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## ***Problems with Perfectionism***

### ***Perfectionism and Adolescence***

High school is a time of extremes for one and all. Peer pressure is at its most intense. Your physical appearance and athletic ability take on enormous importance. Dating begins and having good grades is essential for getting into a good college (or getting into one at all). Consequently, even if you are already getting terrific grades, wowing them on the football field or soloing with the high school orchestra, you may push yourself even harder, driving yourself unmercifully and living in a near-constant state of stress and tension.

What with early-morning team practices, classes, extracurricular activities, after-school jobs and homework, your schedule is jam-packed, leaving you no time for relaxation. As a budding perfectionist, even dating can seem like a competitive sport. And dissatisfaction with your body may lead to extremes in dieting and exercise, even eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia or steroid abuse.

—Miriam Elliott and Susan Meltsner

**Adapted from Miriam Elliott and Susan Meltsner, *The Perfectionist Predicament* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1991), 68, 91.**

### ***Perfectionism at a Glance***

## How a Perfectionist Acts

- Overcommits himself
- Rarely designates work to others
- Has a hard time making choices
- Always has to be in control
- Competes fiercely
- Arrives late because one more thing had to be done
- Always does last-minute cramming
- Gets carried away with details
- Never seems satisfied with his work
- Constantly busies himself with something or other
- Frequently criticizes others
- Refuses to hear criticism of himself
- Pays more attention to negative than positive comments
- Checks up on other people's work
- Calls himself "stupid" when he does something imperfectly
- Procrastinates

## What a Perfectionist Says

- "If I can't do it perfectly, what's the point?"
- "I should excel at everything I do."
- "I always have to stay ahead of others."
- "I should finish a job before doing anything else."
- "Every detail of a job should be perfect."
- "Things should be done right the first time."
- "There is only one right way to do things."
- "I'm a wonderful person if I do well; I'm a lousy person if I do poorly."
- "I'm never good enough."
- "I'm stupid."
- "I can't do anything right,"
- "I'm unlikeable."
- "I'd better not make a mistake here, or people will think I'm not very [smart, good, capable]."
- "If I goof up, something's wrong with me."
- "People shouldn't criticize me."
- "Everything should be clearly black or white. Grays are a sign of confused thinking."

## How a Perfectionist Feels

- Deeply embarrassed about mistakes she makes
- Disgusted or angry with herself when she is criticized
- Anxious when stating her opinion to others
- Extremely worried about details
- Angry if her routine is interrupted
- Nervous when things around her are messy
- Fearful or anxious a lot of the time
- Exhausted and unable to relax
- Plagued by self-hatred
- Afraid of appearing stupid
- Afraid of appearing incompetent
- Afraid of being rejected
- Ashamed of having fears
- Discouraged
- Guilty about letting others down

—Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith

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