Staying on Track: Maintaining Progress After Overcoming Perfectionism

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Staying on Track: Maintaining Progress After Overcoming Perfectionism

A Guided Self-Help Programme for Long-Term Resilience and Self-Compassion

A self-help workbook · 7 modules · about 7 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Staying on Track: Maintaining Progress After Overcoming Perfectionism programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. Its text is drawn from the programme and is kept current with it: whenever the programme changes, the workbook is set again.

Revision 4. This printing was set on 3 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on using this workbook. It offers self-help based on established psychological approaches for difficulties of mild to moderate severity. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment by a qualified professional and is not designed for use in a crisis. The examples in it are fictional; no real person appears in them. If you are worried about your safety, or your difficulties are getting worse, the page headed “When self-help is not enough” says where to turn.

Set in Poppins and Roboto, the Talking Therapies UK typefaces.

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How to use this workbook

This programme builds upon previous work to consolidate gains and prevent the return of rigid self-criticism. It draws on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) principles to help you identify early warning signs of relapse. You will learn to maintain a balanced perspective on performance and self-worth in the face of life's inevitable setbacks. The modules focus on sustaining the behavioural changes that support your mental health and well-being.

This workbook is the written form of the Staying on Track: Maintaining Progress After Overcoming Perfectionism programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. It follows the programme module by module: each part of the book is one module, and each chapter is one piece of the module's teaching, set in the order the programme presents it.

Read the chapters of a part in order, then turn to the worksheets that follow them. The worksheets are the part of the work that changes things, so give them the time they ask for and come back to them as the weeks go on. You may copy or print the worksheets for your own use, as often as you need.

Most people work through one module a week, which takes the whole programme about 7 weeks. Go at the pace that suits you: a module done properly is worth more than two done quickly.

The check-in questionnaires let you see how things are changing. Complete each one when you reach it, note the date and your total, and compare it with the last.

When self-help is not enough

- If you are in danger now, or have seriously harmed yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- If you need help urgently but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 or contact your GP surgery.
- Samaritans are there day and night, every day of the year: call 116 123 free from any phone.
- If you would rather not talk, text SHOUT to 85258 for free, confidential support at any hour.
- If your difficulties are getting worse as you work through this book, or you find yourself thinking about ending your life, stop and speak to your GP or a mental health professional. A workbook can be a good start, and some difficulties need more help than a book can give.

What this workbook will help you to do

- You will reflect on the specific cognitive and behavioural shifts you have made since starting your journey. This module helps you articulate how your relationship with perfectionism has changed, reinforcing the evidence that change is durable when consciously maintained.
- You will learn to identify subtle shifts in thinking and feeling that signal a return to old patterns. By distinguishing between a normal setback and a relapse, you can intervene early with the skills you have already developed.
- This module focuses on using self-compassion as a buffer against harsh self-criticism when

things do not go to plan. You will practice viewing mistakes as learning opportunities rather than evidence of personal inadequacy.

- You will apply cognitive restructuring techniques to address any remaining rigid beliefs about performance and worth. The aim is to keep your thinking flexible and realistic, preventing the re-emergence of all-or-nothing thinking.
- You will review the behavioural strategies that have helped you feel better, such as exercise, social connection, or mindfulness. This module helps you integrate these activities into your daily routine to ensure they remain a consistent part of your life.
- You will create a personalised document outlining your triggers, coping strategies, and support network. This plan serves as a practical guide for managing future stressors without reverting to perfectionistic habits.
- You will use ACT principles to clarify your core values and set goals that are meaningful rather than driven by external approval. This final module helps you move from ‘doing’ to ‘being’, fostering a sense of purpose and contentment.

PART 1

Consolidating Your Progress

Reviewing Your Journey and Identifying Key Changes

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Staying on Track and Mapping Your Journey

Welcome to Staying on Track: Maintaining Progress After Overcoming Perfectionism. This is the first module of a seven-part guided self-help programme designed to help you consolidate your hard-won gains, navigate life's inevitable setbacks, and protect yourself against the return of rigid self-criticism. If you have previously completed work to address perfectionism, you will know how exhausting the cycle of unachievable standards, relentless self-evaluation, and burnout can be. This programme is designed to bridge the gap between initial recovery and long-term, resilient well-being.

Drawing on evidence-based principles from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), this course focuses on sustaining meaningful behavioural changes and nurturing a flexible, compassionate relationship with yourself. Relapse prevention is not about aiming for a life free from stress or striving—that is simply not realistic. Instead, it is about learning to spot early warning signs, responding with self-compassion rather than harsh judgment, and holding onto a balanced perspective on your self-worth.

In this first module, Consolidating Your Progress, we will review your journey so far. Change can sometimes feel intangible, and when life gets busy, it is very easy to slip back into old habits without noticing how far you have actually come. By mapping out the specific cognitive and behavioural shifts you have made, we will help you articulate how your relationship with perfectionism has transformed. This process reinforces the vital evidence that your progress is durable, real, and entirely your own. Take your time with the exercises, and remember that maintaining progress is an ongoing, gentle practice rather than a test to be passed.

CHAPTER 2

Welcome to Staying on Track and Mapping Your Journey

Welcome to 'Staying on Track: Maintaining Progress After Overcoming Perfectionism'. As you begin this seven-module guided self-help programme, it is worth taking a moment to orient yourself to where you are right now. This programme is designed to build directly upon the foundational work you have already completed. If you have previously worked through overcoming perfectionism, you will know just how demanding, courageous, and transformative that process has been. You have likely challenged long-held rules about what it means to be 'good enough', questioned the unrelenting standards you set for yourself, and begun to untangle your self-worth from external achievements. Now, you are stepping into a vital next phase: consolidation and relapse prevention.

In Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), progress is not viewed as a final destination where challenges magically disappear forever. Instead, emotional well-being and psychological flexibility are treated as ongoing practices. Life will continue to present pressures, unexpected hurdles, and busy periods where the old temptation to micromanage every detail, overwork, or seek flawless outcomes will naturally try to creep back in. This programme exists to help you recognise those moments early, stand firm in the new patterns you have built, and protect the hard-won freedom you have gained. By taking this proactive stance, you are shifting from active recovery to sustainable maintenance, ensuring that your achievements are securely locked in for the long term.

Let us begin our focus for this first module: reviewing your journey and identifying the key changes you have made. When we are caught up in the daily flow of life, it is remarkably easy to forget how far we have travelled. Perfectionism has a way of moving the goalposts; the moment you accomplish something, the inner critic downplays the success and immediately focuses on what is left to do or what could have been done better. This cognitive habit can leave you feeling as though you have made no real headway at all, even when your daily life looks fundamentally different from how it did six months ago. Consolidating your progress starts with consciously hitting the pause button and gathering concrete evidence of your transformation. This is not about self-praise for the sake of it; it is an evidence-based psychological exercise designed to update your brain's internal database regarding what you are capable of and how you now relate to stress, mistakes, and expectations.

A NOTE

Remember that tracking progress with perfectionism requires looking beyond external outcomes. Ask yourself not just 'What did I achieve?' but 'How did I treat myself while I was doing it?' A calmer internal dialogue is just as significant a milestone as a completed task.

To understand why this review process matters so much, we can look at the concept of neuroplasticity and habit formation. Over many years, your brain carved deep neural pathways associated with perfectionistic thinking. Thoughts like 'If I am not perfect, I am a failure' or 'I must check this three more times to be safe' were automatic, fast, and heavily reinforced. Through your

previous work, you have been actively blazing new trails—practising self-compassion, tolerating the discomfort of 'good enough', and testing out alternative behaviours. However, these new neural pathways are like newly paved garden paths; they are functional, but if they are not walked upon regularly, nature has a way of letting the old, familiar motorway reclaim territory when stress rises. By reviewing your journey, you consciously walk those new paths, reinforcing them and making them your default route when pressure mounts.

Sarah, who completed a perfectionism-focused guided self-help course a few months ago, initially felt that she had 'reverted to old ways' because she had a stressful week at work and felt a spike of anxiety. When she sat down to do a structured review for this module, she forced herself to look at the specifics. Six months ago, a stressful week meant she would have stayed at work until 9:00 PM every night, rewritten a client report four times until every comma was in place, and spent the weekend feeling sick with worry about a minor typo. This week, by contrast, she worked her contracted hours, handed in a report that was 'thorough and accurate' without chasing absolute perfection, and spent her Saturday resting and seeing friends. Although she felt anxious inside, her actual behaviour had shifted dramatically. Recognising this gap between her old automatic anxiety and her new adaptive behaviour provided Sarah with powerful evidence of durable change, instantly lowering her distress and reinforcing her confidence.

As you map your own journey in this opening module, you are encouraged to look across two distinct domains: cognitive shifts and behavioural shifts. Cognitive shifts refer to the ways your internal monologue, underlying assumptions, and relationship with your thoughts have evolved. For instance, you might notice that you no longer treat every critical thought as an absolute fact, or that you can now recognise your inner critic as an overactive protective mechanism rather than an oracle of truth. Behavioural shifts, on the other hand, are the tangible actions you take—or choose not to take—in your day-to-day life. These include things like intentionally leaving tasks at 'good enough', saying no to extra responsibilities that would overwhelm you, or engaging in leisure activities purely for enjoyment rather than productivity. By examining both of these areas, you build a comprehensive, undeniable picture of your personal growth, setting a solid foundation for the modules that follow.