

Module 2: Perfectionism

- ▶ Belief that in order to be a good and valuable person, you need to be perfect and/or do everything perfectly
- ▶ Belief that even the smallest mistakes can lead to serious consequences and therefore are not allowed to happen

Perfectionistic thoughts involve rigid or absolute rules, with little to no room for deviation. They often begin with:

- *“I should always...”*
- *“I should never...”*

- ▶ Perfectionism is high in people with OCD, and can contribute to the development and maintenance of OCD

An example of excessive standards:

“I have to be perfect, otherwise I am worth nothing.”

- ▶ If you don't do things perfectly, you feel worthless
- ▶ If you do your job well, it confirms the unhelpful belief that you are only valuable if you do not make mistakes
- ▶ You will never be satisfied because you can always be better, more beautiful, reach higher, or go further. This is associated with a lot of misery

Setting high standards for yourself have benefits and costs

Benefits	Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having high standards for yourself can motivate you to achieve goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expecting one's absolute best every second of every day requires a lot of energy and is impossible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Getting recognition for the high goals you've set for yourself can feel good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a low tolerance for mistakes means spending a lot of time checking for them, which backfires in terms of being efficient
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Satisfaction when you accomplish a challenging goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Setting the bar too high means that you will often not meet it. This is associated with a lot of frustration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible short-term payoff (e.g. salary, promotion, improving a skill) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ You will never be satisfied because you can always be better, more beautiful, reach higher, or go further. This is associated with a lot of misery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling (morally) superior to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In the long term, our performance diminishes if we are constantly overtaxed

Aim: Finding the right balance!

- ▶ Use your own potential as well as acknowledge and accept your limits!
- ▶ Achieving goals without "going too far" (e.g., overspending, total exhaustion, or complete frustration)
- ▶ That does not mean to not set any goals at all anymore, but rather to set achievable goals

“Nobody is perfect!”

- ▶ Be aware that everyone, even famous people, have flaws and make mistakes → Treat yourself as kindly as you treat others and avoid generalizations
- ▶ Acceptance: Try to also accept incomplete or imperfect aspects of yourself and consider the consequences → It's our little flaws that make us human and lovable

Exercise 1:

Pay attention to flaws and mistakes of people you value, admire or simply like.

- ▶ Do they always look fit as a fiddle?
- ▶ Do they never make spelling mistakes?
- ▶ Do they never forget appointments or misplace items?
- ▶ Does their apartment always look like it is tidied up to perfection every time?
- ▶ Have they never yelled at their children?
- ▶ Is there nothing you would criticize?
- ▶ Have they perhaps also done something that they regret today?

Here is space for the experiences you made with the exercise:

Which flaws or mistakes have you noticed in others?

What does this mean for your own perfectionism?

Exercise 2:

Do not strive for perfection! Intentionally make mistakes and see whether your feared predictions are met:

- ▶ Wear a shirt or blouse with a small stain
- ▶ Make intentional spelling mistakes in an e-mail or text message
- ▶ Intentionally use a foreign word incorrectly
- ▶ Call someone by the wrong name
- ▶ Do not clean up before you have people over
- ▶ Be late for an appointment

Here is space for the experiences you made with the exercise:

What did you try?

Which fears did you have before?

What experiences did you make? Did your fears come true?

What did you learn from the exercise?

Supplement: Stigma

- ▶ Stigma = greek word. Literally it means: point, wound or brand
- ▶ Stigmatization occurs when people or groups are associated with negative attributes, without much conscious awareness
- ▶ Stigma may lead individuals to be devalued and/or alienated
- ▶ "Self-stigma" means that the stigmatized individual has internalized the stigma, or in other words, come to believe that they are actually "inferior"

Common consequences of fear of stigmatization, rejection and/or devaluation, and consequences of self-stigmatization:

- ▶ Having difficulty communicating about your OCD
- ▶ Low self-worth

Remember...

- ▶ No one is immune to mental health problems! Over the last year more than one in every four people suffered from a mental illness
- ▶ A mental illness should not be regarded as a weakness, but rather as an expression of particular sensitivity
- ▶ Along with genes, the environment also plays a role. Stressful or traumatic experiences can also have a negative impact on our mental health, and

increase the likelihood of mental illness in people with or without a predisposition for a mental illness

- ▶ Usually, many factors are likely involved in the development of mental illness

What can help?

- ▶ Educating yourself and communicating accurately about your OCD can help
- ▶ Instead of leading with an OCD diagnosis, it can be helpful to first describe to people the symptoms that may be commonplace in the population
- ▶ It can also help to inform your relatives and friends about how they can help you
- ▶ On the website of the International OCD Foundation you will find information for relatives of people with OCD (<https://iocdf.org/families/>)

Exercise 3:

Think of a phrase for an appropriate communication of your OCD:

Notes

Space for unanswered questions or problems that came up or experiences that you would like to talk about in the next session:

Other notes:
