# How Perfectionism Impacts Emotional and Mental Well-Being

Perfectionism is different than being disciplined or a hard worker. [Perfectionism](https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/perfectionism) can be defined as an underlying pressure to do everything in their lives without any errors or setbacks. This pressure is typically fear-driven, in that the person struggling with perfectionism is usually deeply afraid of making any mistakes in their lives. Oftentimes, when people struggle with perfectionism, they are terrified of how they will be perceived if they do not perform perfectly. This can be caused by core beliefs or fixed mindsets around the need to be perfect at all times.

**The Psychology of Perfectionism**

In many cases, perfectionism has roots in childhood or forms of trauma throughout life. For example, when a child experiences conditional love or feels like they must perform a certain way to earn praise, they may develop a perfectionistic mindset. If perfectionism is left untreated or unchallenged, it can become a [cognitive distortion](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/how-to-recognize-and-tame-your-cognitive-distortions-202205042738). Cognitive distortions are irrational thinking patterns that are not accurate. These distortions can cause people to struggle with their mental health. Cognitive distortions are a part of [cognitive behavioral therapy](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/), which can be used to move past perfectionism. We will discuss how to use CBT below to help with healing from perfectionism.

**Emotion Health and Perfectionism**

If perfectionism is present in a person’s life for a long time, there will usually be emotional effects as well. These beliefs can leave people feeling shame or having difficulty being happy. Perfectionism becomes an obsession that can lead to other mental health struggles, such as [anxiety](https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders/) and depression.

**How Perfectionism Effects The Brain**

Stress is a component of perfectionism because the fear of failure causes high levels of it. Chronic levels of stress can stimulate the [amygdala](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3181836/), which can make emotional regulation efforts more difficult. When a person deals with perfectionism, they have thought patterns around why they need to be perfect or what will happen if they are not. These thought loops will be reinforced in the brain over time, which makes them harder to break. In these cases, people can use [neuroplasticity](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32491743/) to their advantage. Neuroplasticity is the brain’s capacity to change itself. Neuroplasticity can be used to [rewire the brain](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/train-your-brain) to have new thoughts and beliefs that reflect a more accurate evaluation.

**Rewiring from Perfectionism**

Neuroplasticity gives people the opportunity to change their perfectionistic thinking patterns. Each person who struggles with perfectionism will have slightly different thoughts and might need different forms of rewiring. The best way to learn what tool works best for a person is to try practicing it and see how their thoughts change. Some tools that can be used to help change these thought patterns are practicing mindfulness, exposure to imperfection, journaling, gratitude practices, and therapy. Specifically, cognitive behavioral therapy can be a great tool for rewiring away from perfectionism. CBT teaches us how to reframe cognitive distortions that may be present in thinking.

Perfectionism can be challenging to overcome, but it’s worth the effort it takes. Living with perfectionism can feel a lot like living in a locked cage. Perfectionistic beliefs force a person to perform without error at all times. This is impossible and causes people who hold these beliefs a large amount of suffering. Learning to live in imperfection is worth all the effort it takes to rewire these irrational beliefs.

If you are ready to work with a therapist and work through your perfectionism, [reach out to us](https://michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php). We are here and happy to help you on your journey to healing.

**References**

<https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/perfectionism>

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