

RUNNING HEAD: Clinician's guide perfectionism

Word count: 741 words, excluding references (max 750 words)

A clinician's quick guide to evidence-based approaches: Perfectionism.

Sarah J. Egan^{1,2}, Roz Shafran³, Tracey D. Wade⁴

- 1 – enAble Institute, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University, Perth, Australia
- 2 - Discipline of Psychology, School of Population Health, Curtin University, Perth, Australia
- 3 – Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, University College London, UK
- 4 – Orama Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work, Flinders University

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Associate Professor Sarah Egan, enAble Institute and School of Population Health, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, WA, 6845, Australia, email: s.egan@curtin.edu.au.

A clinician's quick guide to evidence-based approaches: Perfectionism.

Introduction

The definition of clinical perfectionism, where self-worth is based on striving to achieve demanding standards despite negative impacts (Shafran et al., 2002), has informed the development of Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy for perfectionism (CBT-P; Egan, Wade et al., 2014; Shafran et al., 2018). This leading evidence-based treatment has been examined across 15 randomised controlled trials. Compared to waitlist control, treatment has resulted in large effect size reductions in perfectionism ($g = 0.87$ to -1.27), medium reductions in symptoms of eating disorders ($g = 0.61$ to 0.64) and depression ($g = -0.45$ to 0.60), and small-medium reductions in anxiety ($g = -0.14$ to 0.42) (Galloway et al., 2022; Robinson & Wade, 2021). Treatment has been evaluated in adolescents and adults, individual and group face to face therapy, internet delivered (guided and unguided) and traditional book self-help treatment (see Galloway et al., 2022 for a review). Only one RCT has compared CBT-P to an equivalent length active treatment comparison, showing CBT-P to be superior to a stress management condition (Shu et al, 2019). Further trials are required to compare CBT-P to active treatments.

Existing treatment guidelines

There are no existing published guidelines for treatment.

Useful overview for clinicians

Egan, S.J., Wade, T.D., & Shafran, R. (2011). Perfectionism as a transdiagnostic process: A clinical review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *31*, 203-212.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.04.009>

Galloway, R., Watson, H.J., Greene, D., Shafran, R., & Egan, S.J. (2022). The efficacy of randomised controlled trials of cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, *51*(2), 170-184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2021.1952302>.

Limburg, K., Watson, H.J., Hagger, M.S., & Egan, S.J. (2017). The relationship between perfectionism and psychopathology: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *73*, 1301-1326. <https://doi:10.1002/jclp.22435>.

Evidence-based treatment manuals

Egan, S.J., Wade, T.D., Shafran, R., & Antony, M.M. (2014). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of perfectionism*. NY: Guilford.

Self-help treatment manuals or books

Shafran, R., Egan, S.J., & Wade, T.D (2018). *Overcoming perfectionism: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques, second edition*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.

Evidence-based online or remote treatments or supports

Numerous studies have demonstrated CBT-P delivered on the internet as both guided and unguided treatment results in significant reductions in perfectionism, and symptoms of anxiety, depression and eating disorders (Arpin-Cribbie et al., 2012; Egan, van Noort et al., 2014; Grieve et al., 2022; Hoiles et al., 2022; Rozental et al., 2017; Shafran et al., 2017; Shu

et al., 2019; Valentine et al., 2018; Wade et al., 2019), maintained at up to 12 month follow-up (Rozental et al., 2018). Traditional book self-help format therapy has also been demonstrated to be efficacious (e.g., Lowndes et al., 2018; Steele & Wade, 2008). Meta-analyses have indicated no significant difference between face to face and internet delivered CBT-P (Galloway et al., 2022; Suh et al., 2019).

Assessment

Assessment for clinical perfectionism can involve a range of formats. If treatment is traditional, face to face individual therapy, clinicians can engage in using a recommended list of assessment questions (see Egan, Wade et al., 2014) to help derive an individualised formulation of clinical perfectionism to guide treatment, based on the cognitive-behavioural model (Shafran et al., 2002). If treatment is internet delivered, or unguided, then assessment may include self-report measures, such as the Clinical Perfectionism Questionnaire (CPQ; Fairburn et al., 2003). The CPQ does not have clinical cut offs, however can be a useful guide to determining change in perfectionism over the course of treatment in adolescents and adults. Other self-report measures which can be used to assess perfectionism, include the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scales for adults (e.g., FMPS; Frost et al., 1990), and the Almost-Perfect Scale-Revised (Slaney et al., 2001) for children (see Leone & Wade, 2018).

Take home messages about treatment

CBT for perfectionism works to reduce perfectionism and is transdiagnostic in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression and eating disorders. It can be used if a client is presenting with perfectionism as a primary problem, as an adjunct to standard evidence-based treatments for symptoms, or if perfectionism is interfering with treatment of a psychological disorder.

New and emerging developments

New developments include a focus on co-designing internet delivered CBT-P with young people (see Egan et al., 2022) and conducting further RCTs to determine effective elements of treatment and efficacy of treatment in younger children. Only single studies have evaluated other treatment approaches and lack robust designs that can inform effectiveness to date, including mindfulness (James & Rimes, 2018), group psychodynamic treatment (Hewitt et al., 2015), and acceptance and commitment therapy (Ong et al., 2019).

References

- Arpin-Cribbie, C., Irvine, J., & Ritvo, P. (2012). Web-based cognitive-behavioral therapy for perfectionism: A randomized controlled trial. *Psychotherapy Research*, 22, 194-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2011.637242>
- Egan, S. J., Van Noort, E., Chee, A., Kane, R. T., Hoiles, K. J., Shafran, R., & Wade, T.D. (2014). A randomised controlled trial of face to face versus pure online self-help cognitive behavioural treatment for perfectionism. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 63, 107-113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2014.09.009>
- Egan, S.J., Wade, T.D., Fitzallen, G., O'Brien, A., & Shafran, R. (2022). A meta-synthesis of qualitative studies of the link between anxiety, depression and perfectionism: Implications for treatment. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 50, 89-105. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S1352465821000357>.

- Egan, S.J., Wade, T.D., Shafran, R., & Antony, M.M. (2014). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of perfectionism*. NY: Guilford.
- Fairburn, C. G., Cooper, Z., & Shafran, R. (2003). *The Clinical Perfectionism Questionnaire*. Unpublished scale. Oxford University.
- Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 14, 449-468. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01172967>
- Galloway, R., Watson, H.J., Greene, D., Shafran, R., & Egan, S.J. (2022). The efficacy of randomised controlled trials of cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, 51(2), 170-184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2021.1952302>.
- Hewitt, P.L., Mikail, S.F., Flett, G.L., Tasca, G.A., Flynn, C.A., Deng, X., Kaldas, J., & Chen, C. (2015). Psychodynamic/interpersonal group psychotherapy for perfectionism: Evaluating the effectiveness of a short-term treatment. *Psychotherapy*, 52(2), 205-217. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000016>.
- Hoiles, K.J., Rees, C.S., Kane, R.T., Howell, J., & Egan, S.J. (2022). A pilot randomised controlled trial of guided self-help cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism: Impact on diagnostic status and comorbidity. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 76, 101739. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbtep.2022.101739>.
- James, K., & Rimes, K.A. (2018). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy versus pure cognitive-behavioural self-help for perfectionism: A pilot randomised study. *Mindfulness*, 9, 801-814. <https://doi.10.1007/s12671-017-0817-8>.
- Leone E.M., & Wade T.D. (2018). Measuring perfectionism in children: A systematic review of the mental health literature. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 27, 553-567. <https://doi:10.1007/s00787-017-1078-8>
- Lowndes, T. A., Egan, S. J., & McEvoy, P. M. (2018). Efficacy of brief guided self-help cognitive behavioral treatment for perfectionism in reducing perinatal depression and anxiety: A randomised controlled trial. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, 48(2), 106-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2018.149081>
- Ong, C.N., Lee, E.B., Krafft, J., Terry, C.L., Barrett, T.S., Levin, M.E., & Twohig, M.P. (2019). A randomized controlled trial of acceptance and commitment therapy for clinical perfectionism. *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*, 22, 100444. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jocrd.2019.100444>.
- Robinson, K., & Wade, T.D. (2021). Perfectionism interventions targeting disordered eating: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 54(4), 473-487. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23483>
- Rozental, A., Shafran, R., Wade, T., Egan, S. J., Nordgren, L., Carlbring, P., Landström, A., Roos, S., Skoglund, M., Thelander, E., Trosell, L., Örténholm, A., & Andersson, G. (2017). A randomized controlled trial of internet-based cognitive behavior therapy for

- perfectionism including an investigation of outcome predictors. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 95, 79-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2017.05.015>
- Rozental, A., Shafran, R., Wade, T. D., Kothari, R., Egan, S. J., Ekberg, L., Wiss, M., Carlbring, P., & Andersson, G. (2018). Guided web-based cognitive behavior therapy for perfectionism: Results from two different randomized controlled trials. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 20(4), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.9823>
- Shafran, R., Cooper, Z., & Fairburn, C. G. (2002). Clinical perfectionism: A cognitive-behavioural analysis. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 40(7), 773-791. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0005-7967\(01\)00059-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0005-7967(01)00059-6)
- Shafran, R., Egan, S.J., & Wade, T.D (2018). *Overcoming perfectionism: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques, second edition*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Shafran, R., Wade, T., Egan, S., Kothari, R., Allcott-Watson, H., Carlbring, P., Rozental, A., & Andersson, G. (2017). Is the devil in the detail? A randomised controlled trial of guided internet-based CBT for perfectionism. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 95, 99-106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2017.05.01>
- Shu, C. Y., Watson, H. J., Anderson, R. A., Wade, T. D., Kane, R. T., & Egan, S. J. (2019). A randomized controlled trial of unguided internet cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism in adolescents: Impact on risk for eating disorders. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 120, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2019.103429>
- Slaney, R.B., Rice, K.G., Mobley, M., Trippi, J., & Ashby, J.S. (2001). The Revised Almost Perfect Scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 34(3), 130-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481756.2002.12069030>
- Steele, A. L., & Wade, T. D. (2008). A randomised trial investigating guided self-help to reduce perfectionism and its impact on bulimia nervosa: A pilot study. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 46(12), 1316-1323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2008.09.006>
- Suh, H., Sohn, H., Kim, T., & Lee, D. (2019). A review and meta-analysis of perfectionism interventions: Comparing face-to-face with online modalities. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 66(4), 473-486. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000355>
- Valentine, E. G., Bodill, K. O., Watson, H. J., Hagger, M. S., Kane, R. T., Anderson, R. A., & Egan, S. J. (2018). A randomised controlled trial of unguided internet cognitive-behavioral treatment for perfectionism in individuals who engage in regular exercise. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 51(8), 984-988. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22888>
- Wade, T. D., Kay, E., Valle, M. K., Egan, S. J., Andersson, G., Carlbring, P., & Shafran, R. (2019). Internet-based cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism: More is better but no need to be prescriptive. *Clinical Psychologist*, 23(3), 196-205. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cp.12193>