Moving Past Perfect: A Guide To Recovery From Perfectionism
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Perfectionism is the combination of a desire to be perfect, a fear of imperfection, and an emotional conviction that perfection is the route to personal acceptability. **Perfectionism is a self esteem issue:** it burdens lives, interferes with creativity, and makes intimate relations difficult. The bright line distinguishing perfectionism from the pursuit of excellence is the perfectionistic anxiety about mistakes, which seem to reflect a personal defect. Everyone is disappointed by mistakes. Perfectionists may be devastated by them.

**Some Perfectionistic Behaviors:**
Overcommits
Rarely delegates work to others
Has a hard time making choices
Always has to be in control
Competes fiercely
Arrives late because one more thing had to be done
Always does last-minute cramming
Gets carried away with the details
Never seems satisfied with her work
Constantly busies himself with something or other
Frequently criticizes others
Refuses to hear criticism of herself
Pays more attention to negative than positive comments
Checks up on other people’s work
Calls herself “stupid” when she does something imperfectly
Procrastinates

**Some Perfectionistic Thoughts:**
If I can’t do it perfectly, what’s the point?
I should excel at everything I do.
I always have to stay ahead of others.
I should finish a job before doing anything else.
Every detail of a job should be perfect.
Things should be done right the first time.
There is only one right way to do things.
I’m a wonderful person if I do well — lousy if I do poorly.
I’m never good enough.
I’m stupid.
I can’t do anything right.
I’m unlikable.
I’d better not make a mistake or people will think I’m not very
. . . (smart, good, capable).
If I goof up, something’s wrong with me.
People shouldn’t criticize me.
Everything should be clearly black or white.
‘Grays’ are just a sign of confused thinking

**Some Perfectionistic Feelings:**
Deeply embarrassed about mistakes she makes
Disgusted or angry with himself when he is criticized
Anxious when stating her opinion to others
Worried a lot about details
Angry if his routine is interrupted
Nervous when things around him are messy
Fearful or anxious a lot
Exhausted and unable to relax
Plagued by self-hatred
Afraid of appearing “stupid”
Afraid of appearing incompetent
Afraid of being rejected  
Ashamed of having fears

Excellence is risk.  
Perfectionism is fear.
Excellence is effort.  
Perfectionism is anger and frustration.
Excellence is openness to being wrong.  
Perfectionism is having to be right.
Excellence is spontaneity.  
Perfectionism is control.
Excellence is flow.  
Perfectionism is pressure.
Excellence is confidence.  
Perfectionism is doubt.
Excellence is journey.  
Perfectionism is destination.
Excellence is acceptance.  
Perfectionism is judgment.
Excellence is encouraging.  
Perfectionism is criticizing.

PERFECTIONISM DOES NOT DETERMINE SUCCESS — TALENT, ENERGY, and COMMITMENT DO.  
PERFECTIONISTS ARE SUCCESSFUL DESPITE THEIR PERFECTIONISM — NOT BECAUSE OF IT.

“Human Psych 101”
Three universal facets of human experience...
Making sense of the world  
...What does it mean if I make a mistake?
Regulating emotions  
...Managing the fear of making mistakes
Maintaining human connections  
...Seeking acceptance by others/ Wanting a place to belong and feel important

Creating an Environment of Acceptance:
Empathy  
What do mistakes mean to you?
Self reflection  
Do I tolerate mistakes in myself? Others?
Encouragement  
What do I appreciate about you personally, separate from performance.
Dialogue  
Joint problem solving. Connections with one another.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:
—— (2010, November). The pivotal role of gifted self-experience in performance and emotional health. Audio: presentation at the 57th Annual Convention, National Association for Gifted Children, Atlanta, GA.
—— Video Interview on Perfectionism: <www.iag-online.org> Nov. 2009