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Coping with Perfectionism

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If we were to associate OCD with another word, it would likely be perfectionism. Most people who experience this condition have perfectionist tendencies, making it difficult for them to accept even insignificant mistakes or flaws.

Although high standards can often lead to exceptional performances, when it comes to OCD, the costs may far outweigh the benefits. What's troubling about perfectionism, is that it impairs our ability to distinguish between important and unimportant tasks, in which to invest our time and energy. Luckily though, there are certain behaviors you can engage in, in order to keep your perfectionism from becoming unhealthy.

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It's the Road, Not the Destination

People who are obsessed with perfection have a tendency to focus solely on the finished product. For them, the process of getting to the final result is just a necessary step, nothing more. If the final product is not according to their rigid expectations, the entire process is considered a total waste of time and energy.

Being Happy with Your Work

People who are truly happy and successful take pride in their work, regardless of the final result. They know that the journey is just as important as the destination.

Make Peace with Yourself

Oftentimes, those of us who struggle with perfectionism use double standards. In other words, we apply extremely rigid standards to ourselves, but not to others. These standards can either be self-imposed or “imprinted” by teachers and caregivers, during our childhood. The main reason why we keep using them is because we believe that these rigid standards are the only way to avoid failure and reach success.

Time for Change

For many people the past is still a heavy burden, but perhaps now is the time for a change. Make peace with yourself and your past, if you want to live a happy and peaceful life. Let go of those rigid standards that no longer serve you. Once you obtain personal freedom, your performance will automatically improve, because you’re no longer motivated by self-criticism, but by an intrinsic desire to do something truly amazing, not necessarily perfect.

For the Fun of It

In most cases, perfectionism goes hand in hand with productivity. We want our results to be useful, applicable, cost-effective, and so on. Whether it’s hobbies and leisure activities or work and school-related projects, perfectionists will always aim high.

For a “pathological” perfectionist, even a friendly, casual game of basketball is an opportunity to show off their unbeatable skills. Instead of having fun and spending quality time with friends and loved ones, we choose to engage in pointless competitions, just because we seek perfection in everything.

A New Strategy

Next time someone invites you to participate in a fun activity, make an effort to focus entirely on the fun and not on being the best at it. By doing this, you’ll allow your mind to get used to the idea of doing something that isn’t necessarily productive, thus refraining from perfectionist tendencies.

Be Thankful

Perfectionists always want more. Whether it’s social status, money or education, they cannot rest until they have it all. Their ambition is equaled only by their strong desire to achieve perfection. It’s a never ending race where success is only achieved, but not celebrated.

Once they reach a certain goal, they immediately jump to another. If we don't take pride in our personal and professional victories, what's the point of striving for them? Make a habit of celebrating your success, thus showing gratitude, toward yourself and others, for everything you've achieved so far.

Making Distinctions

This is probably what makes the difference between “functional” and “dysfunctional” perfectionists. It's all about the ability to distinguish between critical and trivial tasks. Those of us who use perfectionism in a functional manner are well aware of the fact that not all tasks require a set of rigid standards.

If you want to learn how to distinguish between critical and trivial, just try to envision the end result. Now, will anyone give you extra credit for getting the job done perfectly or is this an unimportant task? Also, is there a pre-established set of standards, which you can lean on, so you don't fall into a rigid pattern? Last but not least, how much time and energy do you have to put into this task, in order to perfect it? Is it worth it?

These were just a few insightful questions to get you thinking about perfectionism, but you can come up with your own as well.

Ultimately, perfectionism is not intrinsically bad, you just have to know when to use it.

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