

AI tools and parent support could be keys to unlock perfectionism

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The quest to find ideal therapy for perfectionism, a condition showing alarming growth among very young people, has moved online—with researchers believing that artificial intelligence (AI) tools could provide

a better, more convenient solution, as well as harnessing parent delivery of interventions.

While the online delivery of [cognitive behavior therapy](#) for perfectionism (CBT-P) provides effective interventions to reduce perfectionism and psychopathology, a new pilot study has examined both the effectiveness and acceptability of an [artificial intelligence](#)-supplemented CBT-P [intervention](#) for young people with anxiety and depression.

The work is [published](#) in the journal *Internet Interventions*.

Perfectionism—the relentless pursuit of impeccability, setting excessively high standards and an unwavering desire to achieve them—has become more prevalent in youth over recent decades, and Flinders University's Professor Tracey Wade says new treatment methods that are appealing to young people with perfectionism are extremely important.

"It's a cause for concern when we start to see perfectionism emerge in childhood," says Professor Wade, a Cognitive Behavior Therapy expert from Flinders University's College of Education, Psychology and Social Work. "It can become overwhelming and crippling, leading to [self-criticism](#), stress, procrastination and even poor mental health. Therefore, it's crucial to identify it early and introduce interventions that are effective."

AI tools have the potential to provide strong guidance through a therapy program, but their effectiveness and likely acceptance by people needing the therapy has not been adequately tested.

"We asked young people about perceptions of AI and co-designed an intervention for perfectionism, and they stated they were interested in AI

guidance, noting both benefits and concerns regarding AI, but were positive overall. They were most enthusiastic about the AI intervention's ease of access, low cost, lack of stigma and benefits for individuals with [social anxiety](#)," says Professor Wade.

The researchers say the results of this study shows that a pilot trial of AI-guided intervention for perfectionism is now required.

To further support the in-depth study of childhood perfectionism, Flinders is leading a new study that will engage with both parents and children aged 7 to 12, and examine how perfectionism-related challenges impact their quality of life.

This study—being conducted by Tracey Wade and Maya Jabs in the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work at Flinders University, with researchers from Curtin University—will examine the feasibility and effectiveness of a new intervention where parents deliver cognitive behavior therapy for perfectionism (GP-CBT-P) to their child, with the help of a guide.

It will focus on the Guided Parent-Delivered Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Perfectionism, a six-module program delivered by a caregiver in a playful way with the child in interactive learning activities, supported by a weekly online guidance session.

"Perfectionism is not a simple concept to define. It encompasses two dimensions: the pursuit of excessively high self-imposed goals, and feelings of inadequacy when these goals aren't met," says Ms. Jabs. "Both dimensions have been associated with psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and even eating disorders. In the context of children and adolescents, perfectionism can lead to less social contact, increased fear and sadness, and difficulties in achieving academic goals. We aim to find the best ways to overcome that."

Cognitive behavioral treatment for perfectionism (CBT-P) focuses on teaching individuals how to approach achievement without causing harm to their mental well-being. Multiple studies have confirmed the effectiveness of CBT-P in reducing perfectionism and its associated issues, such as depression, anxiety, and disordered eating.

More information: Sarah J. Egan et al, A pilot study of the perceptions and acceptability of guidance using artificial intelligence in internet cognitive behaviour therapy for perfectionism in young people, *Internet Interventions* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.invent.2024.100711](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2024.100711)

People interesting in being a part of this study program should email maya.jabs@flinders.edu.au and fill out this consent form:

https://qualtrics.flinders.edu.au/jfe/form/SV_bmEtGXw3IIfPIDU

For more information about the program, download this document link:

[Additional program information](#)

Provided by Flinders University

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