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June / July 2004



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HOT HAIRSTYLES

The Perils of Perfectionism

By Dr. Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.



who has mastered this and I never will. I unequivocally can guarantee this because NOTHING IS or can actually REMAIN perfect. Thus, the pursuit of having perfection in one's life can become a non-ending, FUTILE goal. Chasing after perfectionistic dreams and ending up with less than "paradise" often can lead to LOW SELF-ESTEEM AND

UPSETTING FEELINGS, including frustration, irritability, depression, anxiety, and hopelessness. In fact, the ironic truth is that attempting to HAVE and MAINTAIN perfection is an IMPOSSIBLE and actually stress-INDUCING way of living one's life!

"Keep remembering that we are all HUMAN (i.e., we all make mistakes, have some things in disarray, and/or do certain things imperfectly.)"

Often, a person is perfectionistic because one is trying to compensate for an insecurity he/she feels on the INSIDE by having some EXTERNAL "EVIDENCE" available that "proves" to oneself and the world that one is "really" O.K. The original insecurity and the need for perfection may have developed for several reasons. Maybe a person only got attention when young for outstanding actions, but otherwise was ignored or mistreated. Or a person may have grown up with an emotionally abusive or critical parent who kept indicating that the child was NEVER GOOD ENOUGH. Or maybe some people are now their OWN WORST JUDGE by unknowingly becoming that "critical voice" with themselves that

they first heard from a parent, sibling, teacher, peer, etc. in their youth. In any case, the attempts to achieve perfection generally CONTINUE into adulthood to prevent a person from feeling vulnerable to further negative judgment or criticism from oneself or others. So, perfectionism can be used as the ULTIMATE PROTECTION OR DEFENSE against experiencing more mistreatment and more negative feelings about oneself (i.e., shame, embarrassment, hurt, anger, self-dislike, or self-loathing).

The good news is there ARE ways to combat the urge to obtain perfection. Firstly, keep remembering that we are all HUMAN (i.e., we all make mistakes, have some things in disarray, and/or do certain things imperfectly), and that being a MERE MORTAL SHOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH. Also, recognize which of YOUR qualities ARE good enough. If this is hard to do, try to recall 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 important to see and give oneself CREDIT for one's noteworthy characteristics. In addition, remain aware of the futility of pursuing perfection, and that feeling good from the INSIDE OUT is the key to happiness, peace, and self-worth. In essence, it is CRITICAL to remember that NO ONE IS PERFECT nor does one NEED TO BE in order to feel special, valued, and GOOD ENOUGH AS IS.

Ah, to be perfect! Just imagine the kind of world you might be living in. You'd BE and HAVE everything you wanted, with no worries or stress. In spite of the old saying that one can never be rich or thin enough, YOU could be, along with all the other perks of having a "perfect life" (i.e., abundant numbers of quality friends, the greatest significant other on this planet, a genius I.Q., scintillating wit and humor, the most well-behaved children known to mankind, model looks with never a "bad hair or makeup day," no cellulite or acne, etc., etc., etc.). Obtaining this fabulous version of how life COULD be resonates with many people who believe that if they have certain things perfect in their lives, that they will be happy and stress-free. Thus, they may try to keep things in perfect order in their environment (i.e., their car, house, office, etc.) and/or may strive to have the perfect looks, job/career, financial situation, significant other, house, car, and so on.

What an AWESOME life this could be – if only it TRULY could be attained! Although people may aspire to be perfect and have perfect lives, I don't know anyone