

# Why Do I Never Feel Good Enough?

A Clinical Psychologist answers one of the most painful questions people search for online.

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When we ask this question, we ask it from a vulnerable place from deep inside.

I would like to answer that part of you and let you know, right from the beginning, that I am here to help you. “Never feeling good enough” is an unpleasant combination of negative thoughts and emotions that can feel unbearable. No one deserves to feel that way.

Feeling feel good enough has a lot to do with compassion and care



For you to have found this article, you might be very self-critical and find it tricky to be self-compassionate. In my answer to your question, I will help explain how you could benefit from developing an inner world that feels comforted by receiving care or treating yourself in caring ways.

From my experience as a therapist, my prediction is that if you are asking this question you may struggle with kindness and compassion toward yourself. In fact, it would be quite understandable if, as I start to kindly encourage you to be more kind to yourself – you might find that you want to stop reading. It makes sense you might feel that way, and if you could bear with me a little longer, I will explain why - and what you can do about it.

I truly hope it helps you – because you do deserve to live a life of feeling good enough. There is a very helpful part of yourself that came looking for the answer to this question so you could change things for the better. I am very motivated to help you overcome that feeling, because it hurts to feel the way you do. If you are looking for help that shows you are motivated to overcome it too.

In my therapy practice, and in my own personal experience of tricky feelings around inadequacy, I have learned that feeling good enough rarely comes from external validation. You probably have realised this by now too. You may have worked quite hard to overcome your perceived weaknesses or to gain status through accomplishments or other societally valued status symbols (being the right body shape, attractiveness standards, career standards, matching the attributes that add status as dictated by your culture and the environment that shaped you).

And yet, deep down, you still connect to an empty, longing feeling and find yourself sitting down and typing into google or to your preferred AI chat:

“Why Do I Never Feel Good Enough?”



Speaking of AI, sometimes I use AI to help me write posts, to clean up my grammar, or to help me phrase things in the most professional way. This time I am not doing it, because I want you to know as you read this that this answer comes directly from a human being who has learned a lot about not feeling good enough. I want the little mistakes or not quite polished bits to remain, so you know that I am here, I am human, and I am writing this to be helpful to you.



This is important because when we connect on our common humanity, we can remember that we all have the capacity to make mistakes or to find ourselves in the position that means we arbitrarily don't meet the requirements dictated for external validation.

We can all at times, feel like failures or imposters.

How did reading that land with you? Perhaps a part of you wants to believe me or even does believe me, but perhaps another part feels anxious or uncertain about where the feeling of good enough is supposed to come from, if not from external validation.

A part of you knows that the quick hit of success or external validation feels amazing, but it hurts that it doesn't seem to last. When it passes you find that you are left with a feeling of sadness, emptiness, anxiety or embarrassment. You still don't feel good enough.

I may not be the first Psychologist, therapist or kind person to gently encourage you to reflect on whether you are relying on perfectionism to support your self-esteem. Perfectionistic coping is a common way of trying to keep safe from the threat of being seen by others as not good enough, or by feeling, within yourself, that you are inadequate, insufficient or in some way broken. Since it is a self-protection strategy that means overly relying on external validation or only receiving internal validation (praising or being positive toward yourself) when you have met a high standard; it can feel very anxiety provoking to be asked to consider not doing it anymore.

You would understandably think things like "well then if I drop standards, I definitely will never be good enough" or "this is an excuse to stop striving" or even "I am not a perfectionist... I don't even try... since I know I will never be good enough".

If you were seeing me in my therapy room, I would gently help you to notice that you may be in a competitive mindset, which, would not be your fault. It might feel like I am asking you to drop out of the race or lose – which you may fear would confirm to you your worst fears about yourself that you were never good enough in the first place.



Clinical Psychologist, Professor Paul Gilbert, developer of Compassion Focused Therapy, theorises in Social Mentality Theory that we have evolved emotional regulatory motivation systems that are very sensitive to the context we are in. In a competitive society, our brains are shaped by competitive environments and thus we can relate to ourselves, and others from a very competitive mindset. From an evolutionary point of view, this primes our attention to being very rank (social status) sensitive.

It is very threatening, and it makes us feel unsafe to be positioned as less than. In competitive environments, the competition builds in a system where someone is less than – someone has less. This is not exclusive to the human condition – other social animals, like apes and monkeys for example, also demonstrate rank sensitivity. It is genuinely quite threatening to be a lower ranked member of a group of monkeys, and as human beings, we are allocated more resources and protections by having higher status – whether it is at school, at work or in our wider society.



It is not your fault that your mind is oriented toward constantly striving, you, like many of us, have been conditioned by a competitive system that has set you up to value yourself through external validation.

## It is also not your fault that it doesn't help you feel good enough.

The reason it doesn't help you feel good enough is that our felt sense of feeling 'good enough' is linked to our subjective sense of safety: safeness. To answer the question directly:

The reason why you never feel good enough may be because you never feel safe enough. You are trying to get to safety by gaining external validation, but the realisation that it doesn't fully protect you leaves you feeling vulnerable to future harm.



When we feel safe, we experience very positive feelings, hope, peace, calm, happiness, joy, loving feelings, like belonging, appreciation, gratitude and so on. Feeling safe enough to think of yourself as being good enough comes from being willing to treat yourself differently.

It comes from being able to relate to yourself in a more comforting and less threatening way. This is why learning how to behave in caring ways toward yourself and receive care and compassion from others could transform your felt sense of safeness and leave you in a more secure position to experience positive feelings about yourself. Being caring towards ourselves, and receiving care from others signals to that vulnerable, sad, frightened part that we are not under attack, and that we have inherent value – our value is not contingent on our achievements – but is there because we exist.



Kindness is one way that we signal to other people that they are safe. That we don't mean them harm. That we are prepared to share resources with them, whether that be time, energy, money, food or even simply our attention and empathy. When you are trapped in a competitive mindset, even if the only person you feel you are competing with is yourself – you may find kindness very threatening – because sometimes the kind thing to do is to slow down, to rest, to take care of your needs or to receive help.

Nevertheless, learning to be kind to yourself will help you to be gentler when you hit setbacks, fail at something or experience vulnerable feelings. You will stop saying harsh things to yourself like “you are rubbish” “you are an idiot” and you will start saying encouraging things like “it's OK to make mistakes” and “I don't have to know everything, not knowing just means there is more to learn”. It is very rewarding to experience pleasant emotions, even when we are going through difficult challenges.

Even small bursts of the neurotransmitters (dopamine) and hormones (oxytocin) that tell us that we are doing something pleasant and safe can restore to us a feeling of being “good enough”. Indeed, as you begin to feel 'safe enough' being good enough won't even be a question in your mind anymore, it will be more a question of “What do I need?” “How can I take care of myself today?” The answers will be things

such as hugs, exercise, meditation, calling a friend for help, witnessing acts of kindness, walking in nature, petting a dog or singing in a group. You don't need to earn those things; you don't need to be 'good enough' to be allowed them. In fact, you might even also start noticing other people's needs, and when possible, helping them which can also bring on feelings of warmth and a sense of purpose.

The truth is that life is filled with suffering; loss; setbacks; failures and rejection. It is a sad but inevitable part of life. There is a different mindset to the competitive one, and it is a mindset that is just as powerful and evolutionarily hardwired. It is called 'the caregiving mindset.' In the caregiving mindset we behave in altruistic, kind, supportive, fair and nurturing ways. In fact, just like with competition, we share this with other social mammals too. When we experience this care, in infancy, childhood and beyond, we have evolved to experience positive feelings.

Sadly, many people have experienced some hurt along the way with a caregiver, which might have left them feeling unsafe when it comes to the caregiving mindset. If you resonate with this – this also is not your fault. It doesn't mean you are not good enough; you just find receiving care a little frightening and so you want to protect yourself. That makes sense, and you can learn to overcome that by practicing being kind to yourself step-by-step.

In fact, do you remember how at the beginning of this article I mentioned to you that:

I am very motivated to help you overcome that the pain of not being good enough, because it hurts to feel the way you do. If you are looking for help that shows you are motivated to overcome it too.

I wrote it that way because I wanted to tell you this now: your motivation to get help, to get an answer for your question, that may come from your caregiving mindset, your desire not simply to improve yourself but rather to take care of yourself. My motivation to help you – that too – comes from the caregiving mindset. It can help to keep that in mind when you go on this journey, not as one of improvement, but one of care – a journey of learning that care does not need to be earned, that you do not need to be 'enough' to have access to pleasant emotions and experiences, or safety.

When we act and think from a position where care is a response to pain – that is true compassion, and it is brave, strong and wise. There are excellent resources that have been developed carefully to support you to safely access inner compassion and rebuild your capacity to access your caregiving mindset.

There is hope and you will be able to feel safe enough to stop asking yourself "why do I never feel good enough" and start realising "I was always enough".

Resources:

<http://threecircles.io/>

<https://www.compassionatemind.co.uk/resource/resources>