



## **WARNING: TRYING TO BE PERFECT DOESN'T LEAD TO A PERFECT LIFE!**

**By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.**

Many people believe that if they have certain things PERFECT in their lives that they will be happy and stress-free people. So, individuals often try to keep things in perfect order in their environment (such as in their car, house, office, etc.), or may strive for the perfect looks, job/career, financial situation, significant other, house, car, etc., etc., etc. In fact, the ironic truth is that attempting to BE and MAINTAIN perfection is an IMPOSSIBLE and actually stress-BUILDING way of living one's life! Since nothing is perfect or can actually remain perfect, the pursuit of having some things perfect in one's life can become a futile, non-ending loop. Such an endless vicious cycle often can lead to LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND UPSETTING FEELINGS which may include frustration, irritability, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, etc. after chasing the perfectionistic dream and ending up with less than perfection.

So, why do so many people try to have their life space and/or tangible elements in their life "perfect"? Frequently, it is because that person may be trying to calm some INTERNAL emotional unrest and discomfort with some EXTERNAL orderliness or with a CONCRETE SYMBOL to indicate to oneself that he or she is REALLY O.K. There are many reasons why a person may have these perfectionistic tendencies. For example, one may have only been noticed and received attention when he or she had done something outstanding, and, consequently, may have subconsciously even built an IDENTITY around this behavior during one's childhood by taking on the "good boy" or "good girl" role, which one unknowingly may have then carried into adulthood. Or a person may have grown up with an emotionally abusive or critical parent who kept indicating that the child was NEVER GOOD ENOUGH. Trying to be as perfect as possible may be subconsciously done to prevent the person from feeling like or being a TARGET of further negative feedback, judgment, or criticism from others. In this sense, perfectionism can be the ULTIMATE PROTECTION OR DEFENSE against such maltreatment and the feelings associated with this (i.e., shame, embarrassment, hurt, anger, self-dislike or self-loathing).

Another reason one may tend to be perfectionistic is that the person may have created some very HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF ONESELF that are probably too difficult for him or her, let alone almost ANYONE, to meet, especially on a regular, ongoing basis. So, even if no one EXTERNALLY is pushing you to be perfect in some way, you may have internalized a critical voice from your past (i.e., from a parent, sibling, peer, teacher, etc.) and become YOUR OWN WORST JUDGE.

Ways to combat the urge to have certain things perfect in one's life can include conducting several "reality checks." For instance, try to frequently remind yourself that we are all HUMAN and we all can make mistakes, have some things in disarray, and/or do things in not the most "perfect manner." Additionally, recognize which of your qualities ARE good enough. If this is hard to do, try to remember even the tiniest of things about yourself that you are proud of or feel positive about. Too often, when a person is striving for perfection and doesn't get it, he/she ends up feeling bad about oneself OVERALL, rather than just about that specific area. Thus, it is very important to see and give oneself credit for one's noteworthy aspects. In essence, it is critical to keep remembering that NO ONE IS PERFECT NOR does one need to be to feel special, valuable, and valued in one's life. If, however, a person cannot shake his or her negative self-esteem and/or one's SUPERHUMAN self-expectations, speaking to a Psychologist trained in these areas can help you find peace as a MERE MORTAL.

**© Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D. – all rights reserved.**