

The 3-2-1 technique

Description

Perfectionism is a self-destructive and addictive belief system that fuels this primary thought: If I look perfect, and do everything perfectly, I can avoid or minimize the painful feelings of shame, judgment, and blame.

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I often tell folks I am a “recovering perfectionist.” My need to feel perfect started when I was a kid. It was a pressure I put on myself more than anyone else holding that expectation over me. At the time, I thought that’s what my parents (and teachers, and siblings, etc., etc.) wanted and expected. But now, as an adult looking back, I can see and understand more clearly. It is freeing when we can take responsibility by evaluating a situation and seeing what part we played in it (which is impossible to do when we’re kids).

Do you feel like you are a perfectionist? If so, how is that serving you? Do you feel like a pressure cooker without a release valve at pretty much all times? Let’s try to alleviate that.

Striving for greatness is not a bad thing. Striving to be the best version of you- also not a bad thing. Striving to be **perfect** is a recipe for disappointment. When we hold ourselves to unrealistic expectations (taking into account all elements in our lives that could be impacting our goals) we could be doing more harm than good. Once we realize and remember that it is **impossible for humans to be perfect**, we can start to put ourselves on the road to what I like to call “perfectionism recovery.”

When I speak with other folks like me, those who hold themselves to outrageous expectations or beat themselves up for every small misstep or error, I like to teach them my “-ish technique.” This is something I use to release some of the pressure my inner critic likes to put on myself. When the stakes are low, and I have only myself to report back to, I will add -ish to the end of my expectation. Here are a few examples:

Perfectionist me: I will spend only \$30 at the Farmers Market!

Recovering me: I will spend \$30-ish dollars and not beat myself up if I go a bit over.

Perfectionist me: I will workout 5 days per week!

Recovering me: I will strive to workout 5-ish days per week. Sometimes, things will come up and that’s ok too.

Perfectionist me: I must arrive to the party at 7 p.m.!

Recovering me: I will be there around 7-ish and show up relaxed and ready to enjoy my time.

Maybe you don’t see much of a difference between these statements, but for me, changing my vernacular and my expectations in this way makes a world of difference. For every \$5 I went over my budget, *perfectionist me* would allow my inner critic to creep in and shame myself, saying things like, “you suck at saving money.” For every workout I missed, that inner critic would say, “you’re lazy,” or, “no wonder you hate seeing yourself in pictures.” And, for parties I rushed to get ready for and then stressed myself out while struggling to find an Uber, I was unable to enjoy myself because *perfectionist me* was embarrassed all night and secretly shaming myself for not getting ready for the party earlier.

The -ish technique is a self-coping strategy that I use for myself. It works for me to throw -ish at the end of something whenever I can. I get to pick and choose when I use it. If a client schedules a call with me, I do not use my -ish technique for what time I plan to join

the session. I use the technique in low-stakes situations where otherwise *perfectionist me* would have a tendency to self-criticize. If this resonates with you, adopt the technique! Or reach out and let’s schedule some time to walk through this together and discuss how you might come up with your own technique to get on the road to perfectionism recovery.

Category

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Tags

1. expectations
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