

What Is Perfectionism?

A person with perfectionism sets unrealistically high standards on his or her performance, rigidly adheres to these standards, and equates self-worth with performance. An all-pervasive attitude toward life, perfectionism can create debilitating emotions and unproductive behavior.

Recognizing perfectionistic behaviors and thoughts along with setting goals based on wants, desires, and likes instead of expectations are ways to overcoming the unhealthy belief that perfection is possible.

Warning Signs

- Fear of failure or making mistakes
- Fear of disapproval
- Thinking that it's all or nothing, black or white, perfect or inadequate
- Structuring life on “shoulds” that serve as rigid rules
- Believing that success comes easy for everyone else
- Guilt, pessimism, low self-esteem
- Rigidity
- Lack of motivation, extensive procrastination
- Heightened anxiety caused by worrying about the “what-ifs” of upcoming events (tests, speeches, dates, etc.)
- Inability to enjoy successes and leisure if other hurdles remain
- Depression

Related Scriptures

He does not condemn you.

Romans 8:1

He forgives you.

1 John 1:9

He loves you.

John 3:16

He offers rest.

Matthew 11:28-30

When we decide to follow Christ, we are deemed “not guilty”—perfect (Hebrews 10:8-14). Because He died on the cross for us, *our relationship* with God is perfect and unchanging (Colossians 2:9-10).

Our actions in pursuing God and earthly success, on the other hand, are not perfect and never will be, as Paul says in Philippians 3:12: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” We are called to strive to follow Him as best as we can and work toward our earthly goals (Colossians 3:23), but never let our own pride or desire for perfection overpower the perfection we have in relationship with Christ.

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Perfectionism



A Quick Reference Guide

Provided by the
Office of Student Life

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How to Defeat Perfectionism

- Take a realistic look at how you are living and how you relate to others and yourself. Think about the perfectionism warning signs.
- Consider asking a friend to offer an objective opinion.
- Be balanced. You are a human *being*, not a human *doing*. There is more to life than what you can accomplish. Family, friends, and having fun are important, too.
- Set a goal to re-balance or re-prioritize your life accordingly and pray for help in doing this.
- Admit that you are imperfect, and be honest with those you trust about your struggles and needs.
- Separate who you are from what you do. You (and others) are lovable and valuable for your unique personality, gifts, dreams, feelings, and experiences.
- Shift your mindset. Instead of making demands or placing unreasonable expectations on yourself and others, take an attitude of “I would like to...,” “I’m going to work toward...,” and “I’d appreciate it if you could...”
- Strive to do an excellent job at what is most important to you, remembering that excellent means “very good,” not perfect.
- When you are working on a project, remember to enjoy the process.
- When you do a good job, feel proud of yourself. When someone compliments you, say “thank you.”

What if These Suggestions Don’t Work For Me?

If perfectionism is still a struggle after trying the above suggestions, consider seeking further help (See On- and Off-Campus Support).



Other Facets of Perfectionism*

- Concern over mistakes: Perfectionists tend to interpret mistakes as equivalent to failure and believe they will lose the respect of others following failure.
 - High personal standards: Perfectionists don’t just set very high standards but place excessive importance on those standards for self-evaluation.
 - Parental expectations: Perfectionists tend to believe their parents set very high goals for them.
 - Parental criticism: Perfectionists perceive that their parents are (or were) overly critical.
 - Doubting actions: Perfectionists doubt their ability to accomplish tasks.
 - Organization: Perfectionists tend to emphasize order.
- * “Pitfalls of Perfectionism” from www.psychologytoday.com

On- and Off-Campus Support

On Campus

Office of Student Life: available to talk and pray with you as well as suggest options for further care (BC252; ext. 6300)

Counseling Services: offers free support (Townhouse H1; ext. 8540)

Office of Campus Ministries: provides spiritual support and mentoring (HC325; ext. 6372)

Off Campus

Arden Woods Psychological Services
(New Brighton): 651.482.9361

Midwest Center for Trauma and Emotional Healing
(Minnetonka): 952.934.2555

Minnesota Renewal Center
(Arden Hills): 651.486.4828

Additional Resources

Online:

www.newhopenow.org

Books:

Healing Grace: Finding Freedom from the Performance Trap

By David Seamands

Hope for the Perfectionist

By David Stoop

When Your Best Isn’t Good Enough

By Kevin Leman