

PERFECTIONISM



WHAT IS IT?

Perfectionism is not necessarily about being 'perfect'.

Although there is no universal definition, perfectionism tends to involve three things:

1. Striving for extremely high standards (for yourself and/or others) that are personally demanding, in the context of the individual.
2. Judging your self-worth based on your ability to strive for and achieve your high standards.
3. Experiencing negative consequences of setting high standards, yet continuing to go for them.

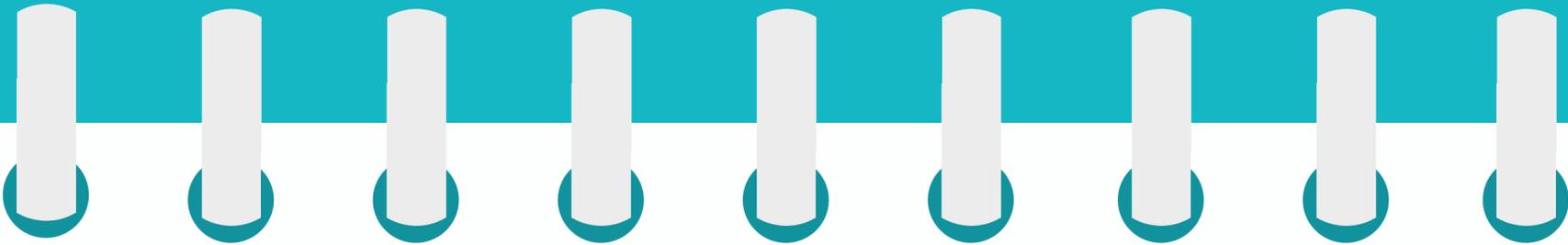
WHAT DOES PERFECTIONISM LOOK LIKE?

Perfectionistic traits and behaviours might include:

- having exceptionally high expectations for yourself;
- being self-critical, self-conscious and easily embarrassed;
- having strong feelings of inadequacy and low self-confidence;
- exhibiting persistent anxiety about making mistakes;
- being highly sensitive to criticism;
- procrastinating and avoiding stressful situations or difficult tasks;
- being emotionally guarded and socially inhibited;
- having a tendency to be critical of others;
- exhibiting difficulty making decisions and prioritising tasks.

THE PARADOX OF PERFECTIONISM!

Although having high standards and goals may help us achieve things in life, sometimes these standards get in the way of our happiness and can actually impair performance. This is the paradox of perfectionism! The excessive drive to achieve ever-higher levels of performance is self-defeating as it leaves individuals with little chance of meeting their goals and feeling good about themselves. This kind of pressure is likely to cause them to feel constantly on edge, tense, and stressed out. Perfectionism can also make people's self-worth particularly vulnerable as not reaching the (possibly unachievable) standards they set for themselves may result in feelings of failure. Pursuing these personally demanding standards can have a significant impact on one's wellbeing, and can lead to frustration, worry, social isolation, depression and a persistent sense of failure.



HOW PARENTS CAN SUPPORT A CHILD WHO DISPLAYS TRAITS OF PERFECTIONISM:

1 Encourage a growth mindset

A growth mindset is when an individual believes that their skills and abilities can be developed further. People with a growth mindset seek opportunities to learn and enhance their skills. They understand that uncertainties and mistakes are part of the learning process and therefore view challenges not as a chance to fail, but rather, as an opportunity to learn and grow.

For information about fostering a growth mind set, visit:

<https://www.teachthought.com/learning/25-simple-ways-develop-growth-mindset/>

2 Help them to develop realistic expectations

Children who display perfectionistic tendencies often have unrealistic expectations of themselves. Their high expectations often underlie the pressure they put on themselves to achieve a desired outcome. When they are unable to attain their desired outcome, they can feel a sense of failure and inadequacy. Help your child to develop realistic expectations by helping them prioritise and plan tasks. Challenge their expectations by asking them to reflect on their skills. Helping your child compare their skills and outcomes to others their age can be a useful way of fostering insight and creating age-appropriate expectations.

3 Help them to develop appropriate coping skills

Children who display traits of perfectionism are more likely to feel overwhelmed and dissatisfied with their achieved outcomes. This is because their desired outcomes often exceed their capabilities. It is important to support your child when they make mistakes and encounter perceived failure. Help them to understand that making mistakes is part of the learning process. Reflections, positive self-talk and emotional regulation strategies such as breathing and mindfulness techniques can be helpful to manage any unhelpful emotions that your child may experience.

4 Model and reinforce appropriate behaviours and attitudes

Children often learn through receiving feedback and observing others. It is important to model a growth mindset so that your child can learn how to accept mistakes and imperfections.

When you have not achieved a desired outcome, verbalise your thoughts and feelings so your child can understand and learn from your thinking processes. This can also help to validate their own experiences. It is also important to model problem solving skills so that your child can also learn how to overcome their challenges.

Reinforce the processes involved in learning a new skill rather than the outcome. Praise your child for their level of motivation and engagement in a task rather than their successes.

Positively reinforcing the skills needed to complete a task is likely to strengthen your child's motivation and perseverance.



RESOURCES & FURTHER INFORMATION:

Perfectionistic Behaviours:

- <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/~media/CCI/Mental-Health-Professionals/Perfectionism/Perfectionism---Information-Sheets/Perfectionism-Information-Sheet---03---Perfectionism-Behaviours.pdf>

Understanding Perfectionists:

- <https://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/school-and-learning-issues/perfectionism-in-children/>

Risk Factors and Potential Implications of Perfectionism:

- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/what-to-do-when-your-child-is-a-perfectionist-4147432>
- <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/323323>

Perfectionism & Anxiety:

- <https://www.hcf.com.au/health-agenda/body-mind/mental-health/understanding-perfectionism-and-anxiety>



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