


The Pursuit of Imperfection:

Helping Youth & Parents Manage Academic Perfectionism


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Today's Program

- Define & describe academic perfectionism
- Discuss how to manage it - including treatment
- Break into kid and parent groups for discussion and Q&A




Perfectionism

(dysfunctional, that is)

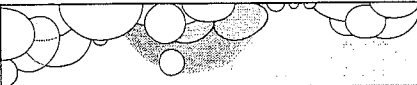
... "the setting of, and striving to meet, very demanding standards that are self-imposed and relentlessly pursued despite this causing problems. It involves basing one's self-worth almost exclusively on how well these high standards are pursued and achieved."^{*}

*Shafran, Egan, & Wade (2010). *Overcoming Perfectionism*. London: Robinson.




**Findings of Note:
Perfectionism & Academics**

- Greater anxiety & stress beforehand (e.g., test anxiety)
- Lower performance (e.g., on tests)
- Greater post-performance criticism (e.g., after the test)
- More post-performance negative affect (e.g., after the test)
- For university students, academics is disproportionately the domain of concern & dysfunction
- Greater delay or avoidance of academic tasks altogether
- What about faculty? Fewer publications, citations, and high-impact publications




Is Perfectionism OCD?

Probably



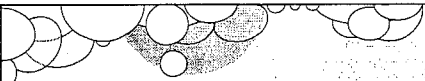
**Avoidant Coping with
Academic Tasks**

1. Procrastination (Avoidance)
2. Taking a long time to complete tasks (Compulsions)




Common AP Compulsions

- Re-reading
- Erasing, re-writing
- Over-researching
- Mental editing
- Checking
- Reassurance-seeking



Perfectionist Dilemmas

- School, society, & family may encourage perfectionism
- May be misjudged as lazy, oppositional
- Fear of failure leads to avoidance which leads to fear coming true
- Severity of the problem & the challenge of recovery is underestimated by everyone
- May believe there is no acceptable alternative: Irresponsible? A bum? A flunkie?



Is perfectionism all bad?

- Hard work, striving to do a job well done, etc. – are all good things
- Some people associate these traits with perfectionism
- But, they are confusing perfectionism with the pursuit of excellence

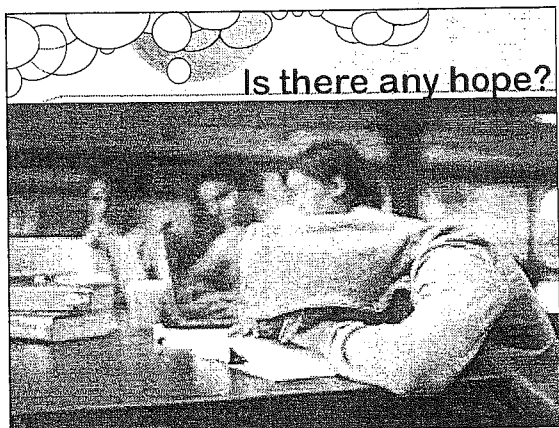
Perfectionism vs Pursuit of Excellence

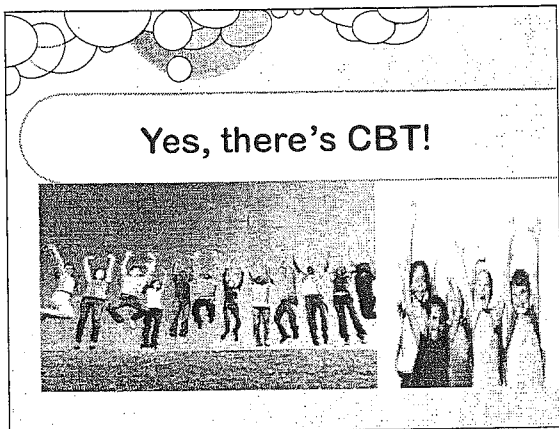
A Perfectionist:

- Sets unobtainable goals
- Maintains goals despite experience
- Judges self almost exclusively on grades
- Motivated by fear of negative outcomes

A Pursuer of Excellence:

- Sets obtainable goals
- Modifies goals based on experience
- Judges self based on multiple criteria
- Motivated by positive outcomes





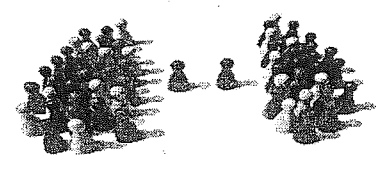
Components of CBT for Academic Perfectionism

- Engagement: identifying the problem, goal-setting, motivational enhancement
- Psycho-education, cognitive intervention (e.g., identifying & challenging perfectionistic beliefs)
- Exposure & Response Prevention
- Skills training (time management, organization, anti-procrastination strategies)

What about medication?

- OCD medication may be indicated (e.g., SSRI)
- If ADD/ADHD co-occurs, relevant medications may be considered

Time for breakout groups!



Contact Information

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