

# The Parent's Corner

we're in your corner

## PERFECTIONISM

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If you have a perfectionist child, you likely already know it -- perhaps you've noticed they are markedly sensitive to criticism, prone to overwhelming stress while doing school projects or tasks at home, or resist trying new things and taking risks. From the outside looking in, perfectionism may seem like a positive trait; your child may be one of the top students in class or the sibling with the spotless room. However, on the inside, childhood perfectionism can feel like a dark cloud looming above. It can feel like overwhelming anxiety, and can manifest into more serious concerns down the line, such as depression, physical illness, poor self-esteem or eating disorders. So, how can we teach our children to sit with their flaws, become more flexible, and develop a healthy sense of self?

Big Life Journal is a program for parents and kids that implements strategies for something called "growth mindset". Growth mindset teaches the ability to take on challenges, accept mistakes, and learn from them. When working with a perfectionist child, Big Life Journal suggests 7 strategies to strengthen your child's growth mindset:

### 1. Redefine Success

Instead of defining success by that 100% grade on a math test or winning the basketball championship, start to incorporate conversations with your child where you define success by the child's effort and strategies used, rather than fixed traits like intelligence or abilities.

### 2. Challenge Their Thinking

Use empathy to validate your child's feelings when they are escalated due to their perfectionism. Then, assist your child in challenging their thoughts. Having them think through what the worst outcome could be if they "fail", what part of the problem they can solve now, and what a more positive way to look at the situation may be. Walking them through how they will handle the situation if it ends up not going how they'd like it to will help prepare them for events out of their control.

### 3. Explain the Brain Muscle

Remind your child that our brains are constantly growing and developing, and that the best way our brain learns is by our experiences. When we make a mistake, that experience stays in our mind and creates new learning lessons for the future.

### 4. Talk About Mistakes

Point out your own mistakes and talk through them in real time. For example, "Whoops- I forgot to plug in the crockpot earlier for our dinner tonight. I'm unhappy about my mistake. This just means we will get pizza tonight and have to do our original plan another night." Show your child that these problems are workable and that you can find solutions to them, while normalizing that it's okay to still feel disappointed.

### 5. Learn From Mistakes

Calmly walk with your child step-by-step through their mistakes and discuss where things went wrong. Perfectionist children are often all-or-nothing thinkers. They may look at a test and say, "I failed," without taking time to look at the questions they got wrong and work through what happened on them.

### 6. Reframe Grades

School is often a major stressor for perfectionist children, and perfectionism with school work can sometimes even look like procrastination. If your child knows the assignment will cause them a great deal of stress and anxiety, they may continue to put it off. Reframing grades is important for children who exhibit perfectionism. Ask them what they can do differently next time on assignments they are not pleased with, and how they can change their approach in the future to feel happier with the outcome.

### 7. Encourage Self Compassion

Children who struggle with perfectionism are their own worst critics. Ask your child to think about what they would tell their best friend who was struggling with the same problem. They would likely say, "It'll be okay", "You've got this!", or "You did a good job". Teach your child to start applying these affirmations to their own abilities. And, lastly, remind your child that even some of the world's greatest things were created by mistake -- such as Silly Putty, potato chips, or the Leaning Tower of Pisa!

**As always, we are always in your corner if you need extra support!**