



Teens + Perfectionism

PATIENT EDUCATION

Enjoy your life
have fun!

LOOK FOR SUPPORT

FIND BALANCE

Set limits

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

How many of these examples describe you?

- Keep yourself really busy all the time.
- Have a hard time relaxing — and when you do, you worry that you'll fail to meet a deadline or goal.
- Spend more time on your work than your friends do on their work.
- Feel disappointed if you aren't "the best."
- Get anxious about not doing well enough.
- Talk negatively to yourself when you don't reach a goal.
- Take the hardest classes offered.

Do you...

- Have an intense competitive drive and high expectations?
- Refuse to try something if there is a chance you won't get it right or you'll look weird trying?
- Resist asking for help — even when you're struggling?
- Think teachers or parents expect you to be perfect all the time?
- Have a hard time enjoying your successes?
- Choose to study or practice instead of enjoying aspects of a healthy lifestyle, like sleep?

If you check two or more boxes, you may be dealing with perfectionism.



Perfectionism:

It's not all that great

Sure, it might seem to have some advantages, like...
 good grades and success at sports, jobs and other activities.
 You probably get a ton of praise for all of this. But...



Perfectionism has huge disadvantages too, such as:

- A loss of balance between school, friends, work, family, hobbies, and other fun.
- A false sense of productivity. *You really aren't managing as well as you think you are.*
- Health problems, like headaches, pain, loss of sleep/feeling tired, stomachaches, heart problems, and more.
- Increased stress and maybe other emotional issues too, like feeling guilty, not feeling very motivated, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, pessimism, obsessive and compulsive behavior, and feeling rigid or inflexible with your schedule.
- Increased chance that you'll procrastinate.
- Strained or lost friendships because there's no time for fun.

The Perfection Trap

High standards lead to pressure to be perfect. Then...

When you FAIL to meet your goals...

- ▼ Your self-esteem drops & anxiety goes up.
- ▼ You increase your efforts & your life balance drops.
- ▼ You can't relax & your health suffers.
- ▼ You crash.
- ▼ **The "failure" cycle begins again.**

When you SUCCEED & meet your goals...

- ▼ You have no time to enjoy your success.
- ▼ Self-expectations and other people's expectations go up.
- ▼ You over-do it and try to meet the goals again.
- ▼ Your life balance is gone.
- ▼ You become hyper-focused on current & future goals — and you lose your sense of fun & flexibility.
- ▼ You can't handle change at all. You explode emotionally when changes or problems come up.
- ▼ You feel more & more pressure all the time.
- ▼ **The "success" cycle begins again.**

It's good to have goals and want to reach them.

But if you strive for perfection, it can cause a lot of physical and emotional health problems.

A person who strives to do well...

Studies for a test; feels good about the answers during the test; feels good with a score of 95%.

Wants to make some spending money by walking dogs after school. Makes a promotional flyer, gets a few clients quickly and is good with that.

Asks to write a story for the school paper; feels good about it. Realizes that the editor revised the story before print. Likes the printed version better!

Wants to try new things, even if they don't know what they're doing and they could look foolish. Is ready to learn from the experiences — even from some mistakes.

Keeps their room tidy most days. Makes the bed often enough that Mom & Dad don't complain any longer.

A person who is a perfectionist...

Feels overwhelmed before a test; studies late into the night. Feels nervous about most answers; is mad when they get a score of 95%.

Chooses to organize a dog-walking company; gets 4 other kids to walk dogs. Delivers marketing flyers to every house in a one-mile radius. Is the only contact person for potential customers. Does all of the scheduling with no help.

Is really mad that the editor messed with the article. Says it doesn't feel like a "personal" accomplishment any longer.

Stays far away from new experiences — to avoid any chance that they'll look foolish in front of friends or in public.

Takes a lot of time — time that they don't usually have — to make the bedroom look perfect before they leave for school.

A person who strives to do well and is okay with less-than-perfect results...

- ◆ Balances school, activities, work, and fun with friends.
- ◆ Is thoughtful and mindful about keeping that life balance.
- ◆ Is flexible — can adapt to new goals and activities.
- ◆ Accepts that people may have negative thoughts about them. But it doesn't bother them a lot. They know they made good decisions.
- ◆ Accepts their best efforts and learns from the results.

To begin to find more balance in

Try these suggestions to help you break out of the downward spiral of perfectionism.

- **Do a reality check.** Which expectations, thoughts or behaviors cause you problems?
- **Identify your sources of stress.** Think about times when you feel stressed. Is your stress caused by a desire to be perfect or to be a high achiever?
- **Simplify your life.** If you have lots of interests, goals and activities, think about which one(s) are most important to you. Choose to spend your time and energy on those. It's OK to end some activities that you have enjoyed in the past and to say "Sorry, I can't." to future requests for your time.
- **Adjust your goals & expectations.** Are they realistic? For example, most people can't work full time and get straight A's. If you are putting good effort towards your schoolwork and working a part time job or managing a small number of other activities, then you're doing well to get ready for college and/or a future job.
- **Don't focus only on the outcomes.** Step back & try to enjoy the process too. When you have a challenge, tell yourself that it's an opportunity to learn and grow.



- **Make healthy lifestyle choices.** Eat well, get the sleep you need and exercise regularly. Watch your intake of caffeine and other stimulants. They can really harm your health over time.
- **Look for support.** Ask other people to help you focus on being rather than doing.

your life...

- **Use positive self-talk.** Give yourself praise for your successes, large and “small.” Pat yourself on the back too for your efforts.
- **Pay attention to your emotional and spiritual health.**
- **Be flexible in your thinking.** There’s often more than one way to do a job.
- **Try not to view things as worse than they really are.** That can really drain your time and energy.

- **Set limits on homework time.** Set limits on the amount of time you’ll spend on any one task.
- **Make time for friends and social activities.** This is all part of having a good life balance!



Realistic thoughts and goals are the keys to avoiding perfectionism.

Movies tell stories. As you think about your life story...

How would you describe yourself today?

Other people might first talk about your successes. Maybe you would too. After all, you've often been rewarded for your accomplishments. *But you are more than your successes.*

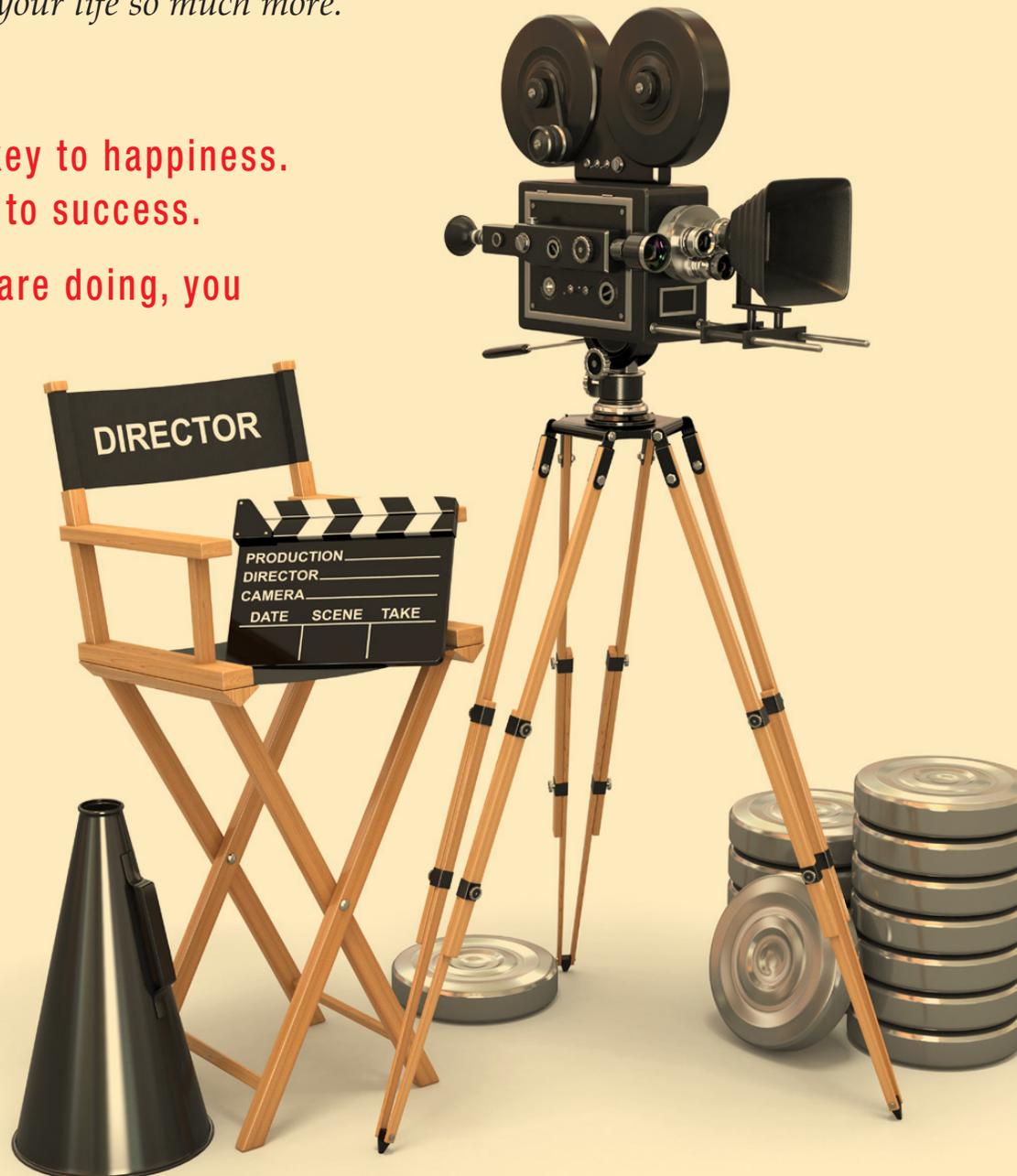
How do you want to be known?

As the director of your life story, you manage most of the scenes. You get to balance your activities, your time and your relationships. It may not be easy every day. *But when you have balance, you'll be able to enjoy the story of your life so much more.*

**"Success is not the key to happiness.
Happiness is the key to success.**

**If you love what you are doing, you
will be successful."**

Albert Schweitzer,
German/French theologian,
philosopher and physician



BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal patient of Mayo Clinic for more than 40 years. She was a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching, even as she assembled a museum-quality collection of antiques and fine art. She was best known by Mayo staff for her patient advocacy and support.

Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. Mrs. Lips had a profound appreciation for the care she received at Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

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