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**PERFECTIONISM IN CHILDREN:
WHEN GOOD ENOUGH JUST WON'T DO**

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“Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Do not bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.”

– William Faulkner

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Objectives

- Describe three mental health diagnoses that are associated with perfectionism
- Differentiate between being driven and being perfectionistic
- Identify three strategies for challenging perfectionism with children and adolescents

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Definition - Perfectionism

- The setting of **unrealistically demanding** goals accompanied by a disposition to regard failure to achieve them as **unacceptable** and a sign of personal **worthlessness**
- But what is "Perfect"
 - Freedom from fault or defect, flawlessness
 - An exemplification of supreme excellence
 - An unsurpassable degree of accuracy or excellence

Perfect-
a seven letter word that shouldn't even exist, because it's not real.

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Types of Perfectionism

- Self-Oriented
 - Self-imposed
 - Associated with self-criticism
 - Inability to accept own mistakes/fauls
- Other-Oriented
 - Demand that others meet unrealistically high standards
 - Fear that others will do a less-than-perfect job
- Socially Prescribed
 - Assuming others have standards for self that are impossible to meet
 - Standards are being imposed by others, not self

(Antony and Swinson, 2009)

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Sources of Perfectionistic Messages

- Parents
- Teachers
- Friends
- Society
- Self



Improving one's performance or striving to meet high standards is **NOT** the same as being perfectionistic.
Are these standards "high beyond reach or reason"?
(David Burns)

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Themes for Perfectionism

- Performance (school, sports)
- Neatness
- Organization
- Writing (content and appearance)
- Speaking
- Physical Appearance
- Health
- Cleanliness

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Perfect Reinforcers for Perfectionism

- Good grades
- Accolades
- Sense of accomplishment
- Organization and efficiency
- Viewed positively by others
- Sense of having it all together
- Avoiding punishment
 - Displeasure of others



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Mental Health and Perfectionism

- Social Anxiety
 - Being judged by others for slightest misstep
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
 - Worrying about not meeting standards that have been set
 - Questioning one's abilities
- Depression
 - Failure for not meeting high standards set for self
- Eating Disorders
 - Controlling and regulating food
 - Appearance, standards for thinness
- Body Dysmorphic Disorder
 - Focus on perceived flaws or imperfections related to appearance

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OCD and Perfectionism

- Excessive beliefs that are inaccurate, inflexible, and more destructive than constructive
- Compulsions need to be done "just so"
- Mental review of flaws in past interactions
- Mental checking
- Playing out possible future scenarios
- Feelings of guilt and negative self-thoughts – punishing self for mistakes
- Fear of being morally inadequate
- Compulsive slowness

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Impact of Perfectionism

- Academics
 - Missed due dates
 - Poor performance on assignments, tests
- Relationships
 - Arguments
 - Anxiety in others
 - Tension
 - Isolation
- Hobbies and Recreation
 - Not enjoyable or relaxing
 - Alienating others

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Perfectionistic Thoughts

- "Am I doing enough?"
 - Of course not. If I were doing enough then everything would be taken care of and everything would be done properly. There's always more that could be done.
- "What if I didn't get it right?"
 - I probably didn't get it right. I should double-check (or triple-check) what I've put together so far. Or, better yet, I should scrap everything and start all over again.
- "I'm such a failure!"
 - If I'm not perfect in everything I do, then I'm simply not good enough. I'm supposed to be able to do everything "just right" and anything short of 100% is failure.

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Perfectionism Undermines Resiliency

- Not knowing how to deal with failure
- Protecting self from deficits
 - Limits critical thinking and abstraction
- Less equipped to deal with stressful life events
- Being paralyzed by discomfort and challenges reduces productivity

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Assessment – Questions to Ask

- How often do you achieve the standards you set for yourself in important areas of your life?
- Do you normally reach your goals, or do you fall short of what you were hoping for much of the time?
- Do you always have to follow rules and guidelines and do things a certain way to achieve the “right” outcome?
- Are you someone who has to compete and outdo everyone in everything, regardless of whether you are, in fact, any good at it, have any practice or skill at it, or are even interested in the task?

The Perfectionist's Handbook – Jeff Szymanski, Ph.D.

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Creating Change – Being Less Perfect

- Commit to action – Just Do It!
- Identify alternative strategies – Flexibility
- Use cues and reminders – Motivational Statements
- Use a stepwise process – One step at a time
- Use Social Supports – No one goes it alone

The image shows the cover of the book 'PERFECTION' by Jeff Szymanski. The cover features a black and white photograph of a woman's face, looking slightly to the side. The title 'PERFECTION' is printed in a bold, serif font at the bottom of the cover.

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Approaching Situations

- Intention
- Strategy
 - Multiple approaches to choose from
 - Undermined by preoccupation with making mistakes or having doubts
- Desired Outcome
- Actual Outcome

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Building Problem-Solving Skills

- Identify the problem being addressed
- Gather the relevant information
- Identify alternatives
- Weigh the evidence
- Choose among the alternatives
- Take action
- Review the decision and the outcomes

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Mindfulness

- Acceptance of presence of thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations without judgment
- Developing skill of acknowledging and walking away from mental rituals and toward the present
- Noticing urge to ritualize and accepting as part of present state without responding
- Using meditation and "mindfulness in the moment" as practice

"A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day.
A string of such moments can change the course of your life." – Christopher K. Germer

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Cognitive Restructuring

- Identifying and challenging cognitive distortions – patterns of thinking that promote ritualizing (i.e. all-or-nothing, catastrophizing, emotional/magical reasoning)
- Not about disproving fears, but about disengaging from “need” to ritualize by acknowledging uncertainty
- Important to keep brief and secondary in order to avoid becoming a self-reassurance ritual
- Watch for “rationalizing”

Does being imperfect mean that you are inadequate?



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Your Authentic Self

- Identification of personal values and priorities
 - www.viacharacter.org
- “Cultivate the courage to be imperfect, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable” – Brené Brown



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Healthy Perfectionism

· Higher achievement	· Less depression
· More self-esteem	· Less anxiety
· More positive feelings	· Less procrastination
· More satisfaction with life	· Less self-blame
· Active coping style	
· Ease in relationships	

The Perfectionist's Handbook – Jeff Szymanski, Ph.D.

Payoffs are greater than costs
Striving for and meeting standards set for self
“High and demanding standards” you work hard to achieve

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References and Resources

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THANK YOU!

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