



### **ABOUT ME:**

I am a Licensed Professional School Counselor, ASCA-certified Trauma and Crisis Management Specialist, QPR-certified Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper, HOPE Squad Advisor, and Small Groups Counselor.

I believe every student has a story. By getting to know those stories, connections are made and relationships are built. Everything boils down to relationships. All future success starts with building and maintaining trusting relationships, where students can feel safe enough to be vulnerable.

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# Building Resiliency and Reducing Anxiety by Overcoming Perfectionism



Lesson Plan for Small  
Groups or Classrooms

# **American School Counseling Association (ASCA) Mindset and Behavior Standards:**

- M 2. Self-confidence in ability to succeed
- B-LS 4. Apply self-motivation and self-direction to learning
- B-LS 7. Identify long- and short-term academic, career and social/emotional goals
- B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem
- B-SMS 10. Demonstrate ability to manage transitions and ability to adapt to changing situations and responsibilities

## **Objectives:**

- Students will acknowledge that striving for excellence is not the same thing as perfectionism. Perfectionism is self-defeating and leads to shame.
- Students will recognize that letting go of perfectionism is a significant part of building resiliency and establishing healthy coping skills.
- Students will evaluate their own behaviors and beliefs in relation to perfectionism and be able to differentiate between healthy striving versus harmful perfectionistic behaviors.

## **Length of Lesson:**

- One hour (but can be adapted based on how much time is spent on an icebreaker and/or discussion questions)

## **Supplies Needed/Preparation:**

- Regular group supplies (list of rules, “talking stick,” supplies needed for any icebreakers, etc.)
- White board and dry-erase markers
- Enough notecards for participants to have 10 each
- Writing utensils
- Copies of Perfectionism vs. Healthy Striving worksheet (included at end of lesson)

## **Welcome:**

- Welcome all participants to the group.
- Remind everyone of established group rules.
  - Rules should be decided upon and established in the very first group meeting, and participants should have input on the rules. Some things to consider when deciding upon rules may include:
    - Use of cell phones during group
    - Participation (being allowed to “pass” if unwilling to share, etc.)

## **Welcome (continued):**

- Group rules (continued)
  - Confidentiality concerns
    - Facilitator of group will break confidentiality under the following conditions:
      - Belief that student is going to harm themselves or others
      - Belief that someone is hurting the student
      - Permission is granted to share with another trusted adult
    - Confidentiality among group members is encouraged but cannot be guaranteed (someone potentially could share with outside friends what is discussed in groups; participants need to be aware of that possibility)
  - Taking turns/sharing procedures
    - It may be helpful to have a “talking stick” or some other small item that can be passed around. Participants only talk when they are holding the “talking stick” (this prevents participants from monopolizing the conversation or talking over others).

## **Icebreaker (optional):**

- Download my free icebreaker activities at <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Icebreakers-for-teens-middle-school-and-high-school-4046192>.

## Check-In :

- Pass the “talking stick” around to have participants answer:
  - On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = worst day ever; 10 = best day ever), how would you rate how your day is going?
  - Is there anything that has happened since our last group that you would like us to know about?

## What Does Perfectionism Look Like?

- Write, “What does perfectionism look like?” on the whiteboard.
  - Brainstorm together and write the ideas in a column underneath the question. Possibilities might include:
    - Fear of making mistakes; fear of failure
    - Worry about what others think
    - Obsessive checking and rechecking
    - Extreme behavior (i.e. non-stop exercising or extreme dieting to achieve a “perfect” body)
    - Avoiding new things unless absolutely sure of success
    - “All or Nothing” thinking (i.e. “Either I get straight A’s or I’m a complete failure.”)
    - Unrealistic expectations
    - Giving up or quitting if something is hard or not immediately mastered

# What Does Shame Look Like?

- Next to the first question, write “What does shame look like?” on the whiteboard.
  - Brainstorm together and write the ideas in a column underneath the question.  
Possibilities might include:
    - Fear of disconnection; not being accepted
    - Never being good enough
    - Not getting elected or not making the team
    - Being ridiculed
    - Feeling like a failure

NOTE: Sometimes the terms “shame” and “guilt” are used interchangeably, but they are not the same thing. Guilt is: “I have *done* something bad.” Shame is: “I *am* a bad person.” While guilt can lead to a positive outcome (if guilty feelings lead to an apology and an attempt to rectify the situation), shame is always self-defeating and detrimental to mental health. Ensure students understand the difference.

## Discussion Questions:

- What do you notice about these two lists?
  - Allow participants to respond, but help them to realize that everything in the “Perfectionism” column could also be listed in the “Shame” column.
- What does that tell us about the relationship between perfectionism and shame? How does it impact our mental health and well-being?

## Life Shuffle:

- Hand 10 notecards and a writing utensil to each participant.
- Instruct them to write down important expectations they have regarding what will happen in their lives within the next five years.
  - List one expectation per notecard.
  - Be specific. Don't just write generic things like, "I will be happy." or "I will do well in school." Encourage them to be as specific as possible and try to think of things that are unique to their own life – things that match the picture in their head of how their life will play out.
- When finished, turn the cards face-down (so no words can be seen) and hand them to the person on their left.
- Everyone shuffles the cards they have been handed and then gives them back to the original recipient – keeping them face-down the entire time.
- Each participant selects just five of their cards from the shuffled stack. Once the five have been selected, they can turn the chosen cards face-up again.
- Tell the participants, "Imagine these five cards are the only expectations that are fulfilled. The other five go unrealized."



## **Life Shuffle (continued):**

- Use the "talking stick" to ask the following questions:
  - What was your initial reaction to hearing that only five out of the ten happen?
  - Do any of your unrealized expectations change your goals or what you want for yourself? Explain your answer.
  - How realistic is it to think that *all* of your expectations will play out exactly like you want them to?
  - What are some acceptable "Plan B" scenarios that you could begin to evaluate?
  - How does the potential fulfillment (or lack of fulfillment) of these expectations impact your current capabilities?

## **Perfectionism vs. Healthy Striving:**

- Have students complete the Perfectionism vs. Healthy Striving worksheet.
- Use the "talking stick" to allow participants to share one (or more) of the situations they came up with to demonstrate perfectionist vs. healthy striving ways of thinking.

## Wrap Up:

- Ask the students to select one of the categories (perhaps the category with their lowest number) of the Perfectionism vs. Healthy Striving continuums that they would like to work on.
- Use the “talking stick” to close the session by allowing each participant to name one thing they are going to do in the coming week to bump up their number on the continuum.

## Thank you to:

- <https://psychopaedia.org/work-and-performance/are-you-a-perfectionist/> (cover image)
- Brown, B. (2007). *I thought it was just me (but it isn't)*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC. (Life Shuffle idea)
- Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*. London: Vermilion Publishing. (definitions of shame and guilt; verbiage and characteristics of perfectionism on Perfectionism vs. Healthy Striving worksheet,)

# PERFECTIONISM vs. HEALTHY STRIVING

Striving for excellence is not the same thing as perfectionism. Perfectionism is self-defeating and leads to shame. Letting go of perfectionism is a significant part of building resiliency and establishing healthy coping skills.

Evaluate where you fit on the Perfectionism vs. Healthy Striving continuum in each of the indicated areas by circling the appropriate number.

PERFECTIONISM is...	←————→	HEALTHY STRIVING is...
Trying to earn approval	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Aiming for personal improvement and growth
Wondering, "What will others think?"	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Wondering, "How can I improve?"
Perception-based	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Motivation-based
Leads to feelings of shame	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Leads to self-confidence

Complete the chart with examples from your own life.

SITUATION	PERFECTIONIST way of thinking	HEALTHY STRIVING way of thinking
I normally get straight A's, but received a B- on my Biology test.	I'm a complete failure. I'm supposed to be the "smart one" in my family. I'm stupid and worthless. I can never let anyone find out about this. I'm such an idiot.	Wow. I didn't do as well as I normally do on tests. That's disappointing, but it doesn't reflect who I really am. It's more important that I learn and remember the information. It's just one grade. I'll study harder next time.