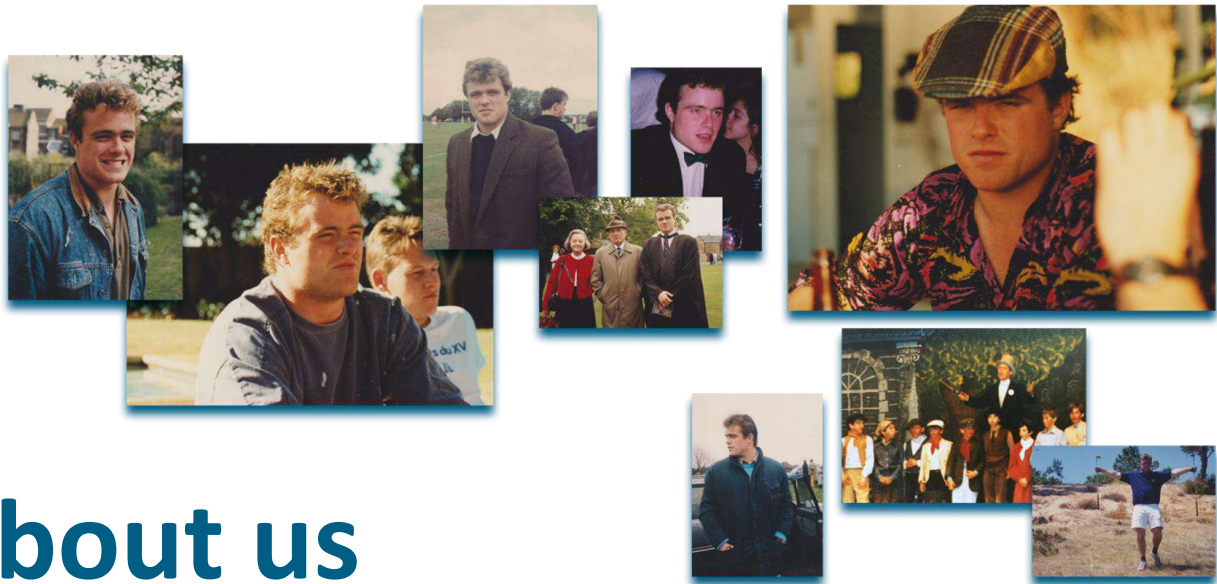




Supporting young people with perfectionism: Practical strategies to build self- compassion, self-worth and wellbeing

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About us

Charlie Waller was a dynamic, funny, kind and successful young man, with a close and loving family. To the outside world, he had everything to live for. Yet in 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie died by suicide. He was suffering from depression.

In response to this tragedy, his family founded the Charlie Waller Trust, to open up the conversation around depression initially, and to ensure that young people are able to understand and look after their mental health and to spot the signs in others.

Charlie sits at the heart of our story, our vision and our purpose.

Evidence based offer



Positive

We take a positive approach to mental health. We focus on prevention and early intervention and recognise the importance of offering hope.



Proven

Our consultancy, training and resources are all based on sound clinical evidence.



Practical

We give people practical strategies and tools to care for their mental health, and to support others in doing so.

Let us introduce ourselves...



Before we begin...

- This webinar is being recorded. Links to the recording and slides will be sent to everyone who registered for today's session.
- Personal experiences and contributions should be treated confidentially.
- Respect different perspectives and experiences.
- Sensitive issues may be discussed. Please take care of your own wellbeing and participate in a way that feels right for you.
- Be aware of where to access support.



Objectives for the session



Define

Perfectionism
and self-worth



Discuss

Warning signs



Do

Practical support
for self-
compassion



Do these sound familiar?



"If I'm going to do something, I want to do it properly."

"I get frustrated when I don't achieve what I know I'm capable of."

"If I make a mistake, I can't stop thinking about it."

"If I don't get this right, people will think less of me."

Subjective wellbeing

Subjective well-being can be thought of as **a positive state of mind in which a person feels good about life** as a whole and its constituent parts, such as their relationships with others, the environments that they inhabit and how they see themselves.

([The Children's Society, 2018](#))



**The
Children's
Society**

Defining self-esteem

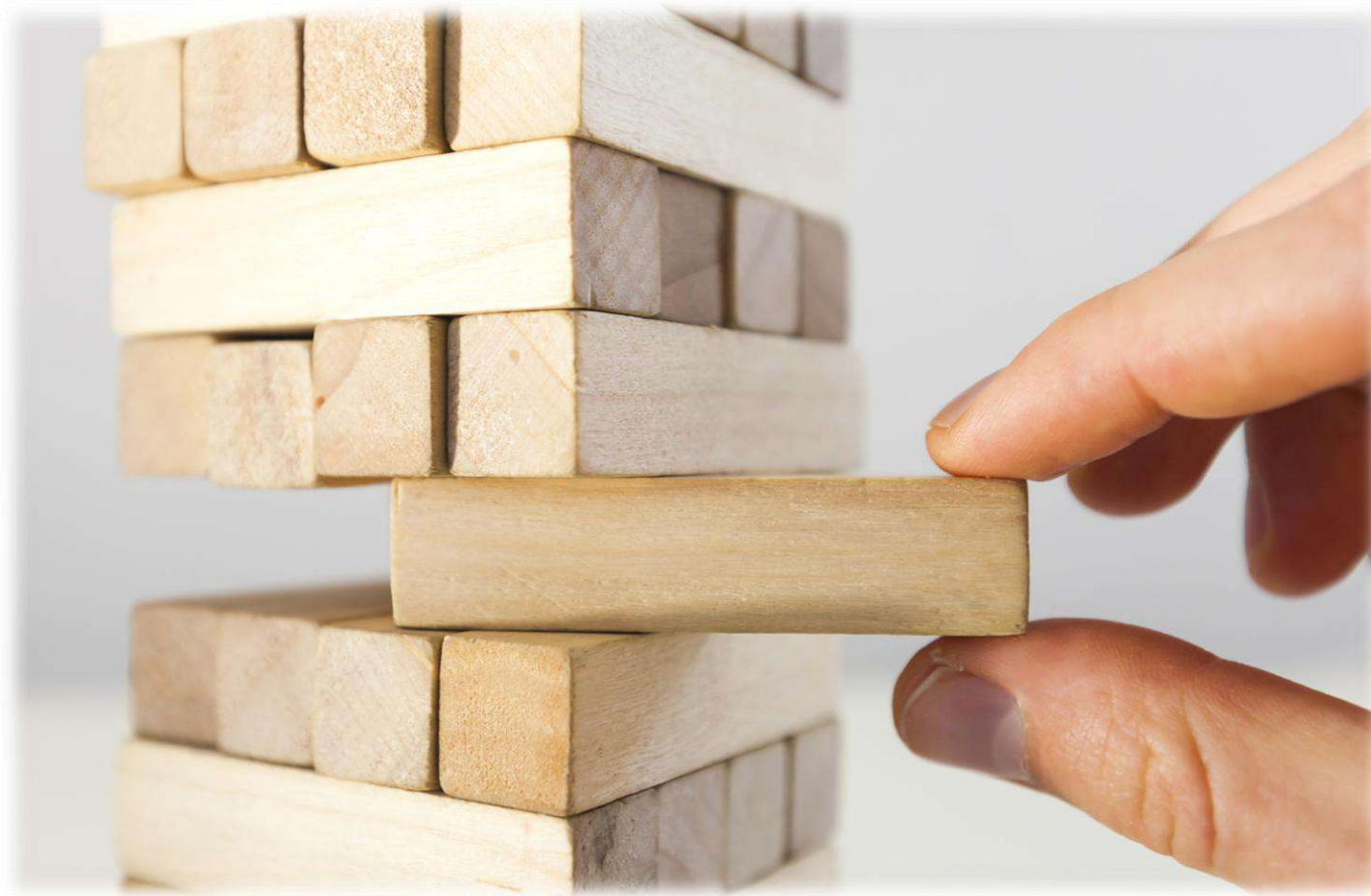
The importance of self-esteem lies in **what people believe they need to be or do to have worth as a person.**

These contingencies of self-worth are both sources of motivation and areas of psychological vulnerability.

(Crocker and Knight, 2005)



The foundations of self-worth



(Crocker and Knight, 2005)



Contingent self-worth scale – example questions:



“I feel better about myself when I know I’m doing well academically.”

“Knowing that I am better than others on a task raises my self-esteem.”

“My self-esteem depends on the opinions others hold of me.”

(Crocker, J. et al., 2003)

When does healthy striving become unhealthy perfectionism?



Healthy striving vs perfectionism



People with a healthy striving for excellence have very high standards but the standards are potentially achievable; when they do not reach their goals, people with healthy striving for excellence are able to stand back and reflect objectively on their mistakes so that they can learn from them.

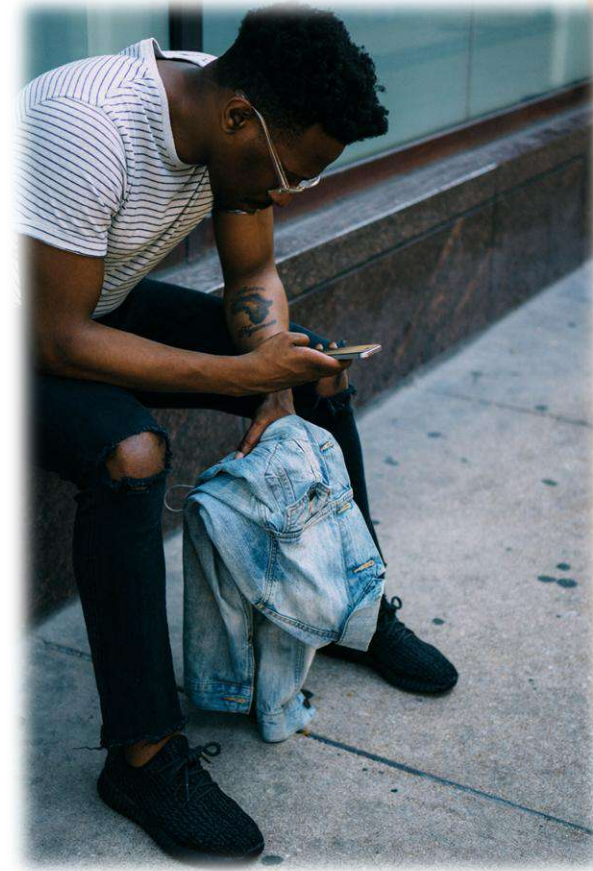
People with unhealthy perfectionism often have the same very high standards but the standards are not realistic or only attainable with significant negative consequences

(Charlie Waller Trust)

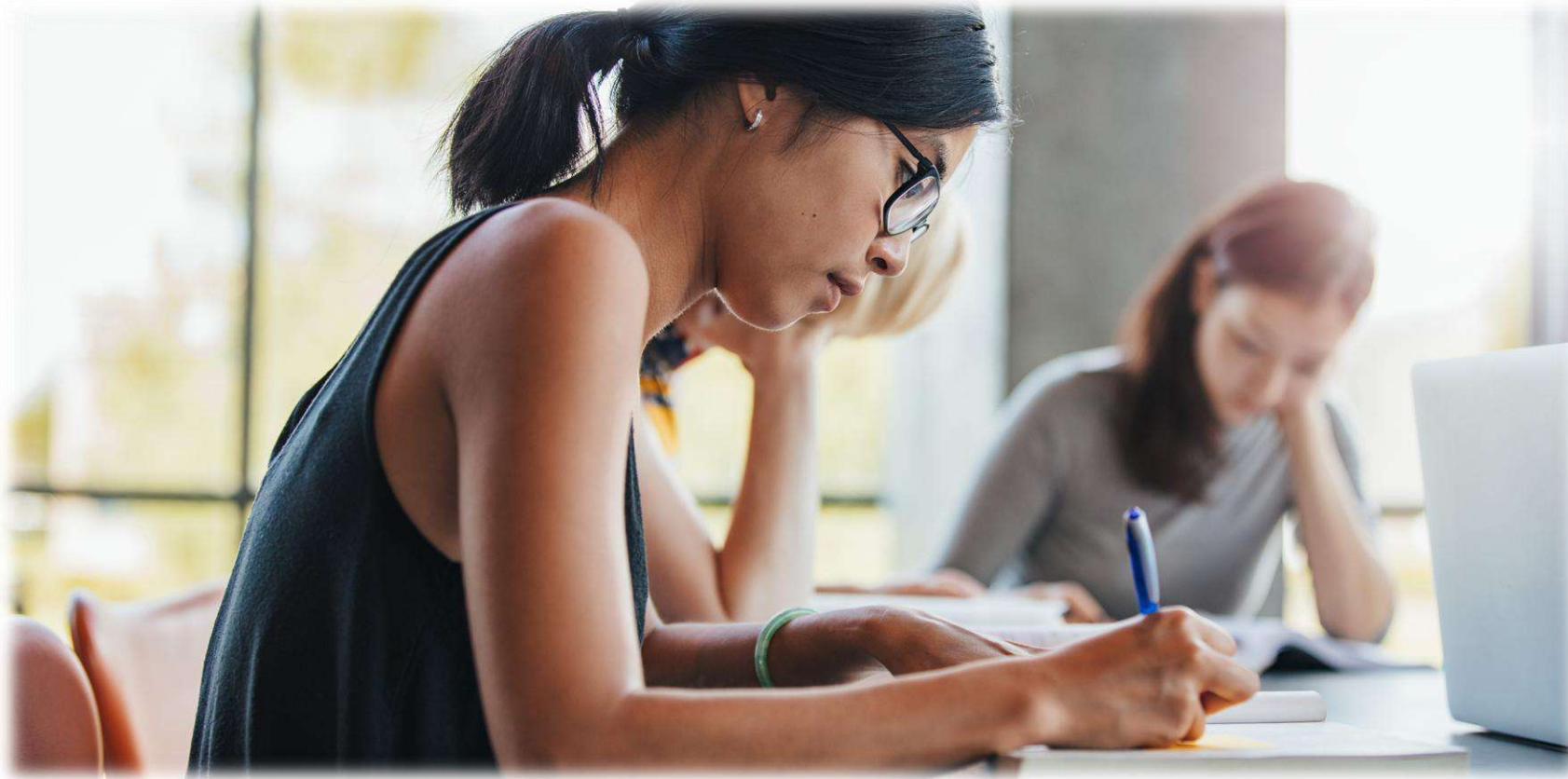
Perfectionism

“Perfectionism is a self-destructive and addictive belief system that fuels this primary thought: If I look perfect, and do everything perfectly, I can avoid or minimize the painful feelings of **shame**, judgment, and blame.”

(Brown, 2010)



Self-oriented vs socially prescribed perfectionism



Self-oriented vs socially prescribed perfectionism



Self-Oriented Perfectionism, which is thought of as involving a set of high, unrelenting, and unrealistic standards that a person sets for themselves.

Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism may involve those who have high, unrealistic, and unrelenting expectations, but these expectations come from others (rightly or wrongly) and are designed to try and keep others happy.

(Centre for Interpersonal Relationships, 2025)

Excellence-seeking vs failure avoiding perfectionism



Excellence-seeking vs failure avoiding perfectionism



Excellence-seeking perfectionism involves tendencies to fixate on and demand excessively high standards. Excellence-seeking perfectionists not only stringently evaluate their own performance but also hold high performance expectations for other people in their lives.

Failure-avoiding perfectionism involves an obsessive concern with and aversion to failing to reach high performance standards. Failure-avoiding perfectionists are constantly worried their work is not quite right or good enough and believe that they will lose respect from others if they do not achieve perfection.

(Harvard Business Review, 2018)



Spotting the warning signs

Signs of perfectionism

- ❉ High standards which are difficult to achieve or maintain over time
- ❉ Harshly criticising yourself when you don't meet your standards
- ❉ Fearing failure, or feeling like you always fail
- ❉ Discounting achievements you see as less than perfect
- ❉ Avoiding or postponing tasks where there's a risk you might fail
- ❉ Sacrificing your interests, relationships, or rest to strive and achieve
- ❉ Pushing yourself to the point of feeling depressed, overwhelmed, or exhausted
- ❉ Judging your self-worth mainly in terms of your successes and achievements in life

(Adapted from: [Psychology Tools, 2022](#))



Unhelpful thought patterns



All or nothing
thinking

Catastrophising

Compare and
despair

Personalisation

Mental
filtering

Magnification
and
minimisation

Shoulds and
musts

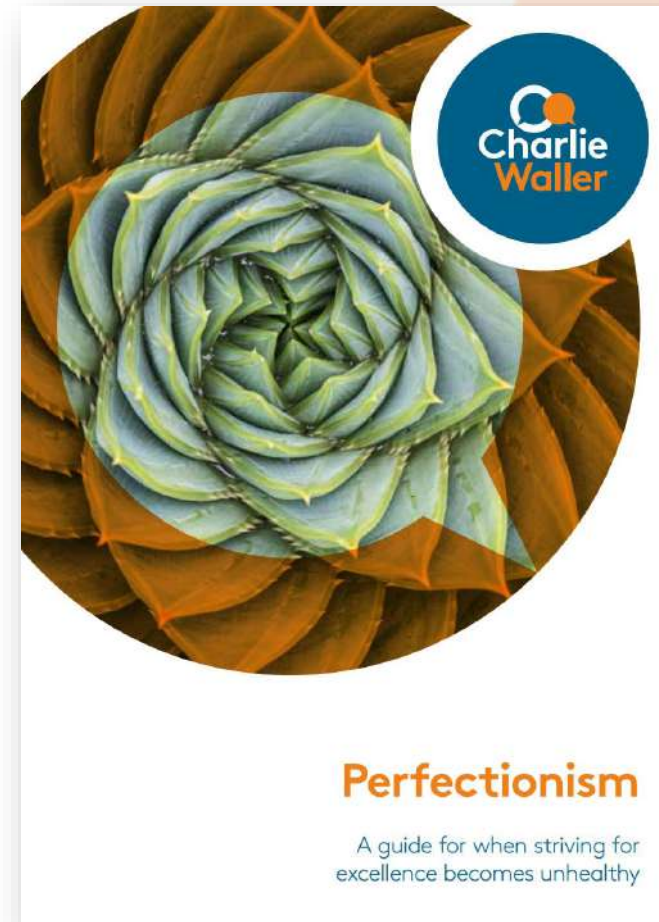
What if
thinking

(Get Self Help, 2009)

Spotting perfectionism

- ❏ Do you tend to focus on what you have not achieved rather than what you have achieved?
- ❏ Do you feel a failure as a person because you have not succeeded in meeting your goals?
- ❏ Do you raise your standards after meeting them?
- ❏ Do you keep on trying to meet your standards even if you miss out on other things?
- ❏ Do you avoid tests of your performance in case you fail?

(Charlie Waller Trust) (Shafran et al, 2018)



The perfectionism-procrastination paradox



If your standards are impossibly high, and failure to meet them means you are inadequate (not just that the work is imperfect), then not starting protects you from that verdict.

An unfinished project can always be "good enough if I just worked harder." A finished project is subject to judgment.

(Simply Psychology, 2026)



Negative self-talk

1. GROUNDED THOUGHTS

It turns difficulty into a reason to give up and avoid challenges.

2. MEAN COMMENTS

It puts you down and turns mistakes into judgements about you.

3. HOPELESS STATEMENTS

It makes the future feel fixed and believes that things cannot change.

4. APATHETIC VIEWS

It convinces you not to try and protects you from possible disappointment.

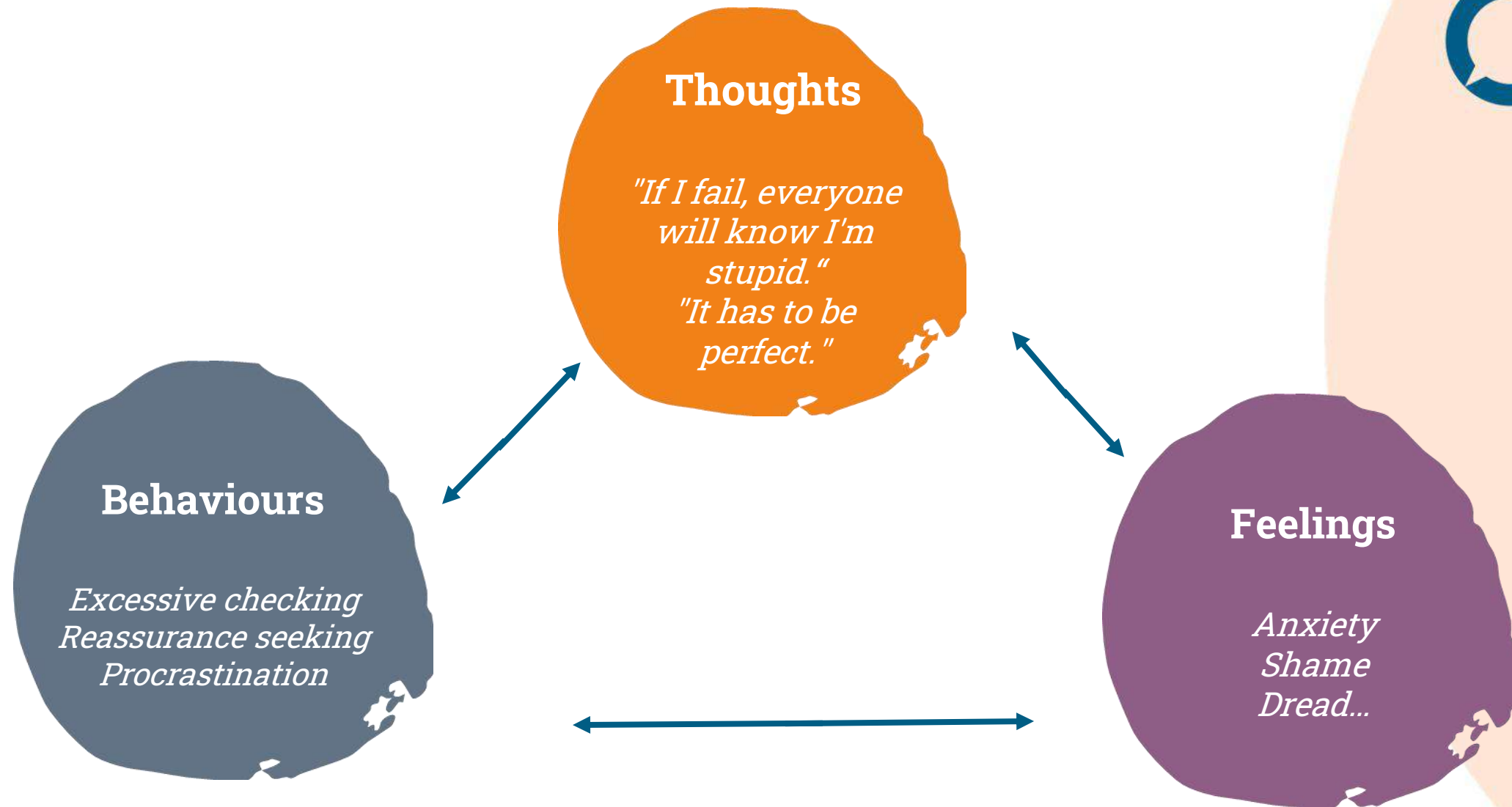
5. DEFEATED ATTITUDES

It turns “this is difficult” into “I am incapable” and stops you before you start.

([VeryWellMind, 2026](#))



The cognitive triangle





Supporting Young People Towards SUCCESS

Supporting a healthier vision of success



Scope of control

Use praise wisely

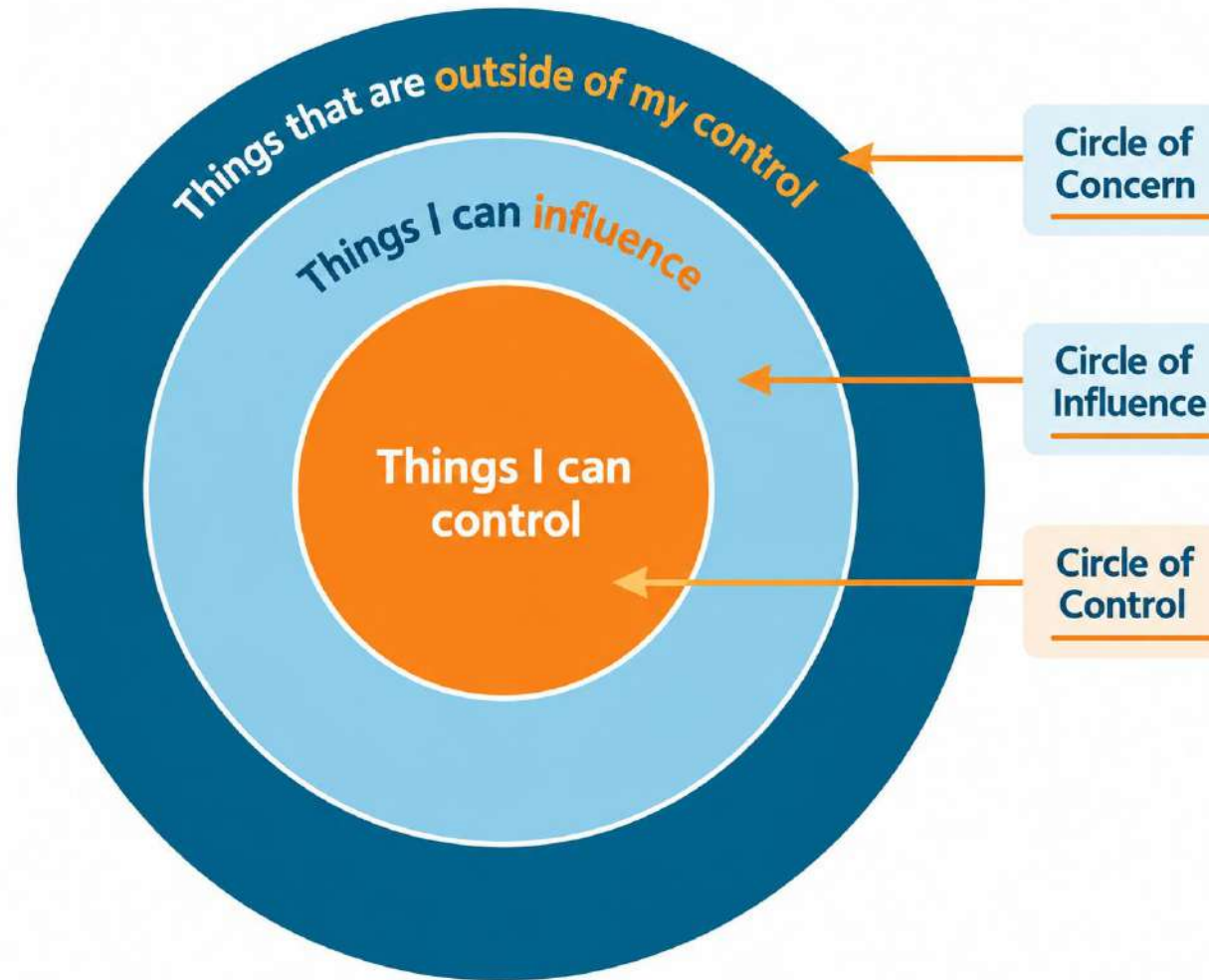
Challenge negative thoughts

Cultivate self-compassion

Encourage a growth mindset

SMART goals

Scope of control



([Schaffner, 2023](#))

Perfectionism

“Perfectionism is a twenty-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us, when in fact it’s the thing that’s really preventing us from taking flight.”

Brené Brown



Use praise wisely

“We all know perfection is an unreasonable burden to place on our children, but we also reward them when they strive for that perfection.”

Jessica Lahey

(Lahey, 2015)

“When praise for children is focused on results, children fare worse than when praise is focused on the good qualities the child displayed in attempting to succeed.”

(Talley, 2025)



Types of praise

Can we replace outcome praise ("You're so clever.") with...

Effort praise "You worked really hard."

Process/strategy praise "You kept experimenting until you found something that worked."

Identity-independent affirmation
"Whatever mark you get, I'm proud of you."



Challenge negative thoughts

That little voice telling you, *“If it’s not perfect, it’s worthless”*?

It’s time to push back. Write down those critical thoughts and ask yourself:

- Is this thought true?
- What’s the worst that could happen if it’s not perfect?
- What evidence do I have that “good enough” isn’t enough?

(CBT for Better Living)



ABCDE thought challenging

Attention! Notice what your mind is saying.

Believe? You don't have to believe everything you think!

Challenge Question your thoughts. Consider a different perspective. What's the evidence for the thought? Is this thought fact or opinion? What would someone else say about this?

Discount Let the unhelpful thoughts go.

Explore Options: Choose the best response. What shall I do now? Do it mindfully.

(Get Self Help)



Cultivate self-compassion



(Compassionate Mind)

Affirmations

If you find yourself stuck in cycles of revision, comparison, or self-criticism—setting impossibly high standards and then feeling defeated when you inevitably fall short—these affirmations are designed for you:

I choose progress over perfection.

Done is better than perfect.

My worth is not determined by my productivity or achievements.

I deserve compassion when I fall short of my own expectations.

Perfect is an illusion; growth is real.

I can be ambitious and kind to myself at the same time.

I can ask for help without feeling weak or inadequate.

(Positivity, 2026)



Self-compassion vs self-esteem

Self-compassion is **unconditional** and is characterized by:

- Being open to and moved by our own suffering
- Relating to our suffering with comfort and kindness
- Adopting an understanding and nonjudgmental attitude toward our inadequacies and failures
- Recognizing that our own experience of imperfection is part of the common human experience

(The OCPD Foundation)



Isn't it just self-indulgence?

All the fears we have of self-compassion are pretty much based on misconceptions. And the research shows the opposite.

Self-compassion helps you be motivated, it helps you take responsibility. It's not self-indulgent, it's not selfish, it leads to better relationships. I find it's quite remarkable how much research there is supporting these ideas."

Dr Kristin Neff

([Khazan, 2016](#))



Practical ideas

- 🕒 Remember to be kind to yourself and recognise your achievements.
- 🕒 Consider how much effort a task really requires.
- 🕒 Ask others for advice on this to have a variety of perspectives.
- 🕒 Take breaks and do other things you enjoy to help build up perspective yourself.
- 🕒 Celebrate gaining that perspective and knowing when is enough.
- 🕒 Consider using guided audios, such as from [The Compassionate Mind Foundation](#) to challenge self-critical thoughts and build self-compassion instead.



Encourage a Growth Mindset

- Abilities and intelligence can be developed over time
- Embrace challenges
- Persistence and effort are required
- Embrace mistakes and setbacks
- Learn from criticism
- Be inspired by others
- Cultivate a love of learning

(Engaging Minds)



The 'just try harder' fallacy

Be aware that a growth mindset message can become problematic for a perfectionistic young person if it is interpreted as:

"If I haven't succeeded, I just haven't worked hard enough."
or *"I must never give up."*

The young person can end up with *"I must improve myself continuously."* which can become another form of perfectionism.

Growth mindset ≠ just try harder

(Simply Put Psych, 2025)

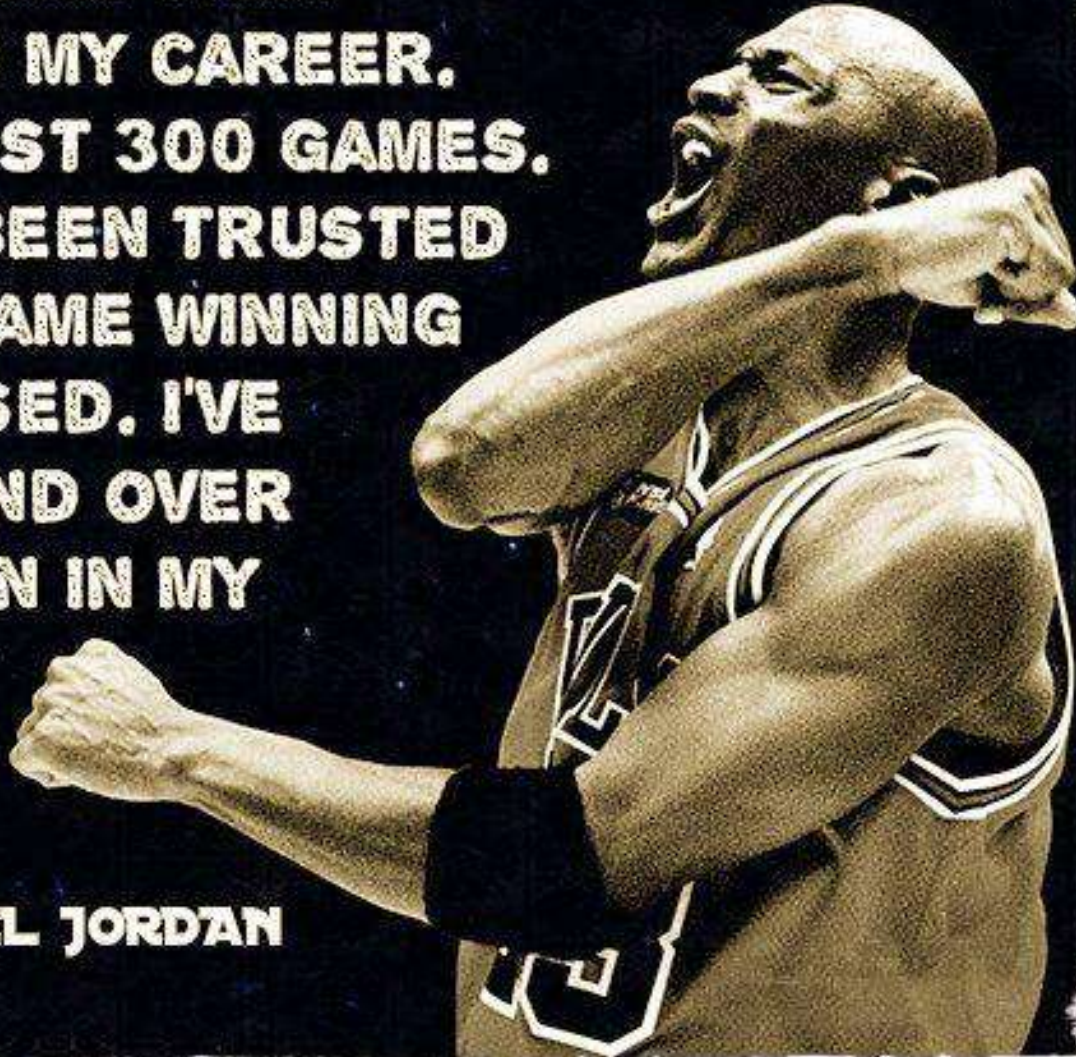


Setting SMART targets



**"I'VE MISSED MORE THAN
9000 SHOTS IN MY CAREER.
I'VE LOST ALMOST 300 GAMES.
26 TIMES I'VE BEEN TRUSTED
TO TAKE THE GAME WINNING
SHOT AND MISSED. I'VE
FAILED OVER AND OVER
AND OVER AGAIN IN MY
LIFE. AND THAT
IS WHY
I SUCCEEDED."**

MICHAEL JORDAN





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Fundraising for us not only brings in money to help us continue our work – it also raises mental health awareness and what people can do to take care of their wellbeing.

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