Chasing Perfection

Don’t let your dreams become a nightmare.

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The fact is, we live in an imperfect world where perfection simply does not exist. But in the United States, society’s expectations tend to run high. The pressure to be perfect starts early, as soon as children find themselves heading off to schools. Their first lesson is that in this country, achievement requires that we be competitive. Kids compete for placement in school and on teams and for grades in the classroom.

In addition, the competition may begin long before we step into an academic institution. How smart, good-looking, strong and agile we are can also play a role in what we’re able to achieve.

In school, if you’re not gifted in any of those areas, that’s when the pressure to be perfect usually begins. But, interestingly, even when blessed with those gifts, many people still consider themselves to be missing the target, and so the obsessive striving begins.

But at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute’s Student Health Center, in Troy, New York, counselors advise that there is a big difference between perfectionism and healthy striving. “Those who strive for excellence in a healthy way take pleasure in trying to meet high standards and are more easily able to cope with the human side of their errors,” they say. “Perfectionism, however, results in struggles with personal doubt and fears of criticism and disapproval.”

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