MANAGING PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism may feel like a typical trait to have, especially since it’s usually normalized on college campuses as a part of being “ambitious” or “hard-working.” While perfectionism might seem harmless, it actually can have its negative/detrimental effects on the psyche. While taking pride in your work and striving for excellence can help you healthily reach your goals, perfectionism, often defined as the need to appear or be “perfect,” can impair your goal-reaching efforts and negatively affect your mental health.

Perfectionism might feel like a way to have a sense of control in situations that feel overwhelming or anxiety-provoking. Perfection often brings a sense of relief because it pushes you to “work harder” where you feel doubtful or inadequate.

This may lead you to:

- Reviewing your work repeatedly
- Working extra hours
- Over-checking for errors
- Taking on too much work and struggle to say no
- Struggling to delegate tasks or ask for help
- Becoming hyper-critical of yourself and/or others
- Avoiding tasks or classes where you feel you cannot achieve perfection
- Focusing on the end product rather than the learning process
- Struggling to feel really happy for yourself and others
- Experiencing minor mistakes as major failures

Many of the actions in this list can lead to high stress, burnout, and even anxiety and depression.
Perfectionism can drive us to overwork and neglect self-care as it convinces us that perfection is possible.

The truth about perfection is that it is not real. Struggle, hard days, and challenges, do not take away from your gifts and worthiness as a scholar and a human.

It can be helpful to use mindfulness to address concerns related to perfectionism:

• Notice when your perfectionist habits are happening. What do you normally do? What normally “triggers” a need to engage in perfectionist habits?
• Normalize your tendency to engage in perfectionist habits. Cultural norms and pressures tend to glorify perfectionism and reward burnout.
• Remind yourself about the facade that perfectionism may offer. Being “perfect” is not attainable, or necessary.
• Engage in self-care. Try journaling, resting, spending time with friends, or doing something you love to rest your mind.
• Reset with new intentions: focusing on doing your best, learning, growing, or centering any other values that are important to you often supports us in keeping anxiety at bay.

Other Resources:

• TED Talk: Our Dangerous Obsession with Perfectionism
• Worksheets