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“Good Enough”

Minding your mental health as a parent

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About me:

Career in Intellectual Disability, Addiction Counselling, Lecturing/Training, CBT Private Practice.

Currently focusing attention on understanding the problems faced by autistic adults, & their specific therapeutic needs.

I'm autistic myself, having made the discovery in late adulthood

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This talk will look at:

- The high level of uncertainty, for parents of a child with non-typical perspectives & needs, about the adjustments that need to be made (including the uncertainty of knowing who to listen to for reliable information regarding the child's wellbeing), &
- Common unhelpful responses to the new challenges that arise (Perfectionism, Self-Blame/Self-Criticism, Compulsive Worry, etc)

The ongoing intense uncertainty can put severe strain on mental health, especially for highly responsible, high standard, parents.

This talk will look at Cognitive-Behavioural ways to minimise and manage these unhelpful responses.

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- It's important that we recognise the reality of the challenge, & not just at the start but at every major life transition
- *But we also need to emphasise here that it's not the challenge people usually think it is...*
- *It's not the challenge of the broken, the lacking, the second-rate, but the challenge of difference, of the unusual, of the unknown and not-yet-well-understood*

**Not Deficit Model but
Neurodiversity & Neurodivergence Model**

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I'm emphasising the concept of “good enough” parenting, as some parents can fall in the trap of over-responsible “super-parenting”, trying to “fix” problems that may not be there.

This can lead to increased worry, anxiety and stress, and lowering of self-esteem in both parent and child.

The term “good enough parent” (initially “good enough mother”) was coined by British paediatrician & psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott in the 1950s. He was warning against too much reliance on experts...

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Perfectionist Parenting

What is the parental impact, in the great “Genetics Vs Environment(s)” debate?

+10/-10



Metaphors:

Plant health	Our own health
	

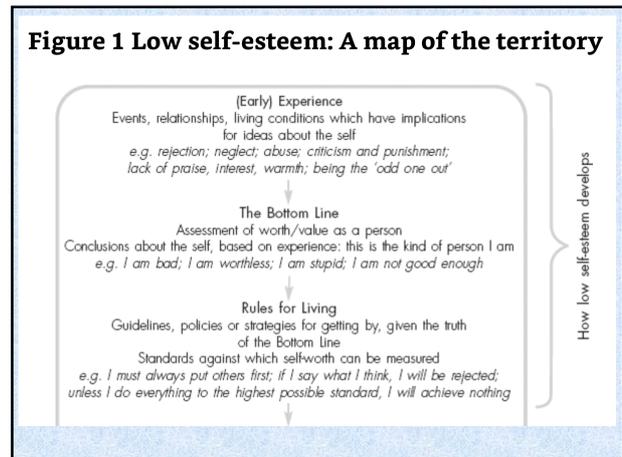
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Perfectionism & Low Self-Esteem (vicious cycles)

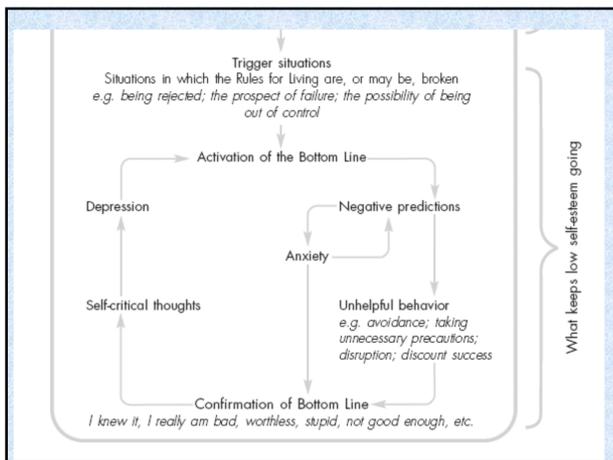
Fennell's Low Self-Esteem Model:

- **Formative Learning Experiences**
- **Bottom Lines/Core Beliefs**
- **Rules/Strategies for Living**
- **Triggers**
- **Self-Critical Thoughts**
- **Anxious Predictions**
- **Self-Protective Behaviours**

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Useful Interventions

- **Thought Record/ Cognitive Distortion Record**
 - **Alternative Thoughts/Filters**
(more realistic, self-compassionate)
- **Double Standard Method**
 - **Replacing Language**
- **Positive Data Log**
- **Behavioural Experiments**
- **Assertiveness Training**
- **etc...**

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Compulsive Worry

Excessive anxiety and worry (negative “What ifs”) about a variety of things

Difficulty controlling the worry

Symptoms such as:

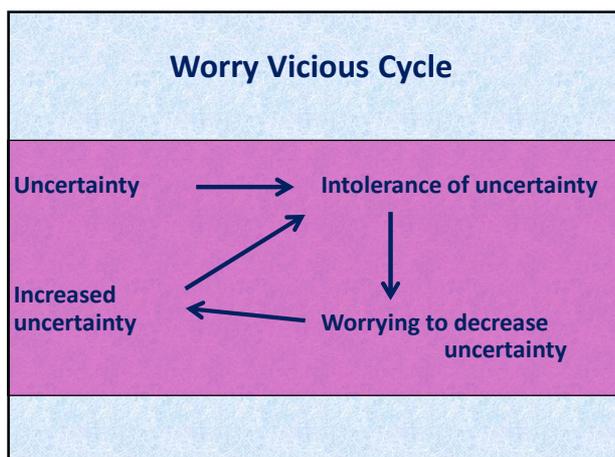
- **Restlessness, feeling on edge**
 - Easily fatigued
- **Difficulty concentrating**
 - Irritability
 - Muscle tension
- **Sleep disturbance**

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According to CBT,
two of the key features of
Compulsive Worry
are:

Intolerance of uncertainty
Positive beliefs about worry

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Once aware of our Positive Beliefs about worry (“It helps anticipate what could go wrong”, “If I didn’t worry it would mean I didn’t care”, etc), we often see there’s little evidence to support them. If not, we can use a written/spoken CBT exercise where we explore the evidence for & against the value of worrying.

We can also set aside a daily **“Worry Time”** & **postpone** our worries until then. During the Worry Time, we *give ourselves permission to focus on our worries*, which alters our relationship to our worry habit, and gives us the chance to distinguish imaginary worries from ones we can maybe do something about.

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- Phillips, A. (2007) *Winnicott*. London: Penguin.
- Singer, J. (2017) *NeuroDiversity: The Birth of an Idea - revised ed.* Lexington: Singer.
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- <https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-to-deal-with-an-especially-cruel-inner-critic/>
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