

What is Perfectionism?

- Setting standards beyond reach and reason
- Never being satisfied by anything less than perfection
- Becoming depressed when faced with failure or disappointment
- Being preoccupied with fears of failure and disapproval
- Seeing mistakes as evidence of unworthiness
- Becoming overly defensive when criticized
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Coping Strategies

1. Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of trying to be perfect.

When you make your own list of costs and benefits, you may find that the costs are too great. You may discover that problems with relationships, workaholism, eating and substance abuse problems, and other compulsive behaviors (plus the accompanying anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, and so on) actually outweigh whatever advantages perfectionism holds for you.

2. Increase your awareness of the self-critical nature of your all-or-nothing thoughts, and how they extend to other people in your life.

Learn to substitute more realistic, reasonable thoughts for your habitually critical ones. When you find yourself criticizing a less-than-perfect performance (whether your own or someone else's), make yourself stop and think about the good parts of that performance.

3. Be realistic about what you can do.

By setting more realistic goals, you will gradually realize that "imperfect" results do not lead to the punitive consequences you expect and fear. Because you're focused on the outcome, you gain little sense of fun or satisfaction from your efforts.

4. Set strict time limits on each of your projects. When the time is up, move on to another activity.

This technique reduces the procrastination that typically results from perfectionism.

5. Learn how to deal with criticism.

Perfectionists often view criticism as a personal attack, which leads them to respond defensively. Concentrate on being more objective about the criticism, and about yourself. Remind yourself that if you stop making mistakes, you also stop learning and growing. Remember that criticism is a natural thing from which to learn, rather than something to be avoided at all costs.

6. Read wise counsel:

Overcoming Perfectionism, Ann W. Smith, in BCCC Library, 616.852. S642

Perfectionism versus Healthy Striving: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/perfectionism.html>

Perfectionism: Myths and Realities

Myth 1. I wouldn't be as successful if I weren't such a perfectionist.

Reality: Although some perfectionists are remarkably successful, what they fail to realize is that their success has been achieved despite—not because of—their compulsive striving.

Myth 2: Perfectionists get things done, and they do things right.

Reality: Perfectionists often have problems with procrastination, missed deadlines, and low productivity.

Myth 3: Perfectionists are determined to overcome all obstacles to success.

Reality: Perfectionistic behaviors increase one's vulnerability to depression, writer's block, performance and social anxiety, and other barriers to success. These blocks to productivity and success result from the perfectionist's focus on the final product.

To talk with a Bucks Student Planning Counselor, call 215.968.8189 or email counseling@bucks.edu to schedule an appointment. It's free and confidential.