

ANXIETY & PERFECTIONISM

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WHAT IS PERFECTIONISM?

Perfectionism is an irrational need for things to be perfect.¹ In other words, mistakes are not an option. When dealing with perfectionism, there are only two possibilities: total perfection or total failure.¹

Research suggests that 1 in 4 adolescents will struggle with perfectionism.² It can show up in many different areas of your life, including school. It is not unusual for individuals dealing with perfectionism to procrastinate or avoid tasks and situations if there is a possibility they will perform less than perfect while carrying them out.²

Perfectionism has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and self-harm.³ As such, if you think you might be dealing with perfectionism it might be helpful to seek out counselling support.

Perfectionism can show up in several different ways, including:

1. Self-Oriented - Expecting perfection from oneself. "I must be perfect."⁴
2. Socially Prescribed - Believing others expect you to be perfect. "People in my life expect me to do everything perfectly."⁴
3. Other-Oriented - Expecting others to be perfect. "I cannot help getting upset if someone I know makes a mistake."⁵

THE GOAL: STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

Let's get real - we all want to experience success and achievement in our lives; but, how we get there is critical. Striving for excellence acknowledges an individual's desire to achieve and is driven by the potential for success. This is unlike perfectionism, which is commonly driven by fear.⁶

While perfectionism comes with 'all or nothing' type thinking, striving for excellence leaves room for the in-between; a person is capable of succeeding while also allowing themselves to make mistakes along the way.⁶ Overall, striving for excellence allows one to have a much more balanced perspective and outlook on personal achievement.⁶

THE POWER OF SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion is a helpful tool to break the cycle of perfectionism. According to Dr. Kristin Neff, a leading researcher in the area, there are three important components of self-compassion, including:

- Self-kindness, which involves one being gentle with themselves when they run into roadblocks or make mistakes,
- Common humanity, which requires one to remember that as human beings we are all inherently flawed, and,
- Mindfulness, which involves acknowledging our thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the present moment, without judgement or over-identifying with them.⁷



For more information,
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References

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- ⁴ Perfectionism and Psychopathology Lab (n.d.a). Child adolescent perfectionism scale. <https://hewittlab.psych.ubc.ca/measures-3/child-adolescent-perfectionism-scale/>
- ⁵ Perfectionism and Psychopathology Lab (n.d.b). 1990 Other-oriented perfectionism scale – revised. <https://hewittlab.psych.ubc.ca/measures-3/1990-other-oriented-perfectionism-scale-revised/>
- ⁶ Martin, S. (2019). *The CBT workbook for perfectionism: Evidence-based skills to help you let go of self-criticism, build self-esteem, and find balance*. New Harbinger Publications.
- ⁷ Neff, K. (2022, September 23). Self-Compassion. Retrieved from <https://self-compassion.org/>