

# Perfectionism Issues

Does your child erase and redo homework over and over again until it's just right? Is anything less than 100% not good enough? Welcome to the world of perfectionism, where unrealistic expectations are daily and unrelenting.

Perfectionists engage in frequent hypercritical self-talk, bringing themselves down and creating a lot of stress within the family. With these children, the goal is to change their mindset.



[Supporting Your Child](#)



# Effective Homework Strategies

## Reward efficiency, not grades

Studies show that the majority of perfectionist children have parents that are demanding and overly critical. Although this certainly isn't the case with every child, it's important for parents to pay attention to how they act and react when it comes to grades. Let's say your daughter brings home a 90% on a writing project. Instead of saying, "This is good, but you could have had a 100% if you had a stronger thesis statement." Consider, "Way to go! You worked hard on this project, but didn't spend too much time revising it. It turned out just fine!" Praise your child's efficiency when she gets her work done in a timely manner without redoing it multiple times.

## Help to make a homework plan

When it comes to homework, perfectionists sometimes procrastinate because they fear the work they will produce won't be good enough. Having a homework plan helps them to feel in control and more confident. Encourage your child to start with an easy task followed by a hard one, and to repeat this sequence (easy, hard, easy, hard).

In essence, your child is easing herself or himself into homework by starting with something he or she likes. Later, being rewarded after a tough assignment with an easy one.

## Switch gears

If you see that your child is spending an inordinate amount of time on one homework assignment, switch gears. At this point there are three choices:

The **first** is that she or he can either quickly finish it up with the mindset that it just has to be good enough.

The **second** is that she or he can take a much needed break away from all homework.

The **third** is to switch subjects and go back to that assignment later with a fresh frame of mind.

## Stick with a schedule

Starting homework at the same general time each day helps to reduce procrastination. It's perfectly fine to help your child get started, if needed. Take a few minutes to discuss the assignment and watch your child begin before you leave the room. More important than a start time is an ending time for schoolwork. Many students will correct and revise their work well into the evening. Have a family policy such as, "All homework must be completed by 9 p.m." Remind your child that the final product just has to be "good enough."

## Empathize, do not criticize

Try to steer clear of comments like, "Stop worrying about that," or "You don't always have to be perfect." Instead, empathize with his or her insecurities. "I can understand why you're worried about reciting your poem. All of the children will be in front of the class, too. You'll be part of a group," or "I realize that you want to

correct your paper, but at this point, your essay has all the qualities the teacher expects according to the directions.”

## **Quell test-taking anxiety**

For many, perfectionist characteristics spill over to preparing for exams and test-taking. Studies show it helps when students write down their worst fears right before the test. Students who do this perform just as well as their non-anxious peers. But students who do not take the time to jot down their anxieties perform poorly compared to the other two groups. Taking time to release worries can make a big difference when it comes to test-day performance.

## **Know when you need outside help**

For some children, perfectionism is just the tip of the iceberg. If your child’s symptoms are interfering with homework completion on a regular basis, consider seeking therapy. A good therapist can tackle the “all-or-nothing” and “worst case scenario” thinking that hampers your child. Better yet, a therapist will give you the strategies to make sure these perfectionist qualities don’t spiral downward. Perfectionism can be embedded in anxiety. It’s important that it is treated so it does not result in depression or other mental health disorders.



# Characteristics

**Patch (1984) listed the following as symptoms of student perfections.**

- 1.** Performance standards that are impossibly high and unnecessarily rigid.
- 2.** Motivation more from fear of failure than from pursuit of success.
- 3.** Measurement of one's own worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishment.
- 4.** All-or-nothing evaluations that label anything other than perfection as failure.
- 5.** Difficulty in taking credit or pleasure, even when success is achieved, because such achievement is merely what is expected.
- 6.** Procrastination in getting started on work that will be judged.
- 7.** Long delays in completing assignments, or repeatedly starting over on assignments, because the work must be perfect from the beginning and continue to be perfect as one goes along.
- 8.** Unwillingness to volunteer in response to questions unless certain of the correct answer.
- 9.** Overly emotional and "catastrophic" reactions to minor failures.
- 10.** Low productivity due to procrastination or excessive "start overs."

*Research Series No. 198. East Lansing, MI. Institute for Research Teaching. Patch, A. (1984). Reflections on Perfection. American Psychologist 39 (April): 386-390.*



# What do these students need to learn?

Perfectionist students need to relearn performance norms and work expectations.

They need to learn that . . .

- Schools are places to learn knowledge and skills, not merely to demonstrate them.
- Errors are normal, expected, and often necessary aspects of the learning process.
- Everyone makes mistakes, including the teacher.
- There is no reason to devalue oneself or fear rejection or punishment just because one has made a mistake.
- It is usually more helpful to measure progress by comparing where one is now with where one was, rather than by comparing oneself with peers or with ideals of perfection.



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