

COMBATING PERFECTIONISM

Nyaka NiiLampti, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist



WHAT IS PERFECTIONISM?

- “ a disposition to regard anything short of perfection as unacceptable”

Webster Dictionary Definition

- People “whose standards are high beyond reach or reason” and “who strain compulsively and unremittingly toward impossible goals and who measure their own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment”

David Burns (1980)



WHAT DOES PERFECTIONISM LOOK LIKE?

- Everything has to be “just right”.
- “I’ll do it myself” (control freaks)
- Don’t take risks or try new things because you may not be good at it.
- “Do it perfectly or not at all”.
- “It’s not quite good enough.”
- “I can’t begin yet because it must be perfect” (chronic procrastinators)
- I “should”, or I “have to”....



PERFECTIONISM

- Self-oriented: self-imposed high standards
- Other-oriented: demanding others to meet your unrealistically high standards
- Socially-prescribed: the belief that others have imposed impossibly high and unrealistic standards
- Excessive concern over mistakes
- High personal standards
- Doubts about actions
- Need for organization
- High parental expectations
- High parental criticism



HOW DID I GET HERE?

- Personality trait?
- Biology?
- Reward and reinforcement
- Punishment
- Early developmental experiences of feeling inadequate or unsuccessful
- Negative self-talk
- Modeling
- Fear of failure



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S A PROBLEM?

- Is my sense of self-worth based on success or failure?
- Can I “shake off” my mistakes?
- Why do I keep putting it off?
- Can I change my expectations, beliefs, and standards when necessary?



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF PERFECTIONISM

- Depression
- Anger
- Social and performance anxiety
- Worry
- Obsessive compulsive behavior
- Body image problems and eating disorders



BEHAVIORAL IMPACTS OF PERFECTIONISM

- Overcompensating
- Excessive checking and reassurance seeking
- Difficulties making decisions
- Procrastination
- Slowness
- Failure to delegate
- Avoidance



HOW DO I CHANGE?

- Assess the impact of perfectionism
- Change perfectionist thoughts
- Change perfectionist behaviors



WAYS TO COMBAT PERFECTIONISM

- Knowing is half the battle!
- Encourage acceptance of limitations, performance, and mistakes
- Stop worrying and start doing
- Start small
- Set realistic and reasonable goals
- Cultivate “learning” rather than “performance” mindset
- Remember that “good enough” is often “more than okay”
- Stress excellence rather than perfection
- Put it into perspective
- Be mindful of the conversations in your head
- Increase mindfulness



RESOURCES

- *When perfect isn't good enough: Strategies for coping with perfectionism*-Antony, Ph.D. and Swinson, MD
- *The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook* -Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle, Ph.D.
- *The Pursuit of Perfect: How to stop chasing perfection and start living a richer, happier life* – Ben-Shahar

