

Overcoming Perfectionism

Megan MacCutcheon, M.Ed.

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Do you feel like what you do is never quite good enough? Or believe that you have to do everything flawlessly or else you may be seen as a failure? If so, you probably have perfectionist tendencies and likely find yourself frequently feeling guilty, becoming frustrated, or suffering from low self-esteem.

Perfectionists measure everything they do by what was *not* accomplished rather than by what was. They never seem to measure up to their personal expectations, and, thus, are very judgmental and critical of themselves. Perfectionists have a tendency to utilize “all or nothing thinking.” For example, “If I’m not perfect, I must be worthless,” or “If I make a mistake, I must be incompetent.” Perfectionists discredit the positives and instead focus on shortcomings.

Perfectionism really has to do with fear - Perhaps the fear of not being accepted by yourself or by others, the fear of failure, or the fear of what might happen to you if you are not perfect.

The roots of perfectionism can be traced both to society and to messages we began incorporating into our thinking as we were growing up. Our society is filled with media and advertising that portray unrealistic standards of existence – airbrushed models, super-parents, and those who seem to have it all. Our internal voices begin sending messages that we have to be perfect to measure up.

The long-term consequence of listening to this voice and of perfectionism is burnout. Eventually, perfectionists deplete themselves to the point that their physical and mental resources become exhausted.

In order to overcome our perfectionist tendencies, we need to first identify what they are and determine why they persist. Recognize the various standards and expectations that you impose upon yourself and consider whether they are realistic.

Let go of the idea that your self-worth is determined by your achievements and accomplishments and begin to realize that you have inherent worth simply because you are human. Rely on yourself rather than on society and others to determine your worth. Stop magnifying small errors and instead recognize that mistakes are how we learn. Focus on the positive things you do and be careful of disqualifying things with a “yeah but.” Make peace with your imperfections, weaknesses, and limitations.

It is okay to have goals and standards for yourself, but it is unrealistic and unproductive to expect perfection. Instead, accept yourself as you are and work on goals and expectations that are realistic.