

Positives and Negatives of Perfectionism

Positives:

- earns high grades.
- high personal standard
- performs well on tasks
- persistent worker
- organized
- enjoys the achievement of and success of a task

NEGATIVES:

- performance standards that are impossibly high and unnecessarily rigid
- motivation more from fear of failure rather than from pursuit of success
- measurement of one's own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment
- difficulty in taking credit or pleasure, even when success is achieved because such achievement is merely what is expected
- procrastination in getting started to work that will be judged
- long delays in completing assignments, or repeatedly starting assignments, because the work must be perfect from the beginning and continue to be perfect as it progresses.

WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION

<http://www.nagc.org>
<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/perfectionism>
<https://www.sengifted.org>
<https://www.davidsongifted.org>

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Perfectionism in Gifted Children

**ExCEL Gifted and Talented
Program**

**“Exceptional Challenge for
Exceptional Learning”**



Perfectionism & Gifted Students

According to psychologist and author, Dr. Sylvia Rimm, perfectionism is very close to excellence, and, of course, parents and teachers encourage excellence in children. In our great excitement at their performance, we describe their work as perfect and we award an A+ and 100 percent – all very deserving and appropriate. In fact, many gifted children go several years without making mistakes in school. Being perfect, right, and smartest can easily become part of their persona—a persona developed by a combination of who they are and what the important adults and peers in their lives expect of them. Many talent areas such as music, dance, art, and athletics demand excellence. Gifted children deliver this excellence, and it becomes both a good and bad habit. Good when they strive for excellence; bad when they can't tolerate mistakes or criticism, or when their fears of a less than perfect performance prevent them from performing at all.

Dr. Rimm states that children can be perfectionistic in only one area, such as art or sports. Perfectionism can also become pervasive and compulsive. Some experts talk about bad perfectionism; others differentiate between excellence and perfectionism with the latter being problematic, the first being appropriate. If we have surgery done,

we would like for the surgeon to do the work perfectly. Even when we hear a solo violinist or watch a ballet, we have come to expect perfection. Perfect shots on the basketball court score points, and so on. As you see, there can be a love/hate relationship with perfectionism.

Is Perfectionism a Social or Emotional Problem?

When perfectionism interferes with productive achievement and a happy lifestyle, it is a social and an emotional problem. For example, gifted underachievers are often, but not always, perfectionists. They view themselves as either "A" students or failures. There are students that have admitted that unless they get A's, there is no reason to do the work. Sometimes students don't admit this to anyone or even themselves, but their motivation will change immediately if they feel they can once again achieve A's. Perfectionism is both a social and an emotional problem when it becomes extreme. We should always try and encourage excellence while working to prevent perfectionism – it is a delicate balance.

How can parents and teachers best deal with a child's perfectionism?

--Praise moderately at least most of the time. Calling a child a good thinker is much better than saying he/she is the smartest or best student; there is a tendency to overdo the praise with a gifted child.

--Help children feel satisfied when they have done their best. Work to not compare their best to others. --Read biographies with your child to show that successful people have made mistakes and experienced failures along the way. Acknowledge the failures and rejections as well as the success. Discuss how the successful person you are reading about must have felt when they were discouraged. Think together with your child about ways others have stayed motivated and help your child find their own ways of dealing with their disappointments. --Help children learn to laugh at themselves and the mistakes they make. Be a model for them by laughing at some of your own mistakes or expressing your own frustration and the modeling how to move forward. --When perfectionism interferes with school work, extra-curricular activities, or a healthy social life, counseling may definitely be warranted. Sometimes symptoms of perfectionism aren't obvious, so parents and teachers must listen and observe carefully.

Counseling or open communication with your child should serve to help children learn from their mistakes, set reasonable expectations of themselves and others, develop personal relaxation strategies, and develop balance in their lives. A balance that allows for mistakes and successes.