

Helping Your Children Keep Perfectionism in Check

Both adults and children often struggle with perfectionism, beating themselves up over every mistake and becoming frustrated when they can't do something well right from the start. Although it's fine to strive for excellence in the important things in life, perfectionism can rob us of joy and a zest for life. But there are things we adults can do to help children keep perfectionism in check – and in helping the kids, we are likely to help ourselves too!

I. Underlying issues

- Individuals vary as to how prone they are to perfectionism. You often can see this even in early childhood.
- But all children experience frustration when they try things that are difficult, and they benefit when adults help them develop good coping strategies.
- No one is perfect and no one can do all things well, so we all will benefit from learning to keep perfectionism in check.

II. Tips for parents

- Focus your comments on effort, process and enjoyment, not outcomes
Make comments such as, "Wow, you really worked hard to learn something new, didn't you?" or "It looked like it was lots of fun to try that, even though it's really hard."
- Teach strategies for coping with frustration
Taking a break, deep breathing, changing your self-talk all can help.
- Ask, "What can you learn for the next time you try this?"
For example, "Maybe we should practice your batting before your next game. It takes a lot of time and practice to get to be a good batter!"
- Set a good example of how to keep mistakes and imperfection in perspective.
Let your child see you make mistakes. Comment on them in a calm and balanced way. For example, "Wow! That new recipe didn't turn out very well. Next time I need to follow the directions more carefully!"
- Engage your child and your family in activities that are not your areas of excellence but are fun or interesting anyway!
Try bowling, tennis, a watercolor class and discover together how much fun you can have even if you are not very good. Life is full of so many wonderful things to learn and do, but you don't have to win the gold medal to enjoy!