Parent Session

Perfectionism in Twice-Exceptional Children

Carol Malueg and Nancy Cohen

PROJECT2EXCEL

University of St. Thomas
Table of Contents

Links to Pre-readings

**Advanced Organizers for the Pre-readings** – questions to think about while reading the articles

**Discussion Notes** -- a graphic organizer for note-taking during discussion

**Discussion Questions**

**Rules for the Road**

**Food for Thought**

- What is one key idea you take away from the discussion on perfectionism, pp. 123-127.

- Are these behaviors and characteristics described even more pronounced or less so in children who are twice exceptional?


- The strategy “due, not done” is discussed. How difficult is it for you, as a parent, to allow your child to turn in unfinished work? How do you handle deadlines—is your child’s way of handling deadlines similar or different?


- What is probably the most important strategy trail lists for overcoming dysfunctional perfectionism in your own twice-exceptional child?


- Are any of the case study examples included in this article on gifted perfectionists suggestive of twice-exceptionality? Why do you think this article was included in this module?
## Discussion Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Strategies to try</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **From the reading**| • What do you already do?  
• What do you want to try?  
• Share ideas from the reading  
• What type of perfectionist is your child? |
| **Idealism**        | • How does your child deal with the divide between the ideal and the real?  
• How do you deal with that?  
• How do you help set realistic goals without squashing the drive for excellence? |
| **Potential**       | • Does your child become frustrated when reality doesn’t live up to its potential?  
• Do you get frustrated when your child doesn’t live up to his or her potential? |
| **Perfectionism**  | • Does it drive your child to work too hard?  
• Does it keep your child from trying new things?  
• Does it cause feelings of guilt? |
| **Inborn or Learned?** | • High expectations  
• Modeling perfectionism  
• Result of learning style  
• Product of intensity |
| **Miscellaneous**   | • Further reading  
• Other resources  
• Related topics |
Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between trying to do your best and perfectionism?
2. What is the difference between having high expectations and perfectionism?
3. What do you feel you have to do perfectly?
4. What do you feel your child has to do perfectly?
5. Thinking of the Adelson article, what kind of perfectionist is my child?
   a. The Academic Achiever
   b. The Risk Evader
   c. The Accuracy Assessor
   d. The Image Manager
   e. The Procrastinator
6. What kind of perfectionist am I?
7. What causes perfectionism?
   a. Role models
   b. High expectations
   c. An ability to see how things could be
   d. Competitive nature
   e. Media
8. What can we do about the messages the media gives our kids?
9. How do I help my child change the self-talk that fuels her perfectionism?
10. What does my self-talk sound like?
11. What does my child enjoy that he isn’t perfect at?
12. How do I let my child risk failure?
13. How do I teach my child to take responsibility for her own actions?
14. Am I enabling my child by helping too much?
   a. Is my help aligned with her needs?
   b. Does my help ‘even the playing field’?
Rules for the Road

• “A child can ask three questions to help develop a healthy attitude toward her perfectionism: (1) Is it good enough? (2) In the long run, will it really matter? And (3) What is the worst thing that could happen? Things usually fall into perspective after considering these three questions.” (Webb, p.126).

• Pay attention to how you handle your own mistakes. Try to acknowledge them, practice being kind to yourself about them, and model how you go about remedying them.

• Work on self-talk. In order to teach our kids to show themselves compassion when they make a mistake, we need to show them how. “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” ~Dalai Lama

• Talk about the unrealistic messages the media inundates us with every day, from Kelly Ripa’s perfect kitchen to the Pantene model’s perfect hair. Help your kids understand why the advertisers use ‘perfect’ to sell their products.

• Practice the mantra “It’s due, not done” to help manage stress about assignments and projects. It’s a fact of life that we can’t always devote the amount of time necessary to complete things to our own high standards.

• In his book, Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell estimates that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to truly master any discipline. That’s more than a year’s worth of hours!

• Gifted kids have to deal with asynchrony, which means their intellect often outstrips their skills, and their ideal products are often beyond their capabilities. Adding a learning disability or challenge to the mix can make the ideal paper, poster, or pottery piece seem even further out of reach. Rather than letting this stop him in his tracks, help your child see that the process builds skills, just like exercise builds muscle, and celebrate the effort! Also, remember that having the ability to imagine something extraordinary is in itself pretty neat.
## Food for Thought

A perfectionistic child may avoid joining the math team, especially if she thinks she won’t be the best mathematician on the team. Add a tendency to flip numbers, or lose track of lengthy problems in the middle of solving them, and avoidance looks more like self-preservation! Gifted perfectionists need to try new things and experience not being ‘the best’ in some of them. Twice-exceptional perfectionists have some experience with not being ‘the best’ and need guidance and support when trying new things. Help your child find ways to express her strengths in an emotionally safe environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trying to Do Well</th>
<th>Perfectionism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the research you have to do for a project, working hard on it, turning it in on time, and feeling good about what you learned.</td>
<td>Writing your report over three times, staying up two nights in a row, and handing it in late because you had to get it right (and still feeling bad about your report). <em>Struggling to get the words in your head onto the page, even though you know your topic inside and out.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying for a test, taking it with confidence, and feeling good about your score of 9 out of 10, or getting a B+ instead of an A.</td>
<td>Cramming at the last minute, taking the test with sweaty palms, and feeling bad about your B+ because your friend got an A. <em>Feeling terrified about taking the test in spite of working hard to prepare, or not preparing at all because you know you won’t do well anyway.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing to work on group projects because you enjoy learning from different people’s experiences and ways of doing things.</td>
<td>Always working alone because no one can do as good a job as you—and you’re not about to let anyone else slide by on your A. <em>Being afraid to work in a group because you might bring down the group’s grade.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting an award with pride, even though your name is misspelled on it. (You know it can be fixed later.)</td>
<td>Being grumpy about the award because the officials didn’t get your name right. <em>You worked so hard for this, why can’t anything just be right?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting together with people who are interesting, likable, and fun to be with.</td>
<td>Refusing to be with people who aren’t star athletes, smart, and popular. <em>Avoiding people who are star athletes, smart and popular.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to try new things, even when they’re a little scary, and learning from your experiences and mistakes.</td>
<td>Avoiding experiences because you are terrified of making mistakes—especially in public. <em>Times ten! I work so hard to keep my struggles to myself!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping your room cleaner and neater, making your bed more often, and putting your clothes away.</td>
<td>Not being able to leave the room until the bed and room are just so. <em>Needing control over something easily controlled.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining a soccer team and playing two or three times a week to have fun and compete with other teams.</td>
<td>Taking lessons as often as you can, practicing every day, and not feeling satisfied until you can beat every other team in your league. <em>Working harder than all the other kids because this is something you can be the best at.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpt from What to Do When Good Enough Isn’t Good Enough, by Thomas Greenspon, Ph.D. (pp.36-37)  *Blue italics added by Project2Excel for use with twice-exceptional learners.*