Identifying Unhelpful Rules & Assumptions

To identify the unhelpful rules and assumptions that underlie your unrealistically high standards, ask yourself:

◊ What do I expect of myself at work or school?
◊ What standards do I expect myself to meet?
◊ What do I expect of myself in my various roles – child, friend, partner, parent, staff member/supervisor?
◊ What might happen if I relax my standards?
◊ What do I criticise in other people? What standards do I expect them to live up to?

Adjusting The Rules

Generating a more helpful rule or assumption involves thinking of another way to see yourself and the world that is balanced, flexible to different circumstances, and realistic given the real state of affairs. When thinking of how to put the new rule or assumption into practice, work out how you would act in everyday life if you already believed the new helpful rule or assumption, and then making a point of acting that way. Often when we act as if something were true, we actually start to take it on board and believe it.

To challenge your unhelpful rules and assumptions about your perfectionism, there are six steps to take:

1. Identify your unhelpful rule or assumption
2. Work out where it comes from or how it developed
3. Question whether your rule is realistic or reasonable or achievable
4. Recognise the negative consequences of having and keeping this rule
5. Develop a more helpful rule or assumption
6. Plan how you would need to act in everyday life to put this new helpful rule or assumption into practice

Remember, practice is very important for challenging your perfectionism. We urge you to practice, and remind you that you don’t have to achieve change ‘perfectly’ or even quickly.

For more detailed information regarding Adjusting Unhelpful Rules and Assumptions see Perfectionism in Perspective Module 7.

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