

Are You Living with a Perfectionist?

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A few things before we get started...

- Campus Tour
- Snow
- Videotaping
- Super Summer
- Facebook



Perfectionism is:

“A combination of thoughts and behaviors associated with high standards or expectations for one’s own performance.” Hamacheck (1978)

Healthy Perfectionists feel good about their efforts and do not feel the need to excel at every endeavor.

Unhealthy Perfectionists do not get a sense of satisfaction from their accomplishments.



Possible Reasons for Perfectionism

- Inborn for some individuals (Silverman, 1990)
- Birth order - oldest (Smith, 1990)
- Messages from the media (Barrow & Moore, 1983)
- Perfectionistic teachers & peers (Adderholdt-Elliott, 1991)
- Pressure from school, peers, teachers: through rewards or punishment; often cited... 'try/do our best'... what's 'best'?
- Influence of the dysfunctional family:
 - Children of alcoholics (Crespi, 1990 & Smith 1990)
 - Children of workaholics (Brophy, 1986)

- **Genetics?: one or both parents are perfectionists. Parental expectations and house rules**
- **Super baby syndrome (Hot housing)**
- **MA>CA : where mental age > chronological age. Mustn't forget children need to do childish things no matter how mature they appear or actually are**



Symptoms of Perfectionism

(Adderholdt-Elliott, 1987)

Indicators of unhealthy perfectionism with potential to impact an individual's success in school and social situations.

- **Procrastination**
- **Poor Time Management Skills**
- **Difficulty in Social Situations**
- **Fear of Failure or Fear of Success**
- **Headaches or Stomachaches**
- **Tense Control of Emotions**
- **Intolerance of Others' Imperfections**
- **Lower self-esteem**
- **Performance Anxiety**
- **Poor Risk Taking Skills**



Signs of Dysfunctional Perfectionism

(Schuler, 1999)

- **Delayed starts**
- **Unwillingness to share work**
- **Extreme response to poor grades**
- **Feelings of superiority accompanied by loneliness**
- **Relentless self-criticism**
- **Feelings of inferiority**
- **Fear of the future**
- **High level of anxiety**
- **Refusal to turn in work or accomplish goals**
- **Inability to tolerate mistakes**
- **Tendency to magnify & generalize self imperfections**
- **Inability to cope with ambiguity & change**
- **Inability to share responsibility**
- **Susceptible to depression following productive periods**

What DOESN'T work

- Saying, “Just do it!”
- Nagging and being a watchdog
- Using criticism, ridicule, and threats of extreme or exaggerated consequences
- Doing it yourself (Burka & Yuen, 1983)

Seven Strategies for Helping the Perfectionist

(Heacox 1991)

- **Assist her in setting reasonable and reachable expectations for herself.**
- **Refrain from criticism.**
- **Introduce him to new experiences.**
- **Show that your caring is not based on the student's performance.**
- **Create a safe environment.**
- **Focus on the student's strengths and successes.**
- **Plan incentives and rewards that do not require perfection.**

Statements to Use to Help Reduce Unhealthy Perfectionism (Walker 1994)

Try Saying this:

How do you feel about your grade?

You do a good job of...

You have improved in...

You can help me by...

Let's find out together.

What did you learn from the mistake?

I understand how you feel.

Keep trying. Don't give up.

Instead of this:

What happened here?

Why can't you ever do it right?

You still can't do...

Why don't you ever...

Go look it up.

That was a dumb thing to do.

Act your age.

Are you still working on that?

Helping Perfectionistic Kids

- Teach courage: “I know you can try.”
- Reward trying
- Try something new without being committed to high performance
- Expect progress, not perfection
 - “Finished” is sometimes a better goal than perfect
- Applaud persistence:
 - “You kept on trying, even when you didn’t know how it would turn out!”
- Break down the task
 - “Inch by inch, it’s a cinch.
 - Yard by yard, it’s hard.”

Helping Perfectionistic Kids

- **Acknowledge learning:**
 - “What did you learn while you were doing it?”
 - “What part did you enjoy most?”
 - “What might you try next time?”
 - “How might you do it differently next time?”
- **Ask: “What’s good about it?”**
- **Help the child discover meaning:**
 - “What were you thinking when you were choosing which colors to use?”
 - “Why do you think you enjoyed that so much?”

Helping Perfectionistic Kids

- Honor the time invested:
 - “You gave a lot of your time to this. It must have been important to you.”
- Focus on processes as well as products:
 - “How did you decide to change the experiment in the way you did?”
- Make mistakes “okay”.
- Call work “practice.”
- Model how to make mistakes “okay”.
- (Smutney, Meckstroth, & Walker, 1997)



"I'm only a good dane." *W. W. Wood*

- ❑ Children who are highly successful are often only praised when they accomplish something whether it be a perfect score on a test in school or a goal in soccer. Instead, praise them for attempting something, for trying. This makes the effort more important than the product.
- ❑ A child also needs a chance to become a decision-maker. Allow her to make choices often; always making either of the possible options acceptable to you! Let him choose what to wear or what to put in his lunch. Expand the opportunities for decision making as he or she gets older and do not second guess the decision even if its outcome is less than desirable.