

# Learning how to help a perfectionist kid



## WHAT IS PERFECTIONISM?

Perfectionism can be perceived as a good thing, something we should strive for. It is often seen as the pursuit of excellence, setting high standards, and working hard to challenge one's self. 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!

Perfectionism tends to involve three main aspects:

### 1 RELENTLESS STRIVING FOR EXTREMELY HIGH STANDARDS

These high standards are reflected on oneself and others. They are personally demanding and are typically considered unreasonable to outsiders.

In kids and teenager this can look like, refusing to submit an assignment because it's not perfect, avoiding playing a certain game because they won't win or catastrophising (blowing things out of proportion).

### 2 JUDGING SELF WORTH BASED ON ACHIEVEMENTS

Determining your self-worth based largely on your ability to strive for and achieve such unrelenting standards.

While it's great for kids to hold high expectations of themselves, aiming for perfection actually sets them up to fail. Focusing on their mistakes rather than on their successes often affects their self esteem, fuelling a vicious cycle that can lead to stress, depression and anxiety if left unchecked.

### 3 EXPERIENCING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES AND YET CONTINUING TO STRIVE FOR PERFECTION

The constant and excessive need to achieve and perform at high levels can leave you feeling defeated as there is little chance you will meet your goals and feel good about yourself and your work. This kind of pressure is likely to cause feelings like tensions, being constantly on edge, stressed, etc.

Striving for perfection can also have a negative impact on a person's self worth, if they are measuring themselves against unattainable standards, it is very likely they will constantly feel like a failure. Experiencing feelings of frustration and worry, social isolation and depression.



### TRAITS OF A PERFECTIONIST KID

- Giving up easily.
- Slowness.
- Struggling to make decisions or changing their mind constantly.
- Seeking reassurance constantly.
- Constant Checking (looking for imperfections in all they do, wear, etc.)
- Avoiding situations in which they may fail.



## TIPS ON HOW TO BREAK THIS UNHEALTHY HABIT

### HELP THEM CREATE FLEXIBLE RULES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Perfectionists tend to create inaccurate underlying rules and assumptions such as "the assignment is not done unless its perfect" or "if I make a mistake I will fail the subject". These type of rigid rules tend to cause them to focus solely on doing things perfectly.

Helpful rules are realistic, flexible and adaptable. Generating a more helpful rule or assumption involves thinking of another way to see yourself and the world that is balanced. Helping your kid challenge unhelpful assumptions and rules can allow them to develop realist, reasonable and achievable standards.

### MODELLING MISTAKES

Kids believe their parents and other adults don't really make mistakes. It's helpful for them to see that you do in fact make mistakes, that it is part of the human condition and that learning to manage these mistakes is what matters.

Look for or create opportunities to do this, let them hear you say sorry or show them how you have fixed a mistake you have made.

## CONSIDER HOW YOU REACT WHEN YOUR CHILD IS "IMPERFECT"

Take a moment to reflect on how you react when your child behaves in "imperfect" ways. Do you tend to overreact or respond calmly?

It is important for parents to remember that their responses should match with what they want to teach their children. By accepting that kids are "learners" and there is no need for them to be perfect, parents can teach them through their behavior that they can be kind to themselves, supporting and forgiving, even when they make mistakes.



## NORISH YOUR CHILD'S SENSE OF SELF WORTH

Perfectionist kids and teenagers tend to put all their self worth in their achievements, they overvalue achieving. They may have other interests but over time these can take a lesser place in their lives if they don't provide them with a sense of self esteem.

Giving your children the opportunities to develop a variety of interests, where they don't need to "achieve" can help them find nourishment for their self worth.

The most powerful form of nourishment for a kid's sense of self worth is a parent's constant love, support and forgiveness. Unconditional love and the knowledge that they are worth because of who they are and not what they do or have is the key to provide a healthy self esteem.

*This information has been adapted from an article by [Dr. Kaylene Henderson](#), a trusted Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist and one of Australia's leading parenting experts, mother of three. And [a resource](#) by the Centre for Clinical Interventions.*

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