Working with Perfectionistic Thoughts

Perfectionism isn't always about striving for excellence. For women with ADHD, it often manifests as a protective shield against potential judgment, failure, or shame. This guide offers practical strategies to recognize perfectionistic patterns and develop healthier approaches to tasks, relationships, and self-perception. Through these eight sections, you'll discover compassionate ways to transform your relationship with perfectionism.

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Understanding Perfectionism in ADHD

For women with ADHD, perfectionism rarely stems from a desire for excellence—instead, it's a protective response to avoid judgment and shame. This protective mechanism often becomes visible through behaviors that seem counterproductive to others but make perfect sense to the ADHD brain.

Procrastination as Protection

Delaying tasks until the pressure becomes overwhelming, often leading to self-sabotage rather than facing potential criticism.

Communication Paralysis

Spending hours crafting "simple" emails or messages, overthinking every word choice and possible interpretation.

Waiting for Perfect Conditions

Avoiding tasks until everything feels "just right"—the right mood, energy level, environment, or resources.

Rejecting Positivity

Dismissing compliments and focusing exclusively on perceived failures, believing one mistake defines your entire worth.

These aren't signs of brokenness—they're sophisticated coping strategies your brain developed to feel safe in a world that often misunderstands ADHD traits.

Breaking the All-or-Nothing Cycle

The Black and White Trap

One of the most persistent forms of perfectionism with ADHD is all-or-nothing thinking. This cognitive pattern creates a false binary where anything less than perfect equals complete failure. This mental framework might sound familiar:

> "If I didn't do it all, I did nothing."

> "If I messed up once, it's ruined."

> "Why start if I can't do it perfectly?"

These thoughts create a high-stakes environment where even small tasks feel overwhelming and failure seems catastrophic.

Moving Toward Middle Ground

Breaking free from all-or-nothing thinking starts with recognizing the spectrum between perfect and failure. When you catch yourself in this pattern, try asking these reframing questions:

- ◯ What was I actually trying to accomplish?

  _____

  _____

- ◯ What progress or effort did I make, even if it's partial?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- ◯ What would I tell a friend in my situation?

  _____

  _____

  _____

By acknowledging the gray areas between extremes, you create space for growth, learning, and self-compassion.

Challenging "Always" and "Never" Statements

Closely related to all-or-nothing thinking is the tendency to overgeneralize with "always" and "never" statements. These absolutes reinforce the feeling that your struggles with ADHD are permanent and unchangeable rather than situational.

Recognizing the Pattern

Women with ADHD often internalize these generalizations after repeated experiences of struggled execution:

- "I always screw this up."
- "I never get it right."
- "I'll always be behind everyone else."

Finding Counterevidence

The most powerful antidote to overgeneralization is specific counterexamples. When you catch yourself using "always" or "never," pause and ask:

- Has this ever gone differently—even once?
  _____
  _____
- Have there been times, however brief, when I handled this well?
  _____
  _____
- What factors might make this situation unique from others?
  _____
  _____

Building a Counterevidence Journal

Keep a dedicated notebook or digital note where you record examples that contradict your "always" and "never" beliefs. Review these regularly to remind yourself that your capabilities are far more varied and situational than your perfectionism wants you to believe.

Remember: The goal isn't to ignore genuine patterns but to recognize that absolutes rarely reflect the full truth of your experiences and abilities.

Practicing "Good Enough"

For the perfectionist ADHD brain, "good enough" can feel like settling for mediocrity. However, embracing "good enough" is actually about accurately assessing when additional effort yields diminishing returns—a crucial skill for managing limited executive function resources.

The 90/10 Reality Check

Your brain likely zooms in on the 10% that isn't perfect while dismissing the 90% that's working well. This hyperfocus on imperfections is a common ADHD trait that perfectionism exploits. Recognizing this tendency is the first step toward a more balanced perspective.

The Good Enough Practice

At the end of each day, identify and write down one thing that was "okay enough." It might be:

- A task you completed, even if it wasn't to your highest standards_____
- A conversation where you expressed yourself adequately_____
- A decision you made without overthinking_____

Over time, this practice builds your tolerance for the discomfort of imperfection and helps recalibrate your assessment of what truly requires perfectionism (very few things) and what can be "good enough" (most things).



Accepting Compliments and Breaking Rejection Patterns

The Compliment Conundrum

Many women with ADHD instinctively deflect positive feedback with thoughts like "They're just being nice—it doesn't count." This rejection of praise reinforces perfectionism by denying evidence of your competence and worth.

Instead of dismissing compliments, try responding with:

> "Thank you. That's hard to hear—but I'm practicing letting it in."



This honest response acknowledges your discomfort while creating space for growth. Each time you accept positive feedback, you strengthen neural pathways that counter perfectionism.

Rejection Sensitivity and Perception

Rejection sensitivity dysphoria (RSD) is common with ADHD and can fuel perfectionism. When someone doesn't respond to a message or gives neutral feedback, the ADHD brain often jumps to catastrophic interpretations.

When you notice yourself spinning a rejection narrative, try this grounding technique:

1. 💬 Say aloud: "My brain is writing a rejection story."
2. Name one thing you can see in your environment
3. Name one thing you can hear
4. Name one thing you can physically touch

This simple practice interrupts the rejection spiral and returns you to the present moment, where you can evaluate the situation more objectively.

Reframing "Should" and "Laziness"

Replace "Should" with "Need"

When you catch yourself thinking "I should be able to do this," pause and reframe with what you genuinely need:

- "I need more time for this task."
- "I need help with breaking this down into steps."
- "I need to try a different approach instead."

Understand Executive Dysfunction

What feels like "laziness" is almost always executive dysfunction—your brain's difficulty with initiating, organizing, and completing tasks despite your genuine desire to accomplish them.

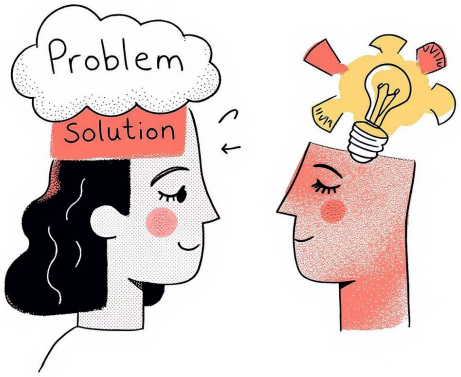
Identify Needed Support

Instead of berating yourself, ask what specific supports might help:

- External accountability
- Environmental modifications
- Breaking tasks into smaller steps
- Body doubling (working alongside someone)

Practice Compassionate Reframing

Replace "I'm so lazy" with "This isn't laziness. It's executive dysfunction. I need support, and that's okay."



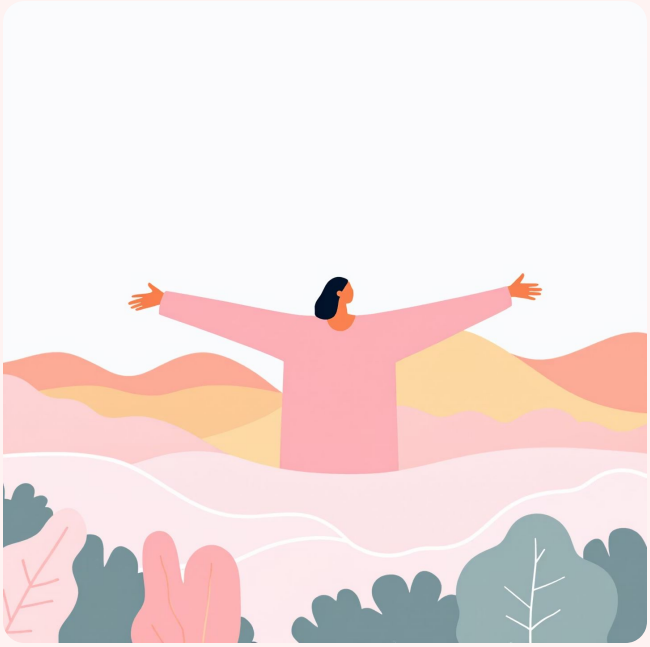
By replacing harsh judgments with accurate understanding of how your ADHD brain works, you create room for effective strategies rather than self-criticism. This shift doesn't just feel better—it leads to better outcomes by addressing the real challenges you face.

Setting Boundaries and Moving Forward

Don't Carry What's Not Yours

Women with ADHD often assume responsibility for things beyond their control. When you catch yourself thinking "This must be my fault," try this exercise:

1. Stretch your arms out wide and say: "I care—but I don't have to carry everything."
2. Ask yourself: "What part of this situation is actually mine to control or influence?"
3. Ask yourself: "What parts belong to others or to circumstances beyond my control?"



This physical and mental practice helps create healthy boundaries that protect your energy and focus.

Your New Beginning

The perfectionism you've been living with wasn't a character flaw—it was adaptation. You did what you could to feel safe and accepted while navigating the challenges of ADHD in a world that often doesn't accommodate your neurotype.

Now, you get to try a different way—with more care, less pressure, and more room to be authentically yourself. Consider:

_____

_____

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_ne perfectionistic pattern are you ready to let go of today?

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_____

-What one small, imperfect action are you giving yourself permission to try?

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Each time you choose self-compassion over perfectionism, you're not lowering your standards—you're reclaiming your right to work with your brain instead of against it.