

The Care and Feeding of Perfectionists

Cynthia Curnan

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Curnan surprises readers with her understanding and method of working with the self-defeating behaviors that limit the ability of perfectionists to live joyful, loving and creative lives. Holding a doctorate degree in psychology from Rykan College, Curnan uses solid, up-to-date psychology coupled with common sense that only experience could provide. In her work as therapist to highly creative individuals battling stress, and in her own inner work as a recovering perfectionist, Curnan has sought out and discovered the many masks and hiding places of the inner perfectionist, which she says afflicts everyone to some degree.

Born of inner injury, the aspect of one's personality she calls "the perfectionist" wages battle within us to prevent our falling into the mode of operation of its polar opposite, "the helpless." In the process, it creates a situation in which we are caught in "an endless loop of lofty starts (the push of perfectionism) and backlashes (collapses into helplessness)." The inner battle escalates as the perfectionist interprets the backlash as the result of a weak or failed character. In its self-judgment, it imposes harsher requirements: too much to do in too little time without the necessary support; making a winning outcome under these circumstances impossible.

Curnan reveals several ways to encounter and understand the elusive inner perfectionist: offering a map to the awareness that makes the inner perfectionist an ally rather than self-defeating enemies, giving clear descriptions of the nine types of perfectionism and identifying areas of injury and the means the mind employs them to avoid being hurt again. She also provides details of her own struggles, as well as those of some of her clients, as motivation for others to discover a better way of life and provides a fourteen-week "Inner Guidance Course" for personal use.

A thought-provoking study, *The Care and Feeding of Perfectionists* helps perfectionists realize that sometimes being imperfect is the "perfect" way to be.

KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 1999)

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