

Recovering Wholeness

Wellness and Wholeness. Restoration and Recovery.
Spirit, Mind, and Body.

Do You Wrestle with Perfectionism?

- What is perfectionism;
- How does it affect your well-being.

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What is Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a personality quality that is linked to the pursuit of excellence and is often associated with striving to be flawless and being critical of imperfections (*Flett & Hewitt, 2002*). Although having perfectionistic tendencies can be a healthy motivator in moderation, excessive perfectionism may cause stress and actually reduce the chances of success. Therefore, the ability to distinguish between healthy (**adaptive**) and unhealthy (**maladaptive**) perfectionism, may help us understand whether we are helping or hurting ourselves.



Is perfectionism a burden or a blessing? Striving for excellence is a good quality, yet even your best strength overused may become a weakness.

Let's explore the characteristics and traits linked to perfectionism, the benefits and downsides of this trait, and how it can affect our well-being.



Components of Perfectionism

There are several components of perfectionism, including self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism.

Self-oriented perfectionism refers to the tendency to set high standards for oneself and to be self-critical when those standards are not met. **Other-oriented perfectionism** involves setting high standards for others and being critical of them when they fail to meet those standards. Finally, **socially prescribed perfectionism** involves feeling pressure from others to be perfect and to meet their expectations.

Consequences of self-oriented perfectionism may be:-

- anxiety;
- depression;
- low self-esteem as individuals may constantly feel like they are not good enough;
- obsessive thinking;
- reassurance-seeking; &
- unattainable goals.

Other-oriented perfectionism can strain relationships and cause resentment from those being held to unrealistic standards:-

- expect others to be perfect;
- constant disappointment leading to hostility towards others;
- impossibly high expectations;
- other-directed blame;
- tendencies to control others with the hope to control the outcome;
- perfectionists perceive themselves as flawless and others as defective.

Socially prescribed perfectionism can lead to burnout and feelings of inadequacy, as individuals may feel like they can never meet the expectations of others. It is important to recognize when perfectionism is becoming detrimental and to strive for balance and self-compassion.

In addition to these three components, perfectionism can also be categorized as adaptive or maladaptive.

Understanding your anxiety, perceptions and tendencies around perfectionism can help individuals identify steps to manage it in a healthy way.

Maladaptive Perfectionism

Maladaptive perfectionism includes:-

- excessive preoccupation and rumination about past mistakes;
- doubts about achieving goals;
- fear of failure;
- fear of letting others down;
- negative emotions especially high for things outside the individual's control;
- severe stress and anxiety

(Smith et al., 2018). If not managed, maladaptive perfectionism can hurt the individual's chances of success and erode their self-esteem and confidence.

Adaptive Perfectionism

Adaptive perfectionism involves setting high standards for oneself but being able to accept and learn from mistakes.

- does not fear failure and is able to receive feedback;
- embrace a growth mindset;
- place more importance on own values than on pressure from outside;
- S.M.A.R.T goals and clear, adjustable, flexible plans on how to achieve goals;
- compete mostly against one's own best;
- do not make self-worth dependant on performance.

All-or-Nothing Thinking	According to a perfectionist, everything can be categorized as either perfect or a failure. Hence, if they notice any mistakes—no matter how minuscule—they tend to see the whole thing as a letdown.
Unrealistic Standards	Perfectionists may have extremely high standards. As a result, they might judge everything through these standards and label almost everything imperfect.
Worry about failure	Perfectionists strive for excellence and worry that they will fail to reach their goals. Moreover, due to their all-or-none thinking and unrealistic standards, it is often difficult for them to achieve perfection.
Tunnel Vision	When perfectionists are worried about failing at something, everything else may become insignificant.
Focus on Outcomes	Laser focused on results, they may disregard every other aspect of the journey.
Excessive Criticism	Highly critical of themselves and others due to unrealistic standards.
Inability to deal with criticism	Highly sensitive due to the fact that they connect their worth to their performance instead of seeing the opportunities to grow and move on.
Procrastination and Avoidance	Perfectionists procrastinate when they don't feel entirely ready or sure that they will produce the perfect result. Learning new skills and improving existing ones may be frustrating if they don't achieve mastery and perfection quickly.

Overcoming Perfectionism

Adaptive perfectionism can indeed make us high achievers. Unfortunately, maladaptive perfectionism can take over our lives and make us anxious and miserable. Luckily, it is something we can overcome.

Suggestions that may help

Be flexible

Learning to be more flexible allows you to adapt to whatever life throws at you and adjust your goals and expectations accordingly.

Setting realistic goals

Aiming high is great as long as your goals are achievable.

Reframe the way you perceive mistakes

Mistakes and mishaps can happen no matter how well-prepared you are or how hard you work. It may help you to reframe them as feedback rather than failure and see it as growth opportunities.

Get help

Sometimes it feels impossible to fix our behaviour alone and then help and an objective perspective can make a world of difference in identifying limiting beliefs and cultivating empowering behaviours.

