



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKING HARD AND BEING A PERFECTIONIST?

Most likely you were raised with the idea that it is important to work hard and do your best at everything you do. It can be the foundation of a great work ethic. Unfortunately though, some kids will misinterpret **doing** your best or working hard at somethings as meaning **being** the best and/or being perfect. This kind of thinking can lead to **Perfectionism**. Although having high standards is generally a positive characteristic, perfectionism can lead to negative consequences and undermine success.

Perfectionists may exhibit some of the following behaviors:

- Spend lots of time worrying about school work, friendships, activities etc.
- Afraid of making mistakes (embarrassment).
- Often run out of time on projects, homework or timed tests.
- Always have to win. Has to make "A's".
- Reluctant to try new things or will quit if they are unable to do it well right away.
- Angry with themselves for not being able to do things just right.
- Have a hard time making choices/decisions.
- Always compare their work to the work of others.
- Always have to be in control.
- Pay more attention to negative than positive comments.
- Procrastinate because of the fear of not getting something perfect.
- Would rather lie than tell the truth about making a mistake or doing something wrong.

Perfectionism can limit your child's potential, self-confidence, emotional health, social relationships and most importantly, overall enjoyment of life.

Here are a few suggestions for helping your child re-direct perfectionistic thoughts, feelings and behaviors:

1. **Allow for mistakes.** They are expected. Talk about the importance of making mistakes for learning. Remember that's why pencils have erasers. Accept your own mistakes. Share how making mistakes has helped you.
2. **Focus on process and effort** rather than results (i.e. grades or winning).
3. **Remind your child of improvements** in developing skills like, math, sports, reading or music.
4. **Encourage flexibility** rather than rigid schedules/routines/habits.
5. Help your child **break down tasks**.
6. **Encourage activities for relaxation and creativity** with no expected end result.
7. **Allow for risk taking and safe opportunities to "fail".**

As parents we have the opportunity, to help our children understand that their best efforts are "good enough" and their value is in who they are rather than what they do or how they perform.

Please contact me if you would like to further discuss parenting your elementary age child.
Lisa Weir, M.Ed., Parent & Family Educator weirli@district112.org

Sources: Thomas S. Greenspon, Ph.D., What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough, the Real Deal on PefectionismEllen Flanagan Burns, MSW, Nobody's Perfect, A Story for Children About Perfectionism