



Tips for Letting Go of Perfectionism and Accepting Yourself

- 1. Instead of constantly feeling disappointed, set more realistic expectations.** As perfectionists, we set ridiculously high standards and [unrealistic expectations](#) for ourselves and others. And because these expectations are impossible to meet, we're constantly disappointed and frustrated. I know the idea of lowering your expectations can be hard to accept, but it does lead to greater happiness and more satisfying relationships. We ultimately have to realize that we're expecting the impossible from ourselves and we can't control and force others to meet our unreasonable expectations. So, if you're continually disappointed and upset with yourself or others, it's an opportunity to reassess and set realistic expectations – ones that you and others can reasonably meet.
- 2. Instead of criticizing yourself, practice self-compassion.** Perfectionists are notoriously intolerant of flaws and shortcomings, so we tend to be very hard on ourselves. But self-criticism is both undeserved and unhelpful. Everyone struggles and is imperfect. We all make mistakes and feel inadequate sometimes. Kindness motivates us to do better, whereas criticizing and shaming tends to be demotivating. Try to give yourself the same compassion that you would show to a friend or family member – a kind word, a treat, or an uplifting message when you're feeling down.
- 3. Instead of seeing mistakes as failures, adopt a growth mindset.** When we have an attitude of growth, we choose to see mistakes as a normal and helpful part of the learning process. The only way to improve at something is to try, fail, and try some more. Instead of trying to avoid mistakes and failures, reframe them as normal and an essential part of your growth.
- 4. Instead of defining yourself by your accomplishments, focus on your character.** Perfectionists tend to define themselves and their worth by their accomplishments. This leaves us always pushing ourselves to do more, be more, and prove ourselves. Accomplishments certainly have their place, but you're so much more than a Harvard graduate, best-selling author, volunteer of the year, or any other title or accomplishment. Your value as a person isn't dependent on being the best or earning it. You are worthy because of who you are, not what you've accomplished. Focusing on your good qualities, values, and strengths will help you reclaim your self-worth.

5. **Instead of focusing on the outcome, enjoy the process.** Perfectionists measure success and self-worth by their achievements, but when we put so much emphasis on the outcome, we sometimes miss out on enjoying the process. Try doing things for the experience, for fun, or because you've always wanted to try them, not because you're good at them or to please others. Focusing on the process takes the pressure away from the results. It's not just about whether you win, or get a promotion, or are praised. Some things are worth doing, even if the outcome is imperfect.
6. **Instead of trying to please everyone, be true to yourself.** When you focus on pleasing others, you disconnect from your authentic self. You start living your life to please others (for the "gold stars" and accolades) or to avoid conflict. This means everyone else's needs and wants come first and you minimize your needs, wants, and values. Maybe you became a doctor to make your parents happy or you invited your mother-in-law to live with you because that's what your husband wanted or you agreed to be chair of the committee because you didn't want to disappoint your mentor. People-pleasing is not only tiring and unrealistic, it isn't honest and true. So, you may be making others happy, but their approval can't quiet your self-doubt and anxiety because they still don't know the real you. When you express more of who you are and what you need, some people may be displeased; practice tolerating this because the alternative is to lose yourself and live as if everyone else is more important than you.
7. **Instead of putting your needs last, be more assertive.** We all have physical and emotional needs, but they don't always fit into our image of being perfect. For example, many perfectionists don't like to ask for what they need, whether it's help or information or time off, because *perfect* people don't need anything. Denying your needs can have serious health consequences – physically and mentally. It also contributes to feelings of anger and resentment. Alternatively, you can practice using [assertive communication](#) such as "I statements" to ask for what you need and want. More information is available here:

[How to communicate your feelings \(https://bit.ly/2HYAqqS\)](https://bit.ly/2HYAqqS)

8. **Instead of rigid, perfectionist thinking, challenge your negative thoughts.** As perfectionists, we often get stuck in all-or-nothing thinking, such as "I'm a success or a failure" or "I'm attractive or I'm ugly" when in reality there's lots of space in between these extremes. Other examples of perfectionist thinking (a form of cognitive distortions) are overgeneralizing, catastrophizing, and magical thinking. You can learn more on my blog:

[13 common cognitive distortions \(https://bit.ly/2Hsixnh\)](https://bit.ly/2Hsixnh)

[How to challenge cognitive distortions \(https://bit.ly/2KccMrw\)](https://bit.ly/2KccMrw)

- 9. Instead of overworking, do some things imperfectly.** When we expect ourselves to do everything flawlessly, we're treating all of our tasks with the same importance. In reality, not everything needs to be done perfectly. Some things – like cleaning your kitchen or eating healthfully – don't have to be done perfectly in order for them to have value. Try leaving something undone or done imperfectly. It will feel uncomfortable at first, but it will get easier to tolerate and you'll discover that nothing terrible happens when things are imperfect. This will free up mental and physical energy for the things that matter most.
- 10. Instead of comparing yourself to others, know your worth.** We all know that comparing ourselves to others makes us feel worse, not better about ourselves. As a result of growing up in a competitive world, we internalize feelings of not being “*as good as*” or “*not having enough*”. We compare ourselves to others looking to see how we measure up. The problem is that comparison only works to validate our fears and self-doubts. And these comparisons are never fair because we don't have all the facts about anyone else's life; we only see the “airbrushed version” that they want us to see.
- 11. Instead of focusing on others, get to know yourself.** People-pleasing and perfectionism are like shields that hide and protect your true self. The more pleasing and perfecting you do, the more out of touch with yourself you become; you no longer know what you like, what you believe, what's important to you, or even who you are because so much of your time and effort is spent trying to be what others want you to be or an idealized version of yourself. “Finding yourself” can feel like a big endeavor (and it may be), but you don't have to do it all at once. Bit by bit, begin to explore and experiment, constantly checking back in with yourself to see how it feels. You might find these three resources helpful:

[26 questions to know yourself better \(https://bit.ly/2ptHbsV\)](https://bit.ly/2ptHbsV)

[How can adults find new hobbies \(https://bit.ly/2I0NL1N\)](https://bit.ly/2I0NL1N)

[Know Yourself Better, Live Authentically, and Embrace What's Fun for You \(https://bit.ly/2qZ0kmQ\)](https://bit.ly/2qZ0kmQ)

- 12. Instead of being ashamed of your flaws, love your imperfect self.** When you recognize that trying to be perfect isn't going to make you feel worthy or lovable, you can relax and allow yourself to just *be*. You no longer have to prove your worthiness. Loving yourself unconditionally means you value and accept yourself just as you are right now, regardless of your imperfections and failures. You might find these ideas helpful:

[22 ways to love yourself more \(https://bit.ly/2JmkXjN\)](https://bit.ly/2JmkXjN)

[9 simple ways to love yourself \(https://bit.ly/2KffEnl\)](https://bit.ly/2KffEnl)