

# Perfectionism

## Disarming the 'inner dictator'

*A compulsive need (for people) to heroically transcend themselves*  
(Knaus 1979)

Perfectionism often stems, again paradoxically, from a fear of failure. This can manifest in procrastination driven by a subconscious urge to avoid the uncomfortable feelings of imagined failure. Or it may lead to an obsessive urgency over tasks, whilst still feeling one is falling short all the time.

Very often driven by inner dialogue around 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and 'musts'. Absolute success becomes an absolute requirement, not just an aim, and one can exert a strong tendency for continuous **control of oneself and others** to achieve this.

Potential anti-perfectionism strategies:

**1. Writing out your thoughts** about any of the following in a journal, or talking these through with a supportive friend, may be helpful:

- Define what success means for you, in the current context.
- Remind yourself of past experiences of growing through 'failures' – your own and others.
- Summarise why people can't be perfect.
- List typical life occurrences (internal and external) that can slow you down or inhibit your peak performance.

**2. Affirm yourself** as the unique individual that you are:

- What's right about who you already are ?
- List ten qualities you (and others) most appreciate in you.
- How can you support yourself compassionately if you don't perform as well as expected (as you would a good friend) ?

### 3. Take risks

- Deliberately do some less than perfect work.
- Start on a difficult project you've been avoiding for fear of 'failure'.
- Admit some of your errors to a truly supportive friend or mentor.
- Compassionately support someone else experiencing similar patterns.

### 4. Give yourself a sensory break:

- Take a walk, connect with your surroundings ... feel the earth beneath your feet ... stop and breathe ...
- Stop and breathe regularly when you're working ... discover how you're feeling ... relax any feelings of discomfort, or at least acknowledge them ...
- Have some time off to engage in a focussing activity that you really enjoy – one that takes over your whole concentration.

### 5. Take action on an issue you've been holding away from:

- Establish **realistic** goals.
- Break these down into identifiable stages.
- Develop simple strategies for these short steps
- Take one
- Reward yourself for each significant step in the right direction, not just for an elusive end destination.

*"I am a ordinary human being, with some extra-ordinary qualities, and I'm doing the very best I can, with every day of my life."*  
(Maryann Madden)