

# How to Be Less of a Perfectionist and Enjoy Life More

*This is the second of a series of two newsletters that explore the dynamics of perfectionism. In my last newsletter, you learned what perfectionism is and why people develop the need to do things perfectly. In this issue, you will learn how to change your perfectionist behaviors and enable yourself to be more satisfied with yourself and your life.*

You will have the greatest success if you read the first newsletter and take some time to observe your own perfectionist patterns. Once you have accomplished that, choose a few of the strategies outlined here. Keep working at it until you understand what you need to do to accept your imperfections and humanness.

## **Create a Support Network for Yourself**

Seek out people who are not perfectionists. Encourage your support network to not be rigid or moralistic in their attempts to keep you on an honest course. Look for people who forgive and forget when mistakes, failures, offenses, or backsliding occur. Ask them to tell you when they think you are being rigid, unrealistic, or idealistic in your behavior. Ask them to give you positive reinforcement for any positive change, no matter how small. Seek out people who have a sincere interest in your personal growth.

## **Do Some Self-Exploration**

Explore the following questions in your journal, make some notes here, or discuss them with a trusted friend or professional counselor:

1. Where do you see perfectionist behavior in your life?

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2. How do these behaviors create problems for you?

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3. What perfectionist beliefs do you have?

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4. How do you think these beliefs will affect your ability to change your behavior?

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5. What do you need to do to become less of a perfectionist and more relaxed about things?

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6. How can you use your support system to help yourself be less of a perfectionist?

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## Identify Alternative Behaviors

Make a list of specific perfectionist behaviors that you want to change. For each one, think of something specific you could do instead. For example:

- *Perfectionist behavior:* I expect my teenage daughter to pick up the clothes off her floor and make her bed every day.
- *Alternative behavior:* I can expect my daughter to clean her room every Saturday and I will close her door every other day.

Note your own examples here:

Perfectionist behaviors: \_\_\_\_\_

Alternative behaviors: \_\_\_\_\_

## Lower Your Expectations

It is very important to understand that it is unrealistic to expect to change your behavior (or someone else's) immediately or completely.

## Make a List of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Being Perfect

You may find that perfection is too costly. Perhaps you will discover that relationship problems, endless working, and other compulsive behaviors (eating disorders and substance abuse problems) are too high a price for the results you gain from your perfectionist way of being.

## Pay Attention to Your Behavior and Attitudes

As you see yourself behaving in a perfectionist way, take note. In the beginning, just observe yourself. Keep a log if it helps you see your behavior more clearly. You don't have to make any changes until you have a good idea of your specific behaviors and thoughts.

## Try Some New Thoughts and Behaviors

Begin to substitute the alternative behaviors you identified earlier. If possible, ask someone from your support network for feedback. Observe your feelings and thoughts as you try new things.

## Review Your Goals and Make Sure They Are Realistic

By having achievable, realistic goals, you will gradually see that less-than-perfect results are not as disastrous as you thought they would be.

## **Set Strict Time Limits for Your Projects**

When the time is up, move on to another task or take a break.

## **Make Friends with Criticism**

Many perfectionists take criticism personally and respond defensively. If someone criticizes you when you make a mistake, the easiest thing to do is to simply admit it. Remind yourself that you are human, meaning you will sometimes make mistakes. The people who never make mistakes are no longer learning or growing. Learn to re-frame criticism and see it as information you can learn from.

When you let go of the fantasy that humans must be perfect to have value in this world, you are less likely to feel angry or embarrassed when you make a mistake. You will see that criticism is information that you can learn from, and you will no longer need to avoid it.