

“Perfectionism is not a good thing. It is often misperceived as a good thing, and it has been described as a good thing, but it is not. What is good is the pursuit of excellence, which is something quite different.

From When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith

DEFINITIONS

- **Perfectionism means:**
 - ❑ You can *never* fail
 - ❑ You **always** need approval
 - ❑ If you come in 2nd, you're a loser
- **The Pursuit of Excellence means:**
 - ❑ Taking risks
 - ❑ Trying new things
 - ❑ Growing and changing

WHO ARE PERFECTIONISTS?

- ❑ People of all ages
- ❑ Gifted People tend to be especially prone to perfectionism

PERFECTIONISM AND YOUR CHILD

Information to help you understand the signs of perfectionism

Content from:

- When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith
- “Perfectionism at a Glance” in Freeing Our Families from Perfectionism by Thomas S. Greenspon
- You Know Your Child Is Gifted When...A Beginner's Guide to Life on the Bright Side by Judy Galbraith

“Use the talents you possess: for the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except the best.”

Anonymous

Compiled by Pat Gerber, 2003

HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME A PERFECTIONIST?

- ❑ Many gifted people show these tendencies because they are aware of quality, they know how something “ought to be done”
- ❑ Students with high expectations may find that they are reinforced by their environment – particularly if they have had a string of early successes
- ❑ Students who have received lavish praise and encouragement to keep up the great work (especially for modest work) may exhibit these traits
- ❑ Students who receive little praise and are held to impossibly high standards can also crave praise from trying to please parents or teachers
- ❑ Some people just develop these traits that go unchecked for many years and they become habit

PERFECTIONISM AT-A- GLANCE

How a Perfectionist Acts

- Over commits himself
- Rarely delegates work to others
- Has a hard time making choices

- Always has to be in control
- Competes fiercely
- Arrives late because one more thing had to be done
- Always does last minute cramming
- Gets carried away with the details
- Never seems satisfied with his work
- Constantly busies himself with something or other
- Frequently criticizes others
- Refuses to hear criticism of himself
- Pays more attention to negative than positive comments
- Checks up on other people’s work
- Calls himself “stupid” when he does something imperfectly
- Procrastinates

How a Perfectionist Thinks

- “If I can’t do it perfectly, what is the point?”
- “I always have to stay ahead of the others.”
- “There is only one right way to do things.”
- “I’m a wonderful person if I do well; I’m a lousy person if I do poorly.”
- “I’m never good enough.”
- “Everything should be clearly black or white. Grays are a sign of confused thinking.”

How a Perfectionist Feels

- Deeply embarrassed about mistakes
- Disgusted or angry with self when criticized
- Anxious when stating opinion to others

- Extremely worried about details
- Afraid of appearing incompetent, afraid of being rejected, or of having fears
- Guilty about letting others down

**What can I do to help my child
learn to Pursue Excellence rather
than seek Perfection?**

Pursuers of Excellence:

- 1) Determine the sources of his/her perfectionism
- 2) Reassess his/her feelings about failure and success
- 3) Stand his/her ground against people who pressure him/her to be perfect
- 4) Learn ways to be easier on himself/herself so he/she is free to take risks and try new things
- 5) Find ways to celebrate the journey, not just the end product

As a Parent you can:

- 1) Create a safe environment for failure. Give your child permission to make mistakes.
- 2) Praise your child for taking risks, even when things don’t turn out the way he/she planned.
- 3) DON’T overdo the everyday praise. Overemphasis on praise makes children think that what they do is more important than who they are.
- 4) Check yourself. Do you exhibit perfectionistic traits? Many perfectionistic children have at least one perfectionistic parent.