectionism mindset are characterised by "shoulds" and "musts," an "all-or-nothing" type of thinking style, self-criticism and name-calling (e.g., "lazy slob"), and discounting the positive. You have probably already started to identify some of the thoughts that make up your perfectionism DVD in the previous modules. Now take a few minutes to identify the attitudes, rules and thoughts that might make up your perfectionism mindset.

Ask yourself: **When my perfectionism mindset is in place …**
What attitudes, rules and thoughts do I have about setting and striving for extremely demanding standards?

What do I do as a result of my perfectionism mindset? How does it affect the way I feel and behave?

Challenging My Perfectionism Mindset

In order to loosen up your unrelenting standards it will be necessary to challenge your perfectionism mindset. Below we offer you some strategies that can be useful for challenging particular thoughts and beliefs that make up the perfectionism mindset.

Acceptance and Change

One way to influence the perfectionism mindset is utilising the twin notions of *acceptance* and *change*. You may be asking yourself: "How could I possibly accept lowering my standards when I'm so unhappy with myself as it is?" Let's look at an example.

> *Sally loves running. She wanted to be a sprinter, but she wasn't fast enough. In her teens she kept practicing and improving her times until she couldn't get any faster. She was miserable. Finally she realised that she would never make it as an elite runner, and that being miserable wasn't helping. So she started running for fun, and switched her focus to languages, which she was good at. She learned to accept she would never be an elite runner, but that she had other skills.*

You can never achieve 'perfection' and you may not be able to achieve those unrelenting standards you've set yourself. It is easy to believe that you can achieve whatever you wish, if only you try just that bit harder….. but this is a fallacy. You're not superhuman!

Can you see yourself getting to the point of accepting a standard that is less rigid than what you used to aim for? Or is your self-esteem totally dependent on pursuing those unrelenting standards? What would it take for you to *accept* loosening up those unrelenting standards and *change* the way you set your goals?

Ejecting the Perfectionism Mindset

Another way of overcoming this mindset is to eject the mindset altogether. This is just like ejecting a DVD from the player! Just like with a DVD that keeps getting stuck in the DVD player, sometimes you have to forcibly eject the mindset because it, too, keeps getting stuck. There are times when you need to force yourself to behave in a balanced, healthy, and helpful way. Remember that

allowing the old perfectionism DVD to keep playing will distort and negatively influence how you see things. Remind yourself how other people might act. It's like replacing an old DVD that you are sick of, with a new DVD that plays a healthier message.

Trigger situations
By now, you have had some practice at challenging the particular thoughts and beliefs that make up your perfectionism mindset. It is also important that you identify situations that might trigger this mindset or situations in which the mindset seems to have a greater hold on you. For example, you might find that you are more anxious about not making a single mistake when you are about to be evaluated for something, or you might feel like making sure that you are in control of <u>everything</u> you eat when something challenging is happening in your life. It is important that you begin to identify the situations in which the volume of you perfectionism DVD is turned right up, making it difficult for you to ignore. This will help you prepare yourself and develop alternative, healthier thoughts.

Ejecting the perfectionism mindset means that you make the choice to not be influenced by its attitudes, expectations, and thoughts. Here are a few steps in the process:

1. Be aware of trigger situations and when the perfectionism mindset 'clicks' into place
2. Think about how you would behave and think if you did not have this mindset in place. What healthy and helpful behaviours would you carry out? What balanced and helpful attitudes and thoughts would you say to yourself?
3. Then, behave and think AS IF you do not have the perfectionism mindset in place – think how a 'non-perfectionist' would act. Learn to have some balance in your life. Don't be so hard on yourself. Learn to 'let yourself off the hook' once in a while. Allow yourself to have little treats and plan to engage in some pleasant activities. Remember to also acknowledge your positive qualities.

Trigger situations for my perfectionist mindset/DVD	Healthy behaviours	Balanced, healthy
My performance review is due	*Keep working hard. Set reasonable goals*	*No need to overdo it. I already work hard and I've got lots of positive feedback from my boss*

Early warning signs that the perfectionism mindset/DVD has 'clicked' in
When does the perfection mindset take hold? How do you know when the DVD has started to play? It is important to recognise early warning signs, such as setting a harder goal once you've achieved an earlier one, or setting a goal that you really know is almost impossible. What are some of your early warning signs?

Early warning signs of my perfectionist mindset/DVD	Healthy behaviours	Balanced, healthy thoughts
I stayed at the office till 9 last night	*I need to go home at a reasonable time*	*I don't need to push myself any harder. I work hard already*

Ejecting the perfectionism DVD means that you are choosing to reject the attitudes, thoughts, and expectations that make up this mindset. Remember, the more your practice ejecting the perfectionism DVD and replacing it with a more healthy, balanced DVD, the easier this will become.

Join us in the final module where we will be pulling together all the strategies you have learnt so far into a model of how to keep putting your perfectionism in perspective into the future.

Module Summary

- Perfectionists tend to over-evaluate the importance of achieving and achievement
- One step towards loosening up your unrelenting standards is to broaden the ways in which you evaluate yourself by extending other areas of your life
- Perfectionism can be considered as an overarching set of beliefs, or a *mindset*
- Challenging your perfectionism mindset can involve acceptance and change, identifying trigger situations for mindset, ejecting perfectionism mindset as you would eject a DVD, and replacing it with balanced and healthy messages

What I Have Learned in this Module

Think about what you have learned in this module and any useful bits of information, tips or strategies that you want to remember. Write them down below so you can refer to them later.

Think about how you might use the information you have just learned. Write down some ways in which you could make use of this information.

Coming Up...

In Module 9 (Putting it all together) we will summarise what has been covered in the modules of this Information Pack, in order that you can continue putting your perfection in perspective.

About this Module

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BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in this module have been developed from evidence-based psychological treatment, primarily Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for perfectionism is based on the approach that perfectionism is the result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours.

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"PERFECTIONISM IN PERSPECTIVE"

This module forms part of:
Fursland, A., Raykos, B. and Steele, A. (2009). *Perfectionism in Perspective.* Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

ISBN: 0-975799576 **Created: March 2009**

Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**