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What is Perfectionism?

Perfectionism is a belief that everything must always be perfect and flawless. Perfectionists set impossible and unrealistic goals for themselves. When those goals are not met, they can feel crushed and consider themselves failures. Striving for excellence, on the other hand, looks like setting high yet achievable goals.

Perfectionism	Striving for Excellence
Believes that everything must always be perfect	Recognizes that some situations call for perfection (e.g., performing surgery) while other situations do not (e.g., choosing an outfit)
Spends large amounts of time on insignificant problems	Addresses the most important and pertinent problems
Sets impossible standards for success and feels upset when they are not met	Sets challenging yet achievable standards and feels content when they are met
Motivated by fear of failure, criticism, or rejection	Motivated by the potential for success and happiness
Sees self only in extremes: as perfect or a failure	Views self from a balanced perspective that encompasses strengths and weaknesses

Challenges of Perfectionism

- Difficulty making decisions, then second-guessing or regretting decisions
- Risk-averse due to fear of failure
- Difficulty with commitment, such as in relationships or career
- Low self-esteem due to not meeting impossible standards

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Domains of Perfectionism (check which apply):

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Bodily hygiene | <input type="checkbox"/> Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Social relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation of documents | <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling | <input type="checkbox"/> Dress | <input type="checkbox"/> Romantic relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating habits | <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Chores/
Cleanliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Correspondence/
mail |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leisure activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Oral presentations | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical appearance | <input type="checkbox"/> Way of speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time management/
punctuality | | | |

Which domain(s) of perfectionism apply to your life?

How does your perfectionism manifest?

Relevant information:

- Perfectionism contributes to problems such as procrastination, stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Perfectionism is not necessarily present in all aspects of one's life. It is possible to be perfectionistic in one area of life and not another.
- The trait of perfectionism has been found to be moderately heritable.
- Disorders associated with perfectionism (e.g., social anxiety, eating disorders, and depression) are moderately heritable.

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Want to learn more?

Resources for Therapists:

- Sirois, F., & Molnar, D.S. (2016). *Perfectionism, Health, and Well-Being*. Springer.
- Egan, S.J., Wade, T.D., Shafran, R., & Antony, M.M. (2014). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of perfectionism*. Guilford Press.
- Stoeber (ed.) (2017). *The psychology of perfectionism: theory, research, applications*. Routledge.
- Hewitt, P.L., Flett, G.L., & Mikail, S.F. (2017). *Perfectionism: A relational approach to conceptualization, assessment, and treatment*. Guilford Press.
- Flett, G.L., & Hewitt, P.L. (2022). *Perfectionism in childhood and adolescence: A developmental analysis*. American Psychological Association.

Resources for Adults:

- Antony, M.M., & Swinson, R.P. (2009). *When perfect isn't good enough: Strategies for coping with perfectionism* (2nd ed.). New Harbinger Publications.
- Shafran, R., Egan, S., & Wade, T. (2018). *Overcoming perfectionism: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques* (2nd ed.). Robinson.

Resources for Teens:

- Dobosz, A.M. (2016) *Perfectionism workbook for teens: Activities to help you reduce anxiety and get things done*. New Harbinger Publications.

Resources for Children:

- Anderson, S. (2015). *Penelope Perfect: A tale of perfectionism gone wild*. Free Spirit Publishing.
- Burns, E.F. (2008). *Nobody's perfect: A story for children about perfectionism*. imagination press.
- Freeland, C.A.B., & Toner, J.B. (2016). *What to do when mistakes make you quake: A kid's guide to accepting imperfection*. imagination press.