

A free workbook from
DR. JAIME BERCUSON, PSYD

The High-Functioning Anxiety Toolkit

Volume 2

For the woman who did the first five tools
and is ready to go deeper.

Five more science-backed tools you can use today.

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Online therapy for high-achieving women · UT · CA · FL

You came back. That says something.

If you're reading this, you already worked through the first toolkit. You sat with the Sunday-Night Reset. You tried the Worry Window. Maybe the boundary scripts made you uncomfortable in the best possible way.

This volume goes deeper. The first toolkit gave you tools for managing anxiety in the moment — the spike, the spiral, the Sunday dread. This one is about the patterns underneath: the perfectionism that drives the anxiety, the self-criticism that fuels it, the invisible labor that exhausts you, and the quiet question of whether you're building a life that actually fits.

These tools are a little softer than Volume 1. Not because you need soft. Because the women I work with have spent their whole lives being hard on themselves, and the bravest thing they do in my office is learn to stop.

Same rules as before: pick one tool. Use it three times. Then come back for another.

“You don't need to earn rest. You need to practice receiving it.”

If something here opens a door you want to walk through with someone, my consult line is at the back.

With care,

Dr. Jaime Bercuson, PsyD

CONTENTS

What's inside

01	The Perfectionism Pause	Page 4
02	The Self-Compassion Letter	Page 6
03	The Values Compass	Page 8
04	The Mental Load Audit	Page 10
05	The Enough List	Page 12
	Next Steps & About Dr. Bercuson	Page 14

HOW TO USE THIS

Same as Volume 1: don't try to do all five at once. Pick the one that makes your stomach flip a little — that's usually the one you need. Use it three times before moving on. These tools build on each other, but they each stand alone.

The Perfectionism Pause

Perfectionism doesn't feel like a problem. It feels like standards. It feels like caring. It feels like *if I just get this right, I'll finally be able to relax*. But you never relax, because the bar moves every time you reach it.

The Perfectionism Pause is a micro-practice for catching that moment — the moment when “good enough” becomes “not good enough” — and choosing to stop anyway.

THE PRACTICE

When you notice yourself revising, re-checking, or delaying because it's “not ready,” pause and answer three questions:

1. What am I afraid will happen if I send/submit/share this as-is?

Name the fear. It's usually about being judged, not about quality.

2. Would I accept this from a colleague I respect?

If yes, your standard is a moving target. Release it.

3. What is the extra hour/revision actually costing me?

Sleep, presence with my family, another task, my nervous system. Name the trade.

WHY THIS WORKS

Perfectionism thrives on autopilot. You don't decide to over-revise — it just happens, because your nervous system has learned that “not perfect” equals “not safe.” The pause interrupts the loop before it completes. Over time, your body learns that releasing imperfect work doesn't lead to catastrophe. That's not a mindset shift. It's a nervous system update.

Use the worksheet on the next page →

Perfectionism pause log

Date _____

01 — What was I perfecting? (the email, the project, the plan, the outfit...)

02 — What was I afraid would happen if I released it as-is?

03 — Would I accept this from someone I respect? (Y / N)

04 — What did the extra time cost me?

05 — Did I release it anyway? What happened?

The Self-Compassion Letter

If your best friend called you and described exactly what you're going through — the pressure, the exhaustion, the feeling of never doing enough — you would never say, *Well, you should be handling this better*. You'd be kind. This tool asks you to write that kindness to yourself.

THE THREE COMPONENTS

Based on Dr. Kristin Neff's research, self-compassion has three parts. The letter touches all three:

Mindfulness — Name what you're feeling without exaggerating or minimizing. "This is really hard right now." Not "I'm fine" and not "Everything is falling apart."

Common humanity — Remind yourself you're not the only one. "Other women feel this way too, even the ones who seem like they have it together."

Self-kindness — Say what you'd say to your friend. Not a pep talk. Just warmth. "You're doing the best you can with what you have right now, and that's enough."

WHY THIS WORKS

High-achieving women often have a well-developed inner critic and an underdeveloped inner ally. Research shows that self-compassion doesn't make you complacent — it actually increases motivation, because you're working from care instead of fear. The letter format works because writing activates different neural pathways than thinking. You can't intellectualize your way into self-compassion. You have to practice it.

Use the worksheet on the next page →

Your self-compassion letter

Date _____

Write to yourself the way you'd write to your closest friend. Start with what's hard right now.

Mindfulness *What are you feeling right now? Name it simply, without judgment.*

Common humanity *Who else might feel this way? What would you want them to know?*

Self-kindness *What do you need to hear? Write it as if you're speaking to someone you love.*

The Values Compass

Most high-achieving women are incredibly good at optimization. The problem is, many of them are optimizing for the wrong scoreboard — one they inherited from a parent, a culture, a grad program, or a version of themselves from ten years ago.

This exercise helps you separate your “*should*” values (what you think you’re supposed to care about) from your “*soul*” values (what actually lights you up when no one’s watching).

THE EXERCISE

Step 1: Look at the values list on the next page. Circle every value that pulls you, even slightly. Don’t filter. Don’t rank. Just notice.

Step 2: Now cross out any that you circled because you think you *should* care about them. Be honest. This is the hardest part.

Step 3: From what’s left, pick your top five. These are your compass. Write them on the worksheet.

Step 4: For each one, rate how much of your actual week — your time, energy, and attention — goes toward it. The gap between “this matters to me” and “I’m actually living this” is where the anxiety lives.

WHY THIS WORKS

Anxiety often spikes when you’re living out of alignment with what matters to you — but you can’t fix alignment you haven’t named. Values clarification is one of the most well-supported exercises in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). When your daily decisions start matching your actual values, the background hum of *something is wrong* gets quieter. Not because you fixed the world. Because you found your place in it.

Use the worksheet on the next page →

Your values compass

Circle what pulls you. Cross out the “shoulds.” Write your top five below.

Adventure	Authenticity	Balance	Beauty	Belonging
Compassion	Connection	Courage	Creativity	Curiosity
Faith	Family	Freedom	Fun	Generosity
Growth	Health	Honesty	Humor	Independence
Intimacy	Joy	Justice	Kindness	Knowledge
Leadership	Love	Loyalty	Nature	Peace
Playfulness	Purpose	Rest	Security	Service
Simplicity	Solitude	Spirituality	Stability	Wisdom

My top five values:

01	Value: _____	How much of my week reflects this? _____
02	Value: _____	How much of my week reflects this? _____
03	Value: _____	How much of my week reflects this? _____
04	Value: _____	How much of my week reflects this? _____
05	Value: _____	How much of my week reflects this? _____

The Mental Load Audit

The mental load is the invisible work that never makes it onto a to-do list: remembering the pediatrician appointment, noticing the soap is low, tracking whose turn it is to bring snacks, anticipating what your partner forgot to plan. It's the project management of a household that no one asked you to run — and no one notices until you stop.

This audit makes the invisible visible. You can't delegate what you haven't named, and you can't set it down if you don't know you're carrying it.

THE CATEGORIES

The mental load breaks into five domains. On the next page, list everything you're carrying in each one:

Household operations — Meals, groceries, cleaning, supplies, maintenance, seasonal swaps

Family and relationships — Schedules, school, medical, gifts, emotional check-ins, social planning

Career and finances — Deadlines, admin, bills, insurance, taxes, professional development

Self and health — Appointments, medication, exercise, sleep, therapy, friendships

Anticipation and planning — Upcoming events, contingency plans, "what if" scenarios, seasonal prep

WHY THIS WORKS

Research on cognitive labor shows that the mental load activates the same stress pathways as a chronically unfinished task. Your brain treats each unresolved item as an open loop, which is why you feel exhausted even when you haven't "done" anything. The audit closes the loops — not by finishing everything, but by getting it out of your head and onto paper, where you can see what's yours, what can be shared, and what can simply stop.

Use the worksheet on the next page →

Mental load audit

List everything you're carrying. Then mark: *K* = keep, *D* = delegate, *S* = stop doing.

Household operations

K / D / S

Family & relationships

K / D / S

Career & finances

K / D / S

Self & health

K / D / S

Anticipation & planning

K / D / S

The Enough List

High-achievers are experts at moving the goalposts. You finish the presentation and immediately think about what you should have added. You get through the week and focus on what you didn't do. The finish line isn't real, because you keep redrawing it.

The Enough List is a daily practice of deciding what “done” looks like *before the day starts* — and honoring it when you get there.

THE PRACTICE

Morning (2 minutes): Before you open your inbox, write down three things. Just three. If these three things happen today, the day counts. Not “the day was productive” — the day *counts*.

Evening (1 minute): Look at your three things. Check off what you did. If you finished them, say it out loud or write it down: “*This was enough.*” If you didn't finish all three, write down what you *did* do. That counts too.

The rule: You are not allowed to add to the list after you've written it. The whole point is that the finish line stays where you put it.

WHY THIS WORKS

Anxiety feeds on open loops and undefined endpoints. When “done” is never defined, your nervous system stays in task mode indefinitely — scanning for the next thing, the missed thing, the better thing. Defining “enough” in advance gives your brain a clear signal that it's safe to shift out of performance mode. It's not about doing less. It's about knowing when you've done what you set out to do — and letting that be sufficient.

Use the worksheet on the next page →

The enough list

Write your three things in the morning. Check them off at night. That's it.

Monday

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Tuesday

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Wednesday

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Thursday

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Friday

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

End-of-week reflection: What was enough this week?

NEXT STEPS

If something here landed, let's do this work together.

I offer online therapy for high-achieving women in Utah, California, and Florida. Sessions are warm, evidence-based, and pointed at change — not endless venting.

The first 15 minutes are free. No pressure, no commitment.

Schedule a Free 15-Minute Consultation →

jaimebercuson.com/contact

(435) 565-1654 · drbercuson@gmail.com

DR. JAIME BERCUSON, PSYD

Licensed Psychologist · California PSY26093 · Florida PY8969 · Utah 103891402501

This toolkit is informational and not a substitute for therapy. If you are in crisis, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline).