

PERFECT IS *BURRING*

Why your quest for perfection is making you miserable and holding you back.



@ashking

Perfectionism.

How it shows up.

Perfectionism is a mindset characterised by a concern for flawlessness and perfection. It involves the relentless striving for extremely high standards in one or multiple areas of your life, and self-worth is often assessed according to how well (or how poorly) you meet these standards. There may also be number of negative consequences experienced as a result of setting such demanding a standards that outweigh any positive outcomes.

Perfectionism is often accompanied by critical self-talk and a deep concern regarding what other people are thinking or feeling about you.

What might perfectionism look & feel like?

- ___ Fixation on the outcome of a situation being “perfect”, and anything less is considered failure.
- ___ The need to control other people’s opinons and feelings about you, often so that they are positive or flattering.
- ___ Difficulty with starting new things, out of a deep seated fear that they wont be “good enough”.
- ___ Difficultly taking breaks or stopping, because you cannot rest until it’s perfect.
- ___ Avoidance and procrastination, in an effort to distract yourself from things that need doing out of fear that they will not be “good enough”.
- ___ Frustration or judgement directed at others when they do not uphold the same unrelenting standards.
- ___ Your self-worth is solely based on achievement, productivity and outward, extrinsic markers of success.
- ___ Inflexibility with schedules or routine.
- ___ Failure to delegate because no one’s efforts will be good enough.
- ___ Giving up too soon because things are not up to your standards.
- ___ Excessive need for reassurance, approval and praise.

Wait, isn't Perfectionism a good thing?

Sometimes. In some circumstances, setting high standards and working towards them can be motivating and help you achieve great things. It can also be an indication of the things that you value in life, and that inspire you to put in the extra effort or go that extra mile.

However, perfectionism also has a dark side - where it starts negatively impacting your quality of life - by decreasing your productivity, blocking your creativity, and hurting your relationships with others, and also with yourself. Here are some hallmarks of a perfectionistic mindset.

- ▶ Fear of failure.
Failure to achieve goals equals incompetence & unworthiness.
- ▶ Fear of making mistakes.
Making mistakes equals failure. By orienting life around avoiding mistakes, perfectionists miss opportunity for learning and growth.
- ▶ Fear of disapproval or rejection.
Perfectionists fear that, if people see their flaws or their vulnerabilities, they will be criticised, rejected and disapproved of.
- ▶ All-or-Nothing thinking.
Accomplishments are not worthy if they're anything less than perfect.
- ▶ Overcompensating
Performing a behaviour excessively to make sure nothing goes wrong.
- ▶ Excessive checking and reassurance seeking.
- ▶ Excessive organising and list making.
- ▶ Procrastination & Avoidance.

“Perfectionism is not the same thing as striving to be our best. Perfectionism is not about healthy achievement and growth; it’s a shield.”

- Brene Brown

Exercise 1.

The Costs of Perfectionism

When it comes to confronting perfectionism, it's worth exploring how this mindset impacts your work, creativity and relationships.

Ask yourself the following questions:

How does perfectionism limit you?

(“I’m going to fail so this isn’t worth doing”, “I can’t enjoy myself doing anything that I’m not amazing at.”, etc.)

What are the consequences of perfectionism in different areas of your life?

(E.g. high levels of stress, creativity “blocks”, procrastination, critical self-talk, inability to be vulnerable with others, burnout, low self esteem, etc.)

What do you miss out on as a result of your perfectionism?

(E.g. moments of rest & relaxation, the freedom to fail and learn from that experience, the chance to do something just for the fun of it, the opportunity to connect vulnerably with others, room to be playful and creative, etc.)

What would loosening these standards make room for?

(E.g. fun and play, more time for relationships and connection, a kinder relationship with yourself, rest and relaxation, the chance to try new things that you might suck at, etc.)

Exercise 2.

Reconnect with your “Why”

Running on the constant treadmill of life, it’s easy to lose touch with why we are striving so hard in the first place and what we hope all this striving will achieve. When was the last time you took stock of your life and asked yourself “Why am I doing what I am doing?”

Place these “why”s into two categories – intrinsic & extrinsic.

Intrinsic why’s are internally-focused, oriented around growth and contribution, whereas **extrinsic why’s** are externally-focused, oriented around external outcomes of status and achievement.

We generally have a mixture of both, however, research indicates that being motivated solely by extrinsic motivators leaves us feeling disconnected, hollow and unhappy. This is largely because extrinsic why’s are *things outside of ourselves* - these are generally things outside of our control. Where as intrinsic why’s are things within our power, often connected to a sense of purpose and meaning.

My **EXTRINSIC** Why’s

TO PROVE MYSELF

E.g. To earn more money/status
To impress my family & friends

My **INTRINSIC** Why’s

TO IMPROVE MYSELF

E.g. To learn new things
To challenge myself

It’s usual to identify things in both categories – however, if your “why’s” are a little lopsided, down the extrinsic end, you might want to check in with your values & priorities and see how they align in your life.

Exercise 3.

Compassionate Self-Talk

When we're in a perfectionistic mindset, the voices in our head sound a like a huge bully, "You're not good enough!" "You should be doing this!", etc. We can hold onto these messages and tell ourselves they're useful or motivating. But think back to the most influential teachers or mentors in your life - chances are that they were motivating and inspiring without being punitive, cruel or aggressive. And they helped you to achieve great things.

So, instead of getting wrapped up in these "bully" thoughts, see if you might introduce some kinder self-talk with messages such as the following...

- ▶ **Your worth is not defined by your achievements. You are worthy right now, as you are.**
- ▶ **Practice makes progress - it doesn't have to make "perfect", sometimes the goal is learning and growth.**
- ▶ **Failures & mistakes do not define you. They can be an amazing opportunity to see what works and what doesn't.**
- ▶ **Stay in your lane. This is your journey, you don't need to compare yourself with anybody else.**
- ▶ **You can let go of the need to be "perfect" and still trust that you can achieve great things.**



@ashking

WHO TO CALL

MENTAL HEALTH LINE: 1800 011 511

HEADSPACE: 1800 650 890

LIFELINE: 13 11 14

BEYOND BLUE: 1300 22 4636

SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE: 1300 659 467

MENSLINE AUS: 1300 78 99 78

If you're concerned for your immediate safety or the safety of others, call 000.