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Perfectionism: What's it Costing Our Kids?

Presented by Dr. Jane Bluestein

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Thank you for your consideration, and for spreading the word.



The Main Refrain (My Premise)

- ❖ Perfectionism is different from healthy striving for excellence
- ❖ Perfectionism is NOT GOOD for our thinking, our health, our performance, and our relationships, therefore...
- ❖ There is NO SUCH THING as “healthy perfectionism.”

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What Perfectionism is NOT

- ❖ Setting realistic goals for yourself or others
- ❖ Standing up for yourself to get credit for work you've done
- ❖ Getting lost in the "flow" of doing something you love
- ❖ Striving for continual growth and improvement (wanting to do your best)

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Perfectionism vs. The Healthy Pursuit of Excellence

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Perfectionism vs. Pursuit of Excellence

Perfectionism:

- ✓ Reach for impossible goals
- ✓ Devastated by failure
- ✓ Dwell on mistakes
- ✓ Need for status, superiority
- ✓ Resistant to feedback

- ✓ Set high standards that are within reach
- ✓ Learn from failure
- ✓ Correct mistakes
- ✓ OK with being #2 if they tried their best
- ✓ Open to feedback

Pursuit of excellence:

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Perfectionism vs. Pursuit of Excellence

Perfectionism:

- ✓ Quest for flawlessness
- ✓ Motivated by fear of embarrassment, rejection, intimacy abandonment, or some other negative reaction from others

Pursuit of excellence:

- ✓ Opportunities for growth, learning, improvement, and doing (looking or being) our best
- ✓ Motivated by curiosity, a love of learning, or the enjoyment of the process or journey.

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Perfectionism and Fear

- ❖ Failure
- ❖ Embarrassment
- ❖ Intimacy, being real with others
- ❖ Loss (social, status, financial)
- ❖ Disappointing or angering others
- ❖ Rejection, exclusion, abandonment

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How Perfectionism Can Show Up

- ◆ Comparing yourself to others (for better or worse)
- ◆ Setting impossible, unrealistic goals (for self or others)
- ◆ Paralysis, fear of starting
- ◆ Never finishing
- ◆ Giving up, refusing to correct or do over

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Risk Factors for Developing Perfectionistic Beliefs and Behaviors

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Origins of Perfectionism

Born that way?

- ✧ Not by itself
- ✧ External messages and pressure
- ✧ Poor or inconsistent attachment (neglect)
- ✧ Over-attachment, over-protective (no failure or mistakes allowed)

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Origins of Perfectionism

- Conditional safety and approval (fear)
- Frequent negative feedback, derision, criticism
- Having “perfect parents” (or siblings)
- Being held accountable for adults’ feelings or behavior (including addiction)
- Association with labels (good or bad)
- Emphasis on importance of cultural fads, media messages, superficial “worth”

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Impact of Culture, Media, & Ads


Only effective if we accept:

- The idea that our bodies, clothes, homes, relationships, children, and lives are somehow flawed
- The “hidden fantasy” that being perfect brings rewards (safety and happiness, for example)

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What Perfectionism Might Look Like

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The slide features a white background with a green header bar. The ASCA logo and name are in a dark blue banner on the left. The title 'Belief Systems Can Include:' is in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below it is a list of four bullet points, each starting with a blue diamond symbol. At the bottom, the copyright information is displayed.

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Belief Systems Can Include:

- ❖ Need to maintain attachment or belonging by pleasing others, fulfilling others' agendas
- ❖ Worth = achievement, appearance, status
- ❖ Mistakes = failure (rejection)
- ❖ Having to work hard means I'm not good at something

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Behavior Patterns Can Include:

- ◆ Comparing self to others—for better or worse (Harsh Inner Critic)
- ◆ Setting impossible, unrealistic goals (for self or others)
- ◆ Procrastination (fear of starting)
- ◆ Never finishing
- ◆ Giving up if not great right off the bat

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Behavior Patterns Can Include:

- ◆ Refusing to correct work or do it over
- ◆ Focusing on negative (“critic’s math”)
- ◆ Telescopic thinking (minimize achievements, obsess about errors)
- ◆ Overcommitting (fear of saying no)
- ◆ Overdoing (doing more than is necessary or expected)

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Behavior Patterns reflect:

**A general sense of
inadequacy or feelings of
not being good enough**

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How Perfectionism Can Show Up *in Relationships*

- ✧ Unrealistic expectations of others
(personal agendas)
- ✧ Unexpressed expectations
- ✧ Disappointment
- ✧ Criticism, anger, making others wrong

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How Perfectionism Can Show Up *in Relationships*

- ✧ Focus on negative
- ✧ Disgust, contempt
- ✧ Alienation
- ✧ Open hostilities, deliberate sabotage

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What Perfectionism Can Cost Us

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Negative Impact may include:

- ✓ Stinkin' Thinkin' (cognitive distortions)
- ✓ All-or nothing thinking
- ✓ Anxiety and stress
 - ✓ bids for approval or conditional acceptance
 - ✓ pressure of unrealistic expectations (from self or others)

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Negative Impact may include:

- ✓ Regrets, rumination and trouble staying in present
- ✓ Panic, self-doubt
- ✓ Underachieving, giving up
- ✓ Increased stress on relationships (personal and professional)
- ✓ Increased risk for self-harm, addiction, suicide

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Getting Real and Getting Well

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Possible Helping Strategies

- ❖ Recognize that perfectionism is pathological.
- ❖ Encourage excellence.
 - ❖ Shift focus from negative (flaw) to what's right
 - ❖ See mistakes and failure as steps to learning
- ❖ Shift from criticism and disappointment to encouragement and instruction.
- ❖ Help kids stop thinking in all-or-nothing terms.
- ❖ Avoid labels, even "good" ones (focus on effort)

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Possible Helping Strategies

- ❖ Help kids set achievable goals.
 - ❖ Encourage revision while helping kids get to “done.”
 - ❖ Help kids learn how to set boundaries and say “no.”
- ❖ Model and teach stress-busting techniques
- ❖ Create a safe environment where kids can be their authentic selves.
- ❖ Provide support for addiction and self-harm.
- ❖ “Progress, not perfection.”

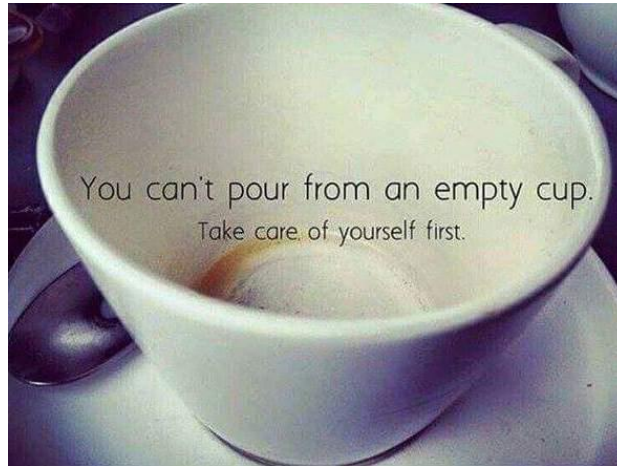
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Model healthy behavior

- ❖ Watch your reaction when you mess up.
- ❖ Shift your focus from what you got wrong to what you got right. (done vs. not done)
- ❖ Honor incremental improvements and growth.
- ❖ Avoid comparing. (media images, cultural messages)
- ❖ Model healthy striving, self-care, self-acceptance, resiliency, and persistence.
- ❖ Get help as needed. No “quick fixes.”

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You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.

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Getting Help

- Intellectual decision to “stop being a perfectionist” is rarely adequate to change deep-seated, long-held beliefs
- Admit to not being perfect (*not* self-shaming, self-deprecating, or self-loathing)
- Find a trusted resource who can help create a safe environment for creating change; offer reality check
- Think “kaizen”: incremental improvements

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And by the way...

In case you forgot to remind yourself this morning:

Your butt is perfect.

Your smile lights up the room.

Your mind is insanely cool.

You are way more than enough.

And you are doing an amazing job at life.

(From a Facebook meme. Author unknown)

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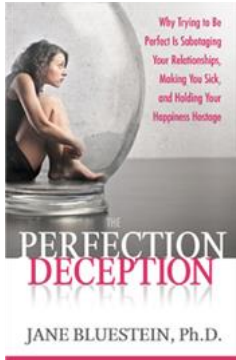
THANK YOU



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