



“PERFECTIONISM”

What to look for:

Perfectionism Signs

Individuals who identify or behave as perfectionists are characterized by a persistent dissatisfaction no matter the process or outcome. These individuals may constantly compare themselves to others or occupy unrealistic expectations or pressures. Perfectionists can also tend to be more self-critical toward their goals which can cause distress that leads to poor self-judgment, anxiety, and negative emotions. Individuals in high-performance environments may experience social or environmental pressures causing them to feel a need to perform perfectly according to expectations established by social norms.

Perfectionism can have many effects. Task performance in school or at work can become more difficult as an individual attempts to complete the task perfectly. Unrealistic standards and expectations can be placed within intimate relationships and friendships leading to unnecessary stress and pressure. An individual may also experience difficulty in areas related to managing their day-to-day personal health as well as challenges in productivity and efficiency. Perfectionists can tend to express feelings of failure, procrastinate due to fear of imperfection, desire for others to meet the level of expectations set for oneself, experience difficulty in sharing their thoughts and feelings, and become over- or under-occupied with their pursuits.

For youth in sports, perfectionism can derive from learned experiences within competitive engagement. Parents, coaches, and peers can contribute to a youth developing a perfectionistic mentality. While sports can foster a healthy goal orientation and lifestyle, competitive activities or play can exacerbate perfectionistic behaviors due to comparing oneself to others, pressures of meeting expectations, and a constant drive to compete with oneself. Young athletes tend to respond to pressures and drives for achievement which can cause them to develop unrealistic standards that can lead to negative emotions, anxiety, and fears of failure. Young athletes that tend to focus on results as opposed to the process of engaging in their sport tend to set higher expectations followed by a relentless effort that can lead to unhealthy consequences such as overtraining and burnout, negative self-talk, and emotional dysfunction. When a young athlete is able to remain balanced in their motivations and expectations, they are better able to accept failure and learning as a part of their developing process. These athletes maintain a consistent work ethic and high commitment toward their goals without placing excessive forms of pressure on themselves.

What you can do:

Self-help

If you or your child have concerns regarding perfectionistic thinking, it can be beneficial for you to see a mental health professional for further guidance. Therapy can help you identify stressors and triggers to perfectionistic responses and behaviors while supporting you or your child through a process of continual personal growth.

Therapeutic intervention creates better insight, self-empowerment, and skills to respond to your specific needs.

If you are the athlete, you can coach yourself to give attention to what you enjoy about competing. Giving attention to what you enjoy may take you away from self-punishing perfectionism. A small part of this is that you can coach yourself to laugh at your mistakes, while also trying to improve your game.

A healthy perfectionism can be influenced by setting healthy personal standards to remain motivated toward one's goals without promoting excessive behaviors that lead to psychological distress or burnout. For young athletes, parents and coaches can be vital to responding to perfectionistic tendencies in real-time by encouraging positive self-talk, setting smaller and more manageable goals, promoting the learning and developing process over results, and having open and consistent communication with the youth to reframe negative thoughts and feelings associated with performance in sport. For example, "Of course, I make mistakes. I'm human. My disappointment tells me that the game is important to me. This is a good thing. If the game was not important to me, I would not be disappointed." By providing an environment that supports individual expression, self-compassion, and empathy for others, the youth has a better opportunity to embrace failure as learning while embracing the intangible traits of their process.

It may also be helpful to adopt and teach self-strategies that challenge perfectionistic tendencies while searching for a therapist. If you struggle with "all or nothing" thinking, reminders to remain balanced in perspective can allow for formulating acceptance within situations. Utilizing and encouraging positive self-talk and the use of positive affirmations can be effective tools for combat negative thoughts and feelings and a poor self-image. Remain active and engage in new learning opportunities while being compassionate to your process of learning. Celebrate mistakes for what you have learned and how much you have contributed to your growth.

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Link: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/perfectionism>

Perfectionism in Sport—IResearchNet

Link: <http://psychology.iresearchnet.com/sports-psychology/sports-and-personality/perfectionism-in-sport/>

The Downside of Perfectionism in Sports—Sports Psychology Today

Link: <http://www.sportpsychologytoday.com/youth-sports-psychology/the-downside-of-perfectionism-in-sports/>