

Cognitive Distortions

Perfectionism

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PURPOSE OF GROUP: to identify the unreasonably high standards we set for ourselves
to identify & challenge our irrational thoughts & behaviors

MATERIALS NEEDED: pens/pencils for each group member
print p. 5 of guide; have enough copies for each group member

1.

- Facilitator opens group by introducing topic, **perfectionism**.
 - Perfectionists put pressure on themselves to meet **high standards that are often unrealistic**
 - They judge themselves based on whether or not they meet these high standards
 - a. They often feel frustrated & disappointed in themselves for failing to live up to their unrealistic expectations
 - Even when they do reach their goals, they are often stressed because the process was so grueling & demanding
 - *You can ask group members, "In what areas of your life do you consider yourself a perfectionist?"

- Striving for excellence can be a good thing...
 - You challenge yourself & work hard
 - You're motivated
 - You have many accomplishments
 - You stay organized & efficient
 - You often obtain new knowledge & learn new skills
 - You focus on your goals

- But striving for perfection can be harmful to your health (and ultimately, unfulfilling)
 - You become demanding and put unnecessary pressure on yourself
 - You often feel stressed & on edge
 - Your goals become unrealistic
 - a. Your unreasonable goals make you feel like your best efforts aren't good enough!
 - b. You end up feeling like a failure
 - You beat yourself up for making mistakes
 - You blame yourself when things don't go exactly as you wanted
 - You don't ask for help because you don't trust others to do things the way you want them to be done
 - You have little free time (for much-needed relaxation!)

- In your quest for perfection, you risk ending up with:
 - Depression (for failing to meet your high standards)
 - Anxiety
 - Symptoms of OCD
 - Relationship problems
 - a. Not only will you have unrelenting standards for yourself, but you may also expect perfection from others!
 - Sleep problems (i.e. insomnia)

-Here are some **examples of the behaviors of perfectionists** (you can see if your group members can relate to any of them):

- Excessive checking & organizing
 - a. Checking: Tom re-read his report 7 times to make sure there were no grammatical errors
 - b. Organizing: Allen had to spend 30 minutes organizing the items on his desk & the items around his desk before he could begin working
- Difficulty making decisions
 - a. Jane spent 30 minutes in the store & ended up buying ribbon in 6 different shades of pink because she wanted to make sure it looked great with the wrapping paper she had at home
- Efforts to change the behaviors of others
 - a. Susan told her friend she wanted to teach her how to better organize her files
- Goes "overboard" ("over-the-top")

- a. Shane always arrives to his appointments 30 minutes early
- b. Amy, who paints in her free time, restarts her painting every time she makes even the smallest of mistakes

2. Tell group members that they will now complete an activity in which they will **explore their high standards.**

-Print out the handout, "**Perfectionism**" (on p. 5 of this guide), and give one to each group member to fill out

-First, they will **identify three high standards** that they have set for themselves (and whether or not they are reasonable)

- a. If they're having trouble thinking of three, tell them to think of the times in which they say sentences like, "I should...", "I have to...", or "I must..."

- b. Note that they will decide if the standard is reasonable for *them specifically*. If they expect to go to the gym 5x/week and they've never exercised before, then that standard is not reasonable!

-Next, they will list the **positive & negative consequences** of pursuing the high standards they listed

- a. If they're unsure what it means by "positive consequences", you can give the following examples:

- Being rewarded by your parents for having a perfect GPA in school

- The compliments you get from visitors on the cleanliness of your house

- The motivation & passion that you feel trying to meet your standard

2a. Allow group members to share their answers to the handout when they're done.

-They should ultimately **decide if the standards they have set are unreasonable & unhealthy or realistic & helpful**

- a. If they determine they are unreasonable & unhealthy, you can ask, "How ready are you to change and relax these unreasonably high standards?"

*Encourage group members to give each other feedback

3. Facilitator can conclude group by giving some tips on how to relax your unrelenting high standards.

-Avoid "black & white" (all-or-nothing) thinking & instead think in "shades of grey" (find a middle ground)

-Avoid "should" or "must" statements (i.e. "I must be perfect when I...")

-Allow yourself to make mistakes... because nobody is perfect!

a. Avoid self-criticism

-Delegate tasks to others when overwhelmed

a. You may want things done a certain way, but you can't overwork yourself & do absolutely everything on your own. Learn to trust others, teach others, & have patience with others

-Relax your standards slowly

a. For example, if a student re-checks their work 5 times before turning it in, they can try re-checking it 4 times at first (instead of immediately dropping down to 1-2 times)

*You can ask group members to come up with more tips on how to relax unrelenting high standards

Perfectionism

1. Identify three **high** standards you have set for yourself:

*Standard:

Is this standard reasonable for me?

*Standard:

Is this standard reasonable for me?

*Standard:

Is this standard reasonable for me?

2. What are some of the positive consequences of pursuing the standards listed in question #1?

3. What are some of the negative consequences of pursuing the standards listed in question #1?