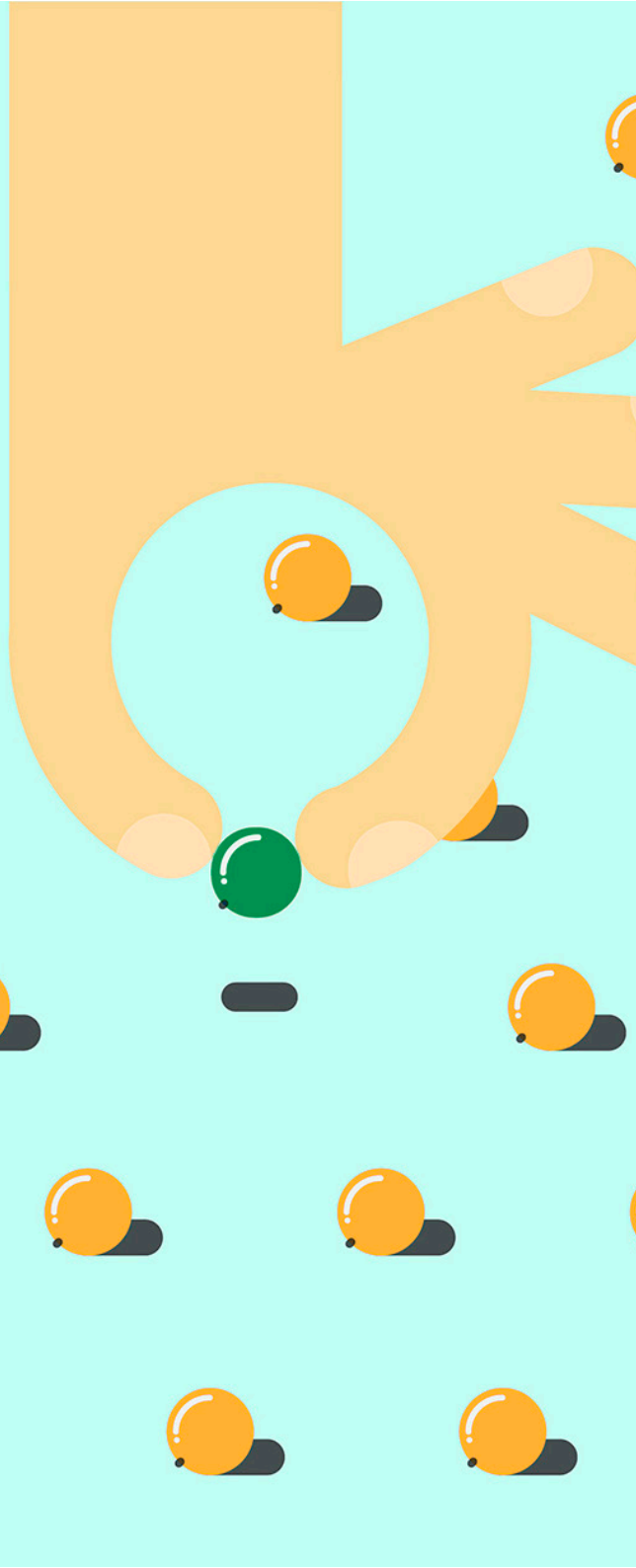
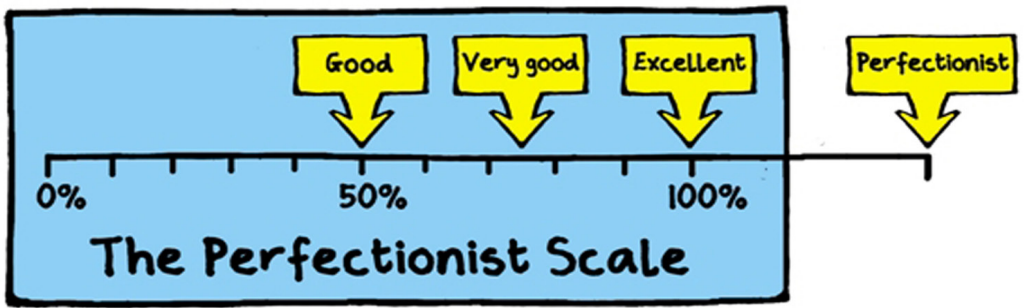


# Perfectionism

Perfectionism can have negative consequences for mental and physical health, relationships and achievement.

This leaflet can help understand where your perfectionism comes from and how to deal with it.





# Perfectionism

Perfectionism involves setting standards that are impossibly high or can only be met with great difficulty. Perfectionists tend to believe that anything short of perfection is failure, with even minor imperfections leading to catastrophe and mistakes causing great anxiety. Research shows that perfectionism has negative consequences for mental and physical health, relationships and achievement.

## Examples of perfectionistic behaviour

- Taking much longer than other people over tasks
- Procrastination
- Difficulty completing tasks or giving up easily
- Excessive checking, re-doing tasks and agonising over small details
- Avoiding trying new things

## Causes of perfectionism

Perfectionism is usually connected with a need for approval (from others or oneself). It often has its roots in childhood; experiences with one's parent(s) or primary care giver(s) frequently being key. Typical causes of perfectionism include:

- Having a parent who demanded perfection
- Having a highly critical parent or one who rarely offered praise
- Early attachment issues, which are often caused by parental (physical or emotional) absence, trauma, neglect or an otherwise troubled childhood
- Experiencing anxiety disorders such as Generalised Anxiety Disorder and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Low self-esteem or insecurity, resulting in the need for praise or admiration

## 1. Understand where your perfectionism comes from.

- Examine your childhood: did you have a demanding, critical, perfectionistic care-giver?
- Who are you now seeking approval from? It may be an unconscious desire to please your parent(s) or to be admired by others in order to boost your self-esteem.
- Do you use perfectionism to defend yourself against judgement, blame or shame?
- Work through these root causes with a trusted friend or a counsellor.

## Tips to overcome perfectionism

### 3. Seek professional support.

- CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) can help replace the unhelpful 'scripts' perfectionists tell themselves and lead to more realistic behaviours.
- Psychotherapy can explore the underlying issues and sources of perfectionistic behaviour, leading to long-term positive changes.

## 2. Become more aware of your perfectionistic behaviour.

- Using mindfulness and regular meditation has proven benefits in enhancing self-awareness, compassion and retraining the brain.
- Challenge your unhelpful thoughts and behaviours. Self-criticism, catastrophising, 'black and white' thinking and using words like 'should' and 'must' all build pressure and anxiety. Replace these with positivity, realism, 'could' and the space for shades of grey.
- Let go of the need to obsess over minor details. Accept that things do not have to be 'perfect', there is no such thing as perfect and that 'perfect is the enemy of good'.
- If you're procrastinating about a major task: prioritise your workload, break the major it down into manageable chunks and tackle one step at a time.
- Reward yourself for every success. Finished a section of that report you have been dreading? Get yourself a coffee! Finally cleaned your muddy bike? Massage time!
- Have you ever spent 3 hours on something that would have been good enough after just 20 minutes? Practice setting a short time limit for each task and stick to it.
- Do you fail to delegate, fearing that others won't meet your high standards? This can result in more stress and burn-out. Ask for help and trust others to do a 'good enough' job.
- The next time you feel fearful of trying something new in case you are 'not good enough' at it, do it anyway! Focus on the enjoyment and learning experience rather than any 'mistakes'...and notice that imperfection did not lead to catastrophe or negative judgements from others.



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Pathlight offers Mental Health First Aid training and Workplace Wellbeing Programmes in Greater Manchester and London.

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