

Perfectionism & the “Never Enough” Cycle

Understanding high standards, fear of mistakes, overchecking, procrastination, and self-criticism.

Perfectionism is more than high standards

Healthy standards can motivate growth. Perfectionism becomes costly when self-worth depends on flawless performance, mistakes feel unacceptable, or tasks are delayed because “good enough” feels unsafe.

Common patterns

- Overpreparing or checking repeatedly.
- Procrastinating because the standard feels impossible.
- Discounting success and focusing on what could have been better.
- Avoiding unfamiliar tasks where competence is not guaranteed.
- Using harsh self-criticism as a motivational strategy.

Experiments to try

- Define “good enough” before starting.
- Set a time limit for checking or revising.
- Intentionally complete a low-stakes task at 80-90% rather than 100%.
- Measure success by values and effectiveness, not by absence of mistakes.
- Practice responding to errors with correction rather than character judgment.

Try this reflection

What does perfectionism promise to protect you from: criticism, rejection, shame, uncertainty, or loss of control?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.