

LEARN TO LIVE BULLETIN

Your guide in wellness and mental health

Challenging Perfectionism with CBT

Have you ever spent hours revising a simple email? Or delayed starting an important project because you didn't know how to do it "the right way?" Although many people think of perfectionism as a quality associated with success or achievement, it is really the habit of setting unrealistic standards and measuring our self-worth by how well we perform. When left unchecked, perfectionism is more likely to leave us stressed and burned out than consistently doing our best work.



Fortunately, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers effective tools for challenging perfectionistic thinking patterns to create healthier, more balanced ways of pursuing goals. CBT focuses on the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. When struggling with perfectionism, we may experience automatic thoughts such as, *"If I make a mistake, I've failed,"* or *"I'm not good enough."* These thoughts can create feelings like intense pressure and fear of failure.

The first step when using CBT is to identify these unhelpful thought patterns as they arise and then replace them with more realistic and compassionate perspectives. The goal is not to stop caring or lower our standards completely but to pursue our goals without basing our self-worth on outcomes. For example, we might catch ourselves thinking, *"I completely ruined that presentation,"* and recognize that this is a blanket, all-or-nothing statement that isn't accurate or helpful. We can then adopt a more accurate and helpful interpretation like, *"That presentation wasn't perfect, but there are still things I did well."*

Another important focus in CBT is addressing procrastination and avoidance. Although perfectionists are often seen as highly productive, the underlying fear of failure can make tasks feel overwhelming and too difficult to start. However, taking imperfect action will almost always get us further than waiting for the perfect moment. CBT offers strategies for breaking down tasks into more manageable steps, setting realistic goals, and focusing on progress instead of perfection.

Perfectionism is frequently fueled by an overly critical inner voice, so practicing more supportive self-talk can improve your resilience and emotional well-being. When you catch thoughts like, *"I'm a failure,"* try shifting to, *"I'm disappointed, but one mistake does not define me."* Shifting our thoughts in this way can help us respond to challenges with more balance and self-understanding. With time and practice, we can move away from perfectionism and toward healthier patterns that support both productivity and overall emotional wellbeing.

Get Started Today

The next time you find yourself rewriting an email or putting off a task until it's perfect, take a moment to consider whether perfectionism is helping you or holding you back. If it seems it's holding you back, the Learn to Live *Stress, Anxiety, and Worry* program could be a good place to start. If you'd like to learn more about your overall emotional health and wellbeing needs, you can take a quick assessment. Do this by scanning or visiting learntolive.com/partners and entering access code **MMHG**. Learn to Live is available to you and your family members, ages 13 and older at no cost.

