**Perfectionism**

**Does This Sound Familiar?**

* I am never completely happy with my accomplishments because my standards are too high.
* I avoid answering questions or even giving opinions because I may say something dumb.
* If I don’t give 100%, the outcome will be mediocre.
* I delay completion of projects because I cannot get them just right.

Perfectionism is a set of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors aimed at excessively high and unattainable goals. Among the underlying beliefs are the following:

* Mistakes must not be made.
* The highest standards must always be met.
* Failure to reach my goals equals shortcomings in me as a person.
* If others see my flaws, they will judge me negatively.
* Wants and desires are secondary to goal achievement.
* The world is black and white, good and bad, right and wrong, with no gray areas.

**HEALTHY GOAL SETTING VERSUS PERFECTIONISTIC GOAL SETTING**

The pursuit of excellence by individuals who enjoy setting and attaining high standards is not perfectionism. A healthy goal setter has drive. A perfectionist is driven and does not enjoy the process of goal attainment. Perfectionists have a hard time seeing this difference. Do you?

**Healthy Goal Setting**

* Healthy goal setting is based on wants and desires.
* Healthy goals are one step beyond present or previous accomplishments.
* Pleasure can be derived from the process of working toward the goal.
* Disapproval or failure can be seen as specific to the situation (e.g. I didn’t earn an A on this exam. I’ll focus on my weak areas so that I can do better on the final exam)

**Perfectionist Goal Setting**

* Goals are often based on the expectations of others.
* Your goal is perfection or the best all the time.
* The focus is on the end result; not the process of working towards the goal.
* Disapproval or failure is generalized to self-worth. (e.g. I am a failure because I didn’t receive an A on this test)

**OVERCOMING PERFECTIONISM**

Here are some steps to help you let go of the perfectionistic habit.

* Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of trying to be perfect.
* Note any self-criticism when you do not reach your goal. Is the criticism realistic? Is it helpful?
* Try changing your standards to 90% of your original for a few projects.
* Set strict time limits on tasks. When that time limit is up, move on to something else.
* Recognize than an activity involves more than the end result. What was the process or journey like? What did you learn?
* Ask yourself: what is the worst thing that could happen if I don’t do this task perfectly?
* When you make a mistake ask yourself what you can learn from the mistake.
* Recognize that most criticism is specific to an action. It is rarely a rejection of the individual
* Challenge underlying beliefs. ***Change:*** “If I’m not perfect, I’m not good enough” ***To:*** “It’s okay that I make mistakes. It’s part of being human.”

**Adapted from Purdue University Academic Success Center**