



Perfectionism: Discerning the Myths from Reality

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Perfectionism is a personality trait focused on flawlessness. It involves setting remarkably high standards and becoming particularly critical when those standards are not met. Perfectionism often encompasses a fear of disapproval, failure, or inadequacy, a focus on results, and an overall expectation of nothing less than perfect. This article will provide clarity regarding common misperceptions about perfectionism as well as provide strategies to help cope with it.

Myth #1: Perfectionism is a *good* thing.

Reality: Perfectionism can be divided into two dimensions, adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. The core distinction involves a person's view or perception of themselves regarding their areas of achievement.

Adaptive perfectionism pertains to setting goals and striving for achievement of those goals. In adaptive perfectionism, one uses their standards simply as a guide to achieve success. If success is not met, adaptive perfectionists are less preoccupied with their failure and either reassess their goal or simply try again.

Maladaptive perfectionism encompasses concerns such as fear of failure, fear of criticism, self-criticism, self-doubt, and excessive concerns over mistakes. In maladaptive perfectionism, one's view of achievement becomes far too dependent on whether or not demanding standards are met. Individuals who display maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies often become engrossed with the idea that they have "failed" and thus continue to pursue these standards despite the consequences they may have.

Myth #2 Perfectionists are efficient and meet deadlines.

Reality: Perfectionists often struggle with procrastination. Self-doubt can manifest itself in prolonged levels of procrastination, due to excessive fear of failure that pushes actual task completion off to avoid imaginable failure for as long as possible. The more fear of failure one experiences, the more likely they are to engage in procrastination. Thus, chronic procrastination can have a devastating impact on one's productivity and efficiency, as well as their ability to meet deadlines.

Myth #3 Perfectionism leads to success.

Reality: It is important to note that perfectionism can lead to serious negative psychological effects. Engagement in maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies can affect emotional, social, physical, cognitive,

and behavioral functioning. The consequences can be pervasive. Maladaptive perfectionism can lead to developing depression, anxiety disorders, disordered eating, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. It has been found to negatively impact stress levels and even result in suicidal ideation. Research has repeatedly shown that perfectionism can have extremely negative consequences on these various areas of functioning, especially on one's mental health.

Myth #4 Perfectionism makes you more likeable.

Reality: People often believe that being perceived as perfect is considered a likeable trait and is less likely to lead to rejection. Nonetheless, perfectionists' constant fear of disapproval often negatively impacts their social relationships. The reality is that oftentimes perfectionists have difficulty developing close relationships with others. This may be due to their rigid expectations of themselves and others. They may place their demanding expectations on others, which results in more unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships. Likewise, perfectionists are fearful of other's perceiving them as anything less than perfect. Thus, oftentimes perfectionists are less honest, engage in less self-disclosure within personal relationships, and attempt to appear as impeccable towards others, all of which might contribute to negative evaluation from others.

Myth #5: Perfectionism is *permanent*.

Reality: Overcoming perfectionism is possible. Perfectionistic thoughts and behaviors can indeed be changed. Through mindful self-compassion, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and assessing the ability to set appropriate goals based on wants and needs, perfectionistic tendencies can be altered. Giving up aspects of one's perfectionism does not mean letting go of it completely. In fact, it is possible to decrease maladaptive perfectionism while increasing adaptive perfectionism. The motivation to change these tendencies is of core importance. Explore the reasons for holding on to your perfectionism. It is likely serving a function in your life. It's also important to remember that setting unrealistic standards from the start will set anybody up for failure. Start by creating standards or goals that are more realistic and achievable. Experiment with your standards if need be and explore what fits best with your abilities. Focus on the steps and process of achieving the goal as opposed to the sole result or desire of success. Reduce engagement in cognitive distortions such as all or nothing thinking, believing that things are "all black or all white" so to speak. Challenging these thoughts can help tackle the distress associated with perfectionism. These are just some of the many ways that perfectionism can be addressed. Additionally, seeking professional services may help with some of the concerns and strategies provided in this article.

If you or someone you know could benefit from talking to someone about perfectionism and would like the name of a qualified psychologist in your area, please try our [Psychologist Locator](#)