PERFECTIONISM BEHAVIOURS

<u>Decision making</u> ❑ Not being able to decide what to wear to work each morning ❑ Being unsure what color shirt to buy so buying one in every color ❑ Finding it so difficult to choose what restaurant to go to that it becomes too late to eat out	<u>Overcompensating</u> ❑ Giving directions to your house in excruciating detail, then sending an email repeating the information ❑ Always making sure you arrive at least 30 minutes early to appointments ❑ Washing the kitchen three times, with antiseptic cleaner, before preparing a meal
<u>Reassurance Seeking</u> ❑ Asking others to check your work in order to ensure the result is acceptable ❑ Needing everyone to compliment your meal when you do the cooking	<u>Correcting</u> ❑ Replacing an item of clothes if there is a tiny hole on an inside seam (even if it's invisible from the outside) ❑ Folding and refolding laundry if you can see the edges aren't exactly even
<u>Excessive Organizing and List Making</u> ❑ Repeatedly writing and re-writing lists e.g. the tasks you want to get done in the day ❑ Having to have your office completely tidy and organized before being able to work	<u>Checking</u> ❑ Repeatedly looking in the mirror for facial blemishes ❑ Looking over work, searching for errors ❑ Frequently checking your watch to make sure you know what time it is
<u>Giving Up Too Soon</u> ❑ Not looking for a house to buy because you are sure you won't find one which meets all your needs ❑ Taking up flamenco but giving up after two lessons because you can't keep up with the teacher (even though nobody can) ❑ Quitting your job because you made a mistake and you fear being fired	<u>Hoarding</u> ❑ Cutting out recipes from the newspaper and filing them in case you ever want to make a particular dish ❑ Keeping your bank statements for 20 years just in case you might need them ❑ Keeping piles of old magazines in case you might want to reread an article one day
<u>Procrastination</u> ❑ Putting off starting an assignment for fear that it won't ever be done well enough ❑ Delaying starting a healthy eating plan until the time feels 'right', with no birthday dinners, Christmas, holidays, or celebrations in the near future	<u>Failure to Delegate</u> ❑ Staying late to do the photocopying because you don't trust the secretary to put the documents in the right order ❑ Not letting others clean the house because you're afraid the tasks won't be done properly

However, we can also have unhelpful rules and assumptions by which we lead our lives. A rule or assumption tends to be *unhelpful* when it is <u>inaccurate</u> and <u>inflexible</u> in some way. Let's turn briefly to the unhelpful rules and assumptions that Peter and Polly have:

> *Peter has the rule: "The job is not done unless it is perfect" and the assumption: "If I make a mistake then the business will fail".*
>
> *Polly has the rule: "Winning is the most important thing" and the assumption: "If we lose one game then there's no chance we will be at the top at the end of the season".*

Are these rules <u>flexible</u>? How <u>accurate</u> are the assumptions that are being made? Clearly Peter and Polly both have rules that are rigid and assumptions that are inaccurate, and this is unhelpful because it makes them single-mindedly focused on doing things 'perfectly'.

Below are some of the most common unhelpful rules and assumptions related to perfectionism. This exercise is designed to help you work out which unhelpful rules and assumptions you live by. Tick the statements you most identify with.

Unhelpful Rules & Assumptions	
<u>Setting Even More Demanding Standards</u> ❑ Doing well isn't good enough, I have to do *better* ❑ If I don't strive to achieve higher standards, I am a lazy and useless person ❑ Losing those 5 kg. wasn't enough. I need to get down to a smaller size	<u>All or-Nothing Thinking</u> ❑ If I don't get a High Distinction in this topic then I don't deserve to be doing this degree ❑ My work is never good enough ❑ There is a right way and a wrong way to do things ❑ If I eat any chocolate at all then I've blown my diet and I might as well binge
<u>Fear Of Failure</u> ❑ I must do things perfectly ❑ I must not fail ❑ I can't have others think poorly of me ❑ If I try, then I will only fail ❑ If I make a mistake then I will be rejected ❑ If I put my work out there, then others will think badly of me	<u>Shoulds, Musts,</u> ❑ I must be perfect or others will realise what I am really like ❑ I should never eat before noon ❑ When I clean my house I should always clean every room thoroughly
<u>Constant Checking</u> ❑ I have to go over any work I do, several times, before I can show it to anyone else ❑ I have to weigh myself several times a day to make sure I'm not gaining weight	<u>Self-control</u> ❑ I must work all the time or I will become a lazy slob ❑ I have to work extremely hard in order to deserve a treat

Unhelpful thinking styles

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion, such as depression or anxiety, it is usually preceded by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these unhelpful thinking styles. One of the things we notice is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit – it is something we are often unaware of. When a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress.

This information describes a number of unhelpful thinking styles. As you read through them, you might notice some thinking patterns and styles that you consistently use. Some of these unhelpful thinking styles might sound similar to one another. They are not meant to be distinct categories but may help you to see if there is a pattern to your thoughts.

Mental filter

This thinking style involves a filtering in and filtering out process – a sort of tunnel vision, focusing on only 1 part of a situation and ignoring the rest. Usually this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts. For ex., noticing the one error on a report and ignoring that the rest is really well-done.

Jumping to conclusions

We jump to conclusions when we assume that we know what someone else is thinking (mind reading) and when we make predictions about what is going to happen in the future (predictive thinking).

Personalization

This involves blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or could go wrong, even when you may only be partly responsible or not responsible at all. You might be taking 100 per cent responsibility for the occurrence of external events.

Catastrophizing

Catastrophizing occurs when we blow things out of proportion, and we view the situation as terrible, awful, dreadful, and horrible, even though the reality is that the problem is quite small.

Black and white thinking

This thinking style involves seeing only 1 extreme or the other. You are either wrong or right, good or bad and so on. There are no in- between or shades of grey. "If I make one mistake I am a complete failure."

Should-ing and must-ing

Sometimes by saying "I should…" or "I must…" you can put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself and others. Although these statements are not always unhelpful – for example "I should not get drunk and drive home" – they can sometimes create unrealistic expectations. "I must never make mistakes"

Overgeneralization

When we overgeneralize, we take 1 instance in the past or present, and impose it on all current or future situations. If we say "You always…" or "Everyone…", or "I never…" then we are probably overgeneralizing.

Labelling

We label ourselves and others when we make global statements based on behavior in specific situations.

We might use this label even though there are many more examples that aren't consistent with that label.

Emotional reasoning

This thinking style involves basing your view of situations or yourself on the way you are feeling. For example, the only evidence that something bad is going to happen is that you feel like something bad is going to happen.

Magnification and minimization

In this thinking style, you magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimize your own positive attributes. It's as though you're explaining away your own positive characteristics. "My boss only gave me a promotion because she was being nice and no one else applied for the position."

Model of Perfectionism: How Perfectionism Is Maintained

Model of Perfectionism: The Pursuit of Unrelenting Standards

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┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│         SELF-WORTH OVERLY DEPENDENT ON:                     │
│  THE PURSUIT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF UNRELENTING STANDARDS       │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↓
┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Underlying rules/assumptions are activated (e.g., musts,   │
│  shoulds & can'ts)…                                         │
└────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↓
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
        │       SET UNRELENTING STANDARDS       │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↓
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
        │       Perfectionism Behaviours        │
        │ (e.g., Excessive checking,            │
        │  procrastination)                     │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↓
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
        │       Perfectionistic Thinking        │
        │ Evaluate performance in an            │
        │ all-or-nothing style,                 │
        │ Look out for mistakes or signs of     │
        │ failure                               │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
             ↙                        ↘
┌─────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────┐
│  Fail to meet   │          │ Meet standards  │
│  standards      │          │ … but …         │
└─────────────────┘          └─────────────────┘
         ↓                            ↓
┌─────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Self-Criticism  │          │ …decide that        │
│                 │          │ original standards  │
│                 │          │ were not demanding  │
│                 │          │ enough              │
└─────────────────┘          └─────────────────────┘
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Re-set standards even higher

Negative Consequences

*Social isolation
Time consuming
Low mood, anxiety
Narrowing of interests
Health problems, e.g., insomnia,
   inability to concentrate*

Positive Consequences

*Simplifies life
Achieves results, praise, recognition
Provides structure & control
Socially encouraged*

The model illustrates the factors that keep perfectionism going. It shows that perfectionism might begin with placing a great deal of importance on the pursuit and achievement of unrelenting standards to the extent that these efforts become the basis for which we place worth and value on ourselves. Our rules and assumptions get activated and we set unrelenting high standards for ourselves. To make sure we meet these standards, we engage in perfectionism behaviours and unhelpful thinking. This is harmful in many ways. First, perfectionists tend to evaluate their experiences in a biased way by only paying attention to mistakes or signs of failure. Second, because the standards set are unreasonable, the perfectionist may procrastinate or give up altogether. In this case, the person has not met the standard set and is likely to become self-critical, which just reinforces their earlier belief that they need to achieve in order to be a valuable person. Third, if the perfectionist does achieve the standard set they may experience some short-

Change Process Balance Sheet

Take a moment to think about your unrelenting high standards/perfectionism…

List the negative consequences of pursuing unrelenting high standards/ perfectionism. (For example, you might give up too easily on tasks, or miss out on relaxation because you are focused on achievement-based activities)	**List the positive consequences of pursuing unrelenting high standards/ perfectionism.** (For example, people praise you when you work hard, or you might believe that setting high standards motivates you to try harder)
List the personal benefits that you expect if you loosen unrelenting high standards/ perfectionism. Think about a general goal and how you will have to change in order to achieve it. (For example, if your goal is "to be able to delegate tasks to others at work" there might be more time to spend at home with your family)	**List the personal costs that you expect if you loosen your unrelenting high standards/ perfectionism.** What will you need to give up in order to change? (For example, perhaps doing things differently will take you out of your comfort zone)

What did you learn from doing this exercise? How ready for change do you think you are? Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts.

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