Why Being a Perfectionist Is Bad for Your Health

Vocabulary

depression - a mental health condition in which people often feel very sad, have trouble eating and sleeping, lack energy, etc. *The doctor is trying to help her overcome her depression.*

disorder - an illness or condition that prevents normal mental or physical functions

Anxiety disorders affect over 10 million adults in the United States alone.

belief - an acceptance that something is true, especially without proof; something one accepts as true. *Eating pork goes against their religious beliefs.*

judge - to form an opinion about a person or thing. *Don't judge a book by its cover.*

A perfectionist is someone who tries to do everything perfectly and who is upset by making small mistakes. For example, a perfectionist student may feel like they failed if they got anything less than an A+ in every class.

While competition and wanting to be excellent can be healthy, perfectionism is a serious problem that has been linked to many mental health issues, including depression and eating disorders. People with high levels of perfectionism have also been shown to have a higher risk of early death.

A University of Bath study found that the number of college students who struggled with perfectionism grew from about 9% in 1989 to 18% in 2016. "On average, young people are more perfectionist than they used to be," says author Andrew Hill, and "the belief that other people expect you to be perfect has increased the most."

Social media may be partly to blame. "You see other perfect lives online ... And so, if you go out, and people see that [your] life isn't perfect, [you're] afraid they'll judge [you]," actor Lana Condor told Vox.

Another reason may be that as jobs become more competitive, parents are pushing their children more than ever to be successful. This may make some children feel that they need to be perfect in order to be loved and accepted.

Many people become perfectionists because they think that others will accept them, and they'll feel better about themselves if they're perfect. However, the opposite is true: not only does perfectionism often lead to unhappiness and self-hate, but perfectionists may also have a hard time making friends because others see them as difficult to approach.

Questions

1. What mental health issues can perfectionism lead to?
2. Is perfectionism becoming less common among college students?
3. Why might perfectionists have a hard time making friends?

Discussion

Would you describe yourself as a perfectionist? Why? Why not?

Do you find it surprising that perfectionism can lead to mental health issues? Why? Why not?

Would you say that parents in your country are pushing their children more than ever to be successful?

Were you often frustrated about your grades when you were in school?

What would you do if your child got upset every time, he/she got less than an A+ in class?

Can you think of any benefits to being a perfectionist?

What advice would you give to someone who has a hard time dealing with failure?

Do you think that social media has a positive or negative effect on society? Why?

Do you know anyone who has a hard time making friends? If so, please describe them.