

Overcoming Perfectionism

Key Questions:

Do you feel as if what you accomplish is never good enough?

Do you fear failure because you believe that others will not accept or respect you?

Do you put off papers/projects, hoping to get them just right?

Do you put in 100% or more in all that you do to avoid being average?

If the aforementioned statements are true, you may be striving to be perfect rather than working toward success. Perfectionistic qualities can put you under a lot of stress and at risk for emotional distress. Psychologically, people with perfectionistic qualities commonly suffer fears of failure, of making mistakes, and of disapproval.

How did I get this way?

Perfectionism is believed to be learned. It can be a product of early interpersonal experiences in which you may have been valued for your achievement. It can also result from your ways of thinking such as setting unrealistic goals and/or experience of self-defeating thoughts.

Typical Cycle

Unreachable goals are set → Goals are not met → Chronic pressure develops because of failure to reach goals → Self criticism ensues because of failure → Lowered self esteem and mood → Increased efforts so to not fail again (*this is when the cycle can start again*) → Setting unreachable goals.....

Interpersonal Consequences

Individuals with perfectionistic qualities may fear disapproval and rejection by others. They may also react to constructive criticism or feedback defensively, and in the process estrange others. In relationships, individuals with perfectionistic qualities may place their high demands on others, and as a result they can come across as quite critical.

Healthy Alternatives to Perfectionism

- ❑ Realize that NO ONE CAN BE PERFECT and realizing this fact is the first step in moving towards more healthy striving.
- ❑ Try to set your goals one step beyond what you have already accomplished. Pick goals that are potentially attainable.
- ❑ Try setting up different internal standards for what you consider a success. For example, instead of always aiming for 100 percent, try for 90 percent or less. And be sure to appreciate your efforts and realize that you are no different as a person if you score less than perfect.
- ❑ Recognize the value in making mistakes
- ❑ Keep in tune with your emotional states and when feeling down or anxious, ask yourself if your distress may be due to unreasonable standards or expectancies.

- Realize there may be fears behind the perfectionism. Try to figure out what may be fueling fears and confront the thing(s) you fear.

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