Perfectionism

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Definition

perfectionism |pərˈfek ʃəˌnizəm |

noun

refusal to accept any standard short of perfection. Philosophy/doctrine holding that religious, moral, social, or political perfection is attainable, esp. the theory that human moral or spiritual perfection should be or has been attained.
A desirable goal?

The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra.
Society LOVES Perfection: Where does it come from?

- Family interactions
- Media portrayals
- Internal pressure
- Appreciation for the extraordinary
Is it a **good** thing or a **bad** thing?

**BOTH.**

Perfectionism can be enabling and help one do one’s best.

Atychiphobia can be a powerful motivator for some.

Or, it can be disabling, causing one lots of stress & anxiety.
Characteristics of Perfectionists

- Mistakes: highly conscious and hypercritical of
- Must always be **THE** best
- Procrastinates on work
- Sees the world only in B & W, no shades of gray
- Are own worst critic
- Defends against criticism-takes it personally
- Relive perceived failures
- Starts work over and over and over again
- All or nothing approach to life
Three Major Types of Perfectionists

- **Self-Oriented** perfectionists have internal demands to be perfect and set high standards for themselves. Even when they achieve their high goals, these perfectionists have very little sense of accomplishment. Such people may also have high stress levels and low self-esteem.

- Self-Oriented perfectionism is associated with depression and is linked to depression’s severity over time.
Three Major Types of Perfectionists

- **Other-Oriented** perfectionists expect their coworkers, family, and others to achieve the high goals they have set for themselves. Similar to Self-Oriented perfectionists, little sense of gratitude is felt when others achieve these goals, and poor interpersonal relationships may result.

- Other-Oriented perfectionism is associated with interpersonal problems, including decreased social interaction, marital satisfaction, and family adjustment. This type of perfectionism has fewer effects for the perfectionist than the other dimensions, but is associated with maladjustment for the target of the Other-Oriented perfectionism.
Three Major Types of Perfectionists

- **Socially Prescribed** perfectionists respond to perceived pressures from friends, family, or society. If Socially Prescribed perfectionists achieve their goals, they believe that others expect achievement at an even higher level.

- These feelings may lead to procrastination or low self-esteem.

- Note: The various types of perfectionism may coexist, creating extraordinarily complex sets of functional difficulty.
How can parents and teachers help?

- Praise child for effort, not ability, or success
- Emphasize personal growth
- Model imperfectin
- Provide opportunities for both small successes and failures
- Teach how to move past mistakes
- Model moving past frustration
- Teach coping mechanisms: relaxation techniques, breathing, letting go of tension, etc.
- Talk about others’ mistakes
- Reframe the idea of “finished” in favor of “due”
- Teach how NOT to “awfulize,” imagine the worst then move on
Arlene DeVries (SENG) shares the following tips for perfectionism: “Acknowledge that mistakes are opportunities for learning. Parents can model discussing what they would do differently next time after they experience a ‘mistake’ or ‘failure.’ Students might read biographies of famous persons, such as Thomas Edison or Leonardo da Vinci, who had many failed experiments. Consider the sticky note pads or penicillin discovered by mistake. Know that good things can come from disappointments. When one thing doesn’t work out, it allows time and opportunity to try another activity.”
Recommended Readings


Measures of Perfectionism

*(scientific & anecdotal)*

Based upon Frost’s *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale*. This questionnaire is designed to measure how much of a perfectionist you are. It has 35 questions and should take no more than 10 minutes. (Scale itself is scientific, this quiz not necessarily)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/surveys/perfectionism/


*Quiz: Are You A Perfectionist?* Take The Perfectionist Test! (anecdotal)

http://stress.about.com/od/selfknowledgeselftests/a/perfect_quiz.htm

*The Almost Perfect Scales* (scientific)

https://sites.google.com/site/apsrevised/scales

*The Eating Disorders Inventory - Perfectionism scale* (EDI-P). Garner, D. Olmsted, O., and Polivy, P. (administered by psychologist or other mental health professional).