

# Perfectionism and ADHD: Understanding and Managing It

## Why It Happens

Perfectionist traits often develop as a way to compensate, especially in students with ADHD for past errors or persistent feelings of inadequacy. Letting go of perfectionism isn't about eliminating concern over mistakes or judgment, but about accepting imperfection as a part of growth and learning (Flett & Hewitt, 2014).

## Three Forms of Perfectionism

1. **Self-Oriented Perfectionism**  
Involves setting unrealistic standards for oneself and harsh self-criticism. Linked to anxiety, depression, and disordered eating (Flett & Hewitt, 2002).
2. **Socially Prescribed Perfectionism**  
Entails believing others expect perfection from you. Often connected to social anxiety and a strong need for external approval (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).
3. **Other-Oriented Perfectionism**  
Involves expecting perfection from others. This can strain relationships with family, friends, or colleagues (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

## Perfectionist Procrastination: How It Happens

- **Perfectionism Procrastination:** Avoids tasks until conditions feel "perfect," delaying due to fear of errors or embarrassment.
- **Avoidance Procrastination:** Stems from low confidence or past failure, leading to avoidance of hard or unpleasant tasks.
- **Productive Procrastination:** Delays urgent tasks in favor of easier ones—not to avoid work entirely but to dodge discomfort (Sirois, 2014; Steel, 2007).

## Strategies to Overcome Perfectionism

- **Build Awareness:** Use mindfulness to observe perfectionist thoughts without judgment. Acknowledge body sensations during stress and remind yourself thoughts are simply thoughts (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).
- **Shift Your Focus:** Notice wins—big or small. Track daily successes by journaling or voice notes. Gratitude and savoring minor achievements foster a more positive outlook (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).
- **Accept Mistakes:** Adopt a growth mindset—see mistakes as learning steps, not personal failures. Practice self-compassion to soften internal criticism (Dweck, 2006; Neff, 2003).
- **Respond Gracefully to Feedback:** Accept constructive feedback neutrally. Paraphrase what you've heard, consider its validity, and decide what to use without spiraling into shame (Stone & Heen, 2015).
- **Strengthen Executive Skills**
- **Time Management:** Use calendars and alarms to counter time blindness.
- **Organization:** Sort tasks by priority, make lists, and embrace imperfect systems.
- **Planning & Prioritization:** Structure your day to balance easier and harder tasks.
- **Emotional Control:** Develop coping cues affirmations, breathing exercises, reminders of achievements.

- Metacognition: Regularly reflect: *How am I doing? What strategies helped before?* (Barkley, 2012)
- Reduce Comparisons. Focus on others' strengths instead of obsessing over your own imperfections. This can ease social anxiety and lower pressure (Gilbert, 2009).
- Adjust Expectations: Ask yourself: *Am I trying to be my best or absolutely perfect?* Unrealistic goals signal harmful perfectionism (Flett & Hewitt, 2002).
- Find Manageable Tasks: Break big tasks into small achievable steps—even five minutes of progress counts. This boosts momentum and self-confidence (Van Eerde, 2003).
- Build Realistic Schedules: ADHD often distorts time estimates. Multiply your initial time estimate and track your actual time spent to gain realistic planning habits (Steel, 2007).

#### Read More Here:

- <https://add.org/adhd-and-perfectionism/>
- [additudemag.com/perfectionism-adhd-not-good-enough-anxiety/?srsltid=AfmBOoowHtEblwymQ\\_\\_usSnzhr2vp6APcPZ2Uqayh8oUIHFxHdz06fIL](http://additudemag.com/perfectionism-adhd-not-good-enough-anxiety/?srsltid=AfmBOoowHtEblwymQ__usSnzhr2vp6APcPZ2Uqayh8oUIHFxHdz06fIL)
- <https://lifeskillsadvocate.com/blog/perfectionism-adhd-everything-you-need-to-know/>

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