

PARENTING MATTERS

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Newsletter

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What a great Vancouver summer this is turning out to be. A good mix of hot and warm, with a bit of rain to let the kids sleep in and the grass to look green!

I have been reading the Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund Bourne, Ph.D. and have come across some interesting reading with regards to traits that are common in people who have anxiety. So I would like to present some of this information in this and the next **PARENTING MATTERS** Newsletter.

Hope your families are safe in your travels this summer!

Perfectionism is rooted in anxiety

There are common traits found in people who have anxiety. Some traits that “ramp up” and exaggerate the anxiety are : perfectionism, excessive need for approval, tendency to ignore signs of emotional and physical stress and excessive need for control. This article will focus on perfectionism and ignoring your stress signals.

The drive to be perfect or to be perceived as perfect is fueled by one’s fear. Oftentimes the anxiety stems from childhood. If you were regularly criticized by a parent, you may have decided that nothing you could do was “good enough” and so you began to strive to do everything perfectly. Another article I read also commented that first born children are more likely to feel the pressure to be perfect. It could have been further heightened by things like self pressure, social pressure and media pressure. These pressures can lead you to worrying, feeling guilty and working too hard.

Perfectionism has two components. First, you have unrealistically high expectations about yourself, others and life. When someone or something does not measure up, you become disappointed and/or critical. Second, you are overly focused on small flaws and mistakes in yourself and your accomplishments. Often these small flaws have no real consequence in the big picture, but there is a tendency to focus on what’s wrong rather than what’s right. The rigid style

of thinking a perfectionist employs is “all or nothing.” You may question your judgment, lack effective problem solving skills or feel a need to please others.

Perfectionism is a common cause of low self-esteem. It can cause you to drive yourself to the point of stress, exhaustion and burnout. Meeting your own high expectations to please your parents, colleagues, teachers or friends is a problem. When you are too afraid to take healthy risks, that is a problem. When you hear yourself saying “you must” or “you should have,” this comes from a point of worry and anxiety rather than from a true natural desire.

Ways to Counteract Perfectionism

1. Let go of the belief that your worth is determined by your achievements and accomplishments. (recognize that you are lovable and acceptable as you are)
2. Overcome Perfectionist styles of thinking. (The rigid patterns include: All-or-Nothing Thinking, “Should/Must Thinking” and Overgeneralization)
3. Stop focusing on small flaws or errors.
4. Focus on the positives.
5. Set realistic goals.
6. Start placing value on the *process* of doing things and not on the accomplishment.
7. Stop denying yourself small pleasures or the chance to enjoy life and have fun.

Ignoring Physical and Psychological Signs of Stress

Being anxious means you are preoccupied with worrying and often not in-tune with your body. Some clients I see tell me that they are thinking through their worries over and over again, and tell me that they feel exhausted, but do not find ways to calm their thoughts and their body to a state of feeling restful. There is a wide range of physical symptoms you can feel when stressed, such as: fatigue, headaches, tight muscles, nervous stomach, and even diarrhea.

People who are constant worriers, and perfectionist, can drive themselves so hard that they can develop panic attacks, depression, or mood swings. The goal here would be to develop an ability to manage and cope with stress. To do this you need to both recognize your symptoms and do something about them. Some suggestions to help manage your symptoms would be:

- Schedule in “downtime,”
- Yoga or deep relaxation.
- Recreational activities
- Good sleep hygiene
- Be assertive
- Have an emotional release
- Counter negative thinking
- Be tolerant of set backs
- Adopt a positive philosophy of life

The key point is to be proactive in building in some “me” time so your nervous system does not become over worked!

Conquering your perfectionism will open up new possibilities, and it will certainly make your life a lot more relaxing and enjoyable!

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