



SPEAKER KIT

CARALENA PETERSON

Author of *The Effortless Perfection Myth*
www.caralenapeterson.com

ABOUT CARALENA

Caralena (Cara) Peterson is a speaker and writer educating students, parents, teachers, and administrators on the “Effortless Perfection” Myth and the mental health crisis it has spurred on campuses across the United States, especially amongst women. Known as the Effortless Perfection expert, she has written about the Myth for places like *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Week*, *Teen Vogue*, *She Knows Media*, *Ms. Magazine*, and *Bustle* and dives deeper into all of its effects and solutions in her book, *The Effortless Perfection Myth: Debunking the Myth and Revealing the Path to Empowerment for Today’s College Women* (September 2022).

Caralena earned her B.A. in Women’s Studies and Public Policy at Duke University and her M.A. at the Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English. She has spoken to audiences including TEDx, Cornell, Duke, Elon, Harvard, Tulane, Amazon GoodReads, and the National Women's History Museum, among others. She has also had the honor of appearing on news programs like *Good Morning Washington* and *PIX11*.

Caralena served as a visiting professor at Middlebury College for the 2024 Winter Term. She has five years of teaching experience at the middle and high school level in English and History. She is also a mixed-medium artist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times* and *Washington Life Magazine*.

To learn more, visit www.caralenapeterson.com.

AS SEEN ON/IN:

The New York Times
Inside Higher Ed
The Week
Teen Vogue
Ms. Magazine
Good Morning Washington
PIX 11
Elite Daily
She Knows Media
Bustle
Rewire News
Garnet News

STAGES

APPEARED ON:

Cornell University
Duke University
Elon University
Harvard University
Middlebury College
St. Mary's College
Tulane University
Branson School (CA)
Durham Academy (NC)
Flint Hill School (VA)
Pomfret School (CT)
Stevenson School (CA)
Thacher School (CA)
TEDx
Amazon GoodReads
INOVA Health Systems
National Women's History Museum
Running Start Congressional Fellows



WHY CARALENA?

Caralena is an educator at heart. She's known for being able to spark interesting conversations among diverse audiences and then asking the right questions to keep them going – and it's no different when she's teaching about Effortless Perfection from the stage. Woven throughout each talk is her own personal story of struggle with the Effortless Perfection Myth to show just how possible it is to break the Myth and live in a healthier, more empowered reality.

Of course, Caralena also pairs her story with statistics and anecdotes that she's gathered from young women of various races, sexualities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to bring it all to life and give her listeners a chance to see their own experiences reflected in the data. **Caralena deeply believes in the importance of prioritizing intersectionality within her work to make sure all members of the audience feel seen and understood. Effortless Perfection does not discriminate. It impacts individuals from all backgrounds in an array of ways.**

Keynotes can be tailored to fit the audience, depending on the event's needs or direction. Caralena also offers customized keynotes and breakout sessions. While much of her work centers around collegiate women, she also has experience speaking to mixed-gender audiences in both educational and corporate spaces.

Lastly, Caralena knows the importance of addressing an entire school community and has developed a speaking model specifically for high school settings that allows her to address students, teachers, and parents in ways that are specific to their roles. She often even does so all in one day! She has three separate keynotes designed to do more than simply raise awareness around perfectionism and mental health; rather, she hopes to mobilize whole populations by giving each segment the tools they need to do their part in defeating the Myth.

Mental Health is Not a Contest: How the Effortless Perfection Myth Warps Our Understanding of What's "Allowed" to Count as Struggle

Most women don't go off to college expecting a major drop in confidence; they're getting ready to have the best four years of their lives. But the reality is that women leave college with less self-esteem than they came in with and are two times more likely to experience depression than their male counterparts. So, where is the disconnect happening? Drawing from a plethora of data and her own personal experience, Effortless Perfection expert Caralena Peterson shows us just how immense the Myth's impact can be and why women need to start talking about the ways it disadvantages them instead of hiding behind secrecy and comparison. Full of authentic reflection and heart, this talk invites high school and undergraduate women to take an honest look at their state of mental health and learn ways to move into healing and empowerment. [Please note: this talk can easily be adapted for mixed gender audiences.]

Audiences Will Learn:

- What the Effortless Perfection Myth is and why it's dangerous to keep ignoring it and labeling it a superficial cliché
- How to reframe the way they see struggle and recognize that theirs is part of a larger issue affecting many women of all backgrounds
- The dangers of writing off mental health as a "white people issue" and a "rich people issue"
- Vocabulary to express what they're feeling and experiencing along with tools for how to combat the Effortless Perfection Myth and its side effects



Beneath the Surface: What Your Perfectionist, Self-Sufficient Child Secretly Wants from You

Do you ever worry about your type-A, straight-edge, perfectionist child who seems to have everything going for them? Perhaps you should. They may secretly be feeling the need to earn the love they receive by making themselves smart enough, pretty/handsome enough, perfect enough. They may be attempting to create a sense of identity based on impossible standards and expectations, and it may be pushing them straight toward a breakdown. College in particular is a very intense period wherein your child is likely to experience their highest highs and lowest lows to date. Caralena informs parents on the red flags to look out for and the sneaky strategies their children may be using to hide all that is going on beneath the surface, while providing pointers for engaging them in conversation about how it's okay to not always be okay.

Audiences Will Learn:

- How your child might be using accomplishment as a cure-all
- Underlying problems with the coping mechanisms they use to project a flawless, unbreakable exterior
- Advice on how to plant seeds and effectively engage your child in conversation on this topic instead of staging a big, overwhelming intervention



10 Helpful Scripts for Teachers with Persistently Anxious, Perfectionist Students

With five years of teaching experience at the middle and high school level, Caralena knows what it is like to attend a professional development session and wonder if the presenter has ever actually spent time in a classroom -- let alone experienced the nuanced challenges of being an educator in the past decade. Have no fear, this presentation is designed to feel like a conversation among kindred spirits wherein teachers can voice their concerns about the ways they see the Effortless Perfection Myth at work in their school community, then sit back and consider a number of concrete tools and strategies for actually addressing the issue in their classrooms.

Audiences Will Learn:

- How to recognize students' red flag behaviors (such as inflexible all-or-nothing-thinking, reassurance addiction, fear-based motivation, and compulsive inefficient overwork)
- Appropriate language to redirect students away from unhealthy behaviors that lead to burnout and a variety of other mental health struggles
- To consider the ways in which their own habits and behaviors might be modeling the exact perfectionist behaviors they are instructing students to avoid
 - Specific emphasis on how jobs like teaching, wherein empathy is a key motivator, often trigger a perfectionist mindset in surprising ways

Even more so than the student and parent talks, this presentation condenses the research-based findings of a myriad of current leading medical health professionals and academics into a strong selection of bite-sized actionable directives.



SPEAKING SAMPLES

Beneath the Surface: What Your Perfectionist, Self-Sufficient Child Secretly Wants from You (Durham Academy)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKHerEiY0iw>

Are We ALL on the Menu?: The Effects of Stereotypes and Misinformation Surrounding Disordered Eating (TEDxDuke)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8ZSQQSmZ8c>

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING...

"CARALENA SPOKE AT FEMINIST CAMP-NEW ORLEANS AND SHE CHANGED MY ENTIRE WAY OF THINKING ABOUT LIFE. BEFORE HER, I HAD NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PUT INTO WORDS THIS PRESSURE PUT ON MYSELF AND SO MANY OF MY FRIENDS TO 'DO IT ALL' AND MAKE IT LOOK EASY, BUT STILL NEVER FEEL GOOD ENOUGH. SINCE SHE OPENED MY EYES TO THE EFFORTLESS PERFECTION MYTH, I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO START DISMANTLING THIS HARMFUL WAY OF THINKING AND START BEING MORE TRUE TO MYSELF. HER MESSAGE IS ONE NEEDED BY EVERY YOUNG WOMAN WHO FEELS PRESSURE TO LOOK LIKE SHE ALWAYS HAS HER LIFE TOGETHER, BUT WHO STRUGGLES JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!"

-Zoe, first year student at Tulane University

CARALENA PETERSON'S TALK TO THE RUNNING START CONGRESSIONAL FELLOWS WAS INTIMATE, TAILORED TO THE AUDIENCE AND RELATABLE. SHE MADE COMPLEX ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON THE EFFORTLESS PERFECTION MYTH, YOUNG WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH, AND TOXIC SOCIETAL TRENDS INTO ACCESSIBLE ANECDOTES THAT RANG TRUE. THIS IMPACTFUL AND INSIGHT-LADEN TALK – AND THE ENGAGING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PETERSON POSED AFTERWARDS – SHOULD BE REQUIRED FOR WOMEN AS THEY ENTER YOUNG ADULTHOOD.

-Serena Sanders, Communications & Programs Coordinator, Running Start

"CARALENA SPOKE WITH OUR COLLEGIATE MEMBERS ABOUT THE EFFORTLESS PERFECTION MYTH. HER ABILITY TO PERSONALLY CONNECT WITH THE AUDIENCE ABOUT DEEPLY PERSONAL TOPICS WAS INCREDIBLE. HER IDEAS GET TO THE VERY CORE OF WHAT OUR WOMEN STRUGGLE WITH ON A DAILY BASIS AND GIVE US THE FOUNDATION TO BEGIN MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS THAT PROMOTE CONFIDENCE AND GROWTH."

-Jill Mahar, Director of Leadership and Curriculum Development, Phi Mu Sorority

"CARALENA DID A TREMENDOUS JOB SPEAKING TO OUR 11TH AND 12TH GRADE CLASSES. EVERY STUDENT THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY TAKEN BY HER OPEN, DIRECT APPROACH AND DEEPLY APPRECIATED THE MESSAGE SHE HAD TO SHARE! I ENTERED MY PSYCHOLOGY CLASS LATER THAT DAY AND WAS MET WITH A HOST OF STUDENTS WHO REALLY WANTED TO TALK ABOUT HER MESSAGE AND HOW MUCH IT MEANT TO THEM. CARALENA HAS A REAL GIFT IN SPEAKING TO OTHERS AND HER 'STORY' IS A POWERFUL ONE!"

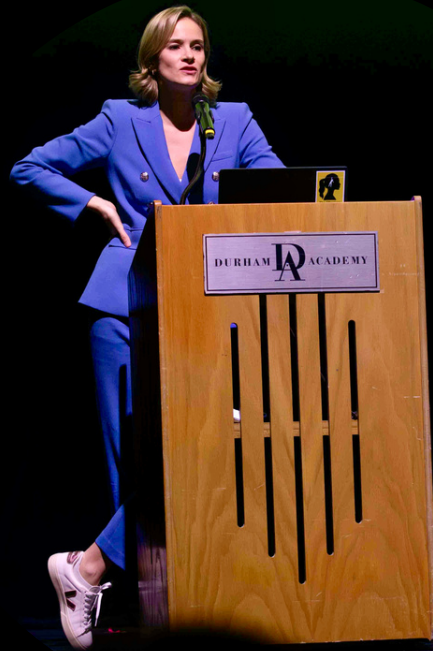
-John Thomas, Headmaster of Flint Hill School (K-12)

"OUR HIGH-ACHIEVING SCHOOL WAS LOOKING FOR A SPEAKER TO DISCUSS THE PERILS OF PERFECTIONISM WITH STUDENTS, FACULTY/STAFF, AND PARENTS. WE BOOKED CARALENA FOR A FULL DAY OF SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS. SHE WAS ON CAMPUS AT 8 AM, AND STAYED WITH US UNTIL NEARLY 8:30 PM THAT NIGHT. SHE HAD THE SAME AMOUNT OF ENERGY, WARMTH, AND ENGAGEMENT AT HER FIRST STUDENT ASSEMBLY AS SHE DID WITH A CROWDED AUDITORIUM OF ADULTS THAT EVENING. CARALENA'S POWERFUL MESSAGE RESONATED WITH OUR ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY. STUDENTS COULD EASILY CONNECT WITH HER YOUTH. HER OWN TEACHING EXPERIENCE MEANT SHE HAD INSTANT CREDIBILITY AND CONNECTION WITH OUR FACULTY. AND WHEN WE ASKED HER TO SHARE EVIDENCE-BASED TIPS WITH CAREGIVERS, SHE DREW ON RESEARCH TO HELP PARENTS UNDERSTAND BOTH MODELING AND PREVENTION."

-Victoria Muradi, Director of Strategic Initiatives at Durham Academy (K-12)

BOOKING CONTACT INFORMATION

Caralena Peterson can be requested as a keynote speaker, panel participant, or breakout session leader. To book her, you may reach out to her directly at cara.peterson14@gmail.com.



If you prefer to work through a speakers bureau, Caralena is represented by:

Soapbox Speakers, Inc.

<https://www.soapboxinc.com/inquiry/>

Please contact Amy Richards
(amy@soapboxinc.com)
with any specific questions.