



Perfectionism: the facts and some solutions

What is perfectionism?

Perfectionism is about unrealistic expectations that you might have for yourself and for other people in your life.

Some people expect themselves to be perfect (self-oriented perfectionism), some people expect other people to be perfect (other-oriented perfectionism), and some people think that other people in their life, like a parent or coach, expect them to be perfect (socially prescribed perfectionism).

Everyone has perfectionism to some degree. Some people have high levels of perfectionism. Other people have low levels of perfectionism. Most of us are somewhere in between.



What does perfectionism lead to?

The consequences of perfectionism depend on what form you have and the amount that you have.

Research has found that expecting yourself to be perfect is, in some circumstances, related to some positive things, like hard work and dedication. However, it is also related to lots of negative things, such as anxiety and worry, and over time is likely to be bad for your wellbeing.

Expecting other people to perform perfectly is usually related to negative things; especially, less supportive relationships with other people. This means you are less likely to feel supported when you need help.

When you believe that other people expect you to be perfect, this is the most negative form of perfectionism. It is related to a range of issues including severe mental health problems.

How do we overcome perfectionism?

Most of us can learn to cope with our perfectionism better. Here are three things we can all do.

- 1. Do not base your self-esteem on how you perform.** Instead, try to feel good about things you have more control over, such as being a kind person or how hard you work.
- 2. Cut yourself some slack.** No one is perfect. Mistakes will happen and when they do, focus on the positives. Mistakes mean you are trying new things and learning.
- 3. Getting things done is better than getting things perfect.** Try not to put things off and avoid overthinking things. When it's done, it's done.

If you are having serious problems with your mental health (eg, you are upset all the time), you should speak with your parents, teachers, or doctor. **Young Minds** and **Student Minds** also provide information on a range of topics designed to help young people.



Other resources and references

Dobosz, A, M (2016). *The perfectionism workbook for teens: Activities to help you reduce anxiety and get things done*. New Harbinger; Workbook edition.

Greenspon, T (2007). *What to do when good enough isn't good enough*. Minneapolis, MA: Free Spirit Publishing.

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