Lecture 3, March 30, 2015

Moving Past Perfectionism and Procrastination

Learning Objectives

Obj 1 • Participants will be able to define perfectionism and possible origins.

Obj 2 • Participants will be able to discuss the physical and psychological costs of perfectionism.

Obj 3 • Participants will be able to explain the difference between perfectionism and striving for excellence.

Obj 4 • Participants will be able to apply at least three interventions to assist their child or student with perfectionism.

Obj 5 • Participants will be able to apply at least three interventions to assist their child or student with procrastination.

How much do I know...

➢ Perfectionism
➢ Procrastination
Understanding the Gifted Perfectionist

Perfectionism

- Perfectionism is part of being gifted.
- Expectations are extremely high for gifted students.
- School, society, family and self can contribute to the idea that peak performance should be the norm for students selected for gifted programs.
- Although it can breed excellence it can also be destructive, leading students to think that the only efforts worth making are those that end in perfect achievement.

Delisle, pg. 34: Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is the combination of a desire to be perfect, a fear of imperfection, and an emotional conviction that perfection is the route to personal acceptability. 

Perfectionism is a self esteem issue; it burdens lives, interferes with creativity, and makes intimate relations difficult. The bright line distinguishing perfectionism from the pursuit of excellence is the perfectionistic anxiety about mistakes, which seem to reflect a personal defect. Everyone is disappointed by mistakes. Perfectionists may be devastated by them.
Reasons for Perfectionism

- Inborn for some individuals (Dabrowski, 1964; Silverman, 1990)
- Perfectionistic parents (Rowell, 1986)
- Birth order (Leman, 1985; Smith, 1990)
- Messages from the media (Barrow & Moore, 1983)
- Perfectionistic teachers and peers (Adderholdt-Elliott, 1991)
- Asynchrony—developmental dysplasia—intellectual age greater than chronological age (Adderholdt-Elliott, 1991)
- “Hothing” babies (Elkind, 1981)
- Influence of dysfunctional family
  - Alcoholics (Ackerman, 1989; Crespi, 1990; Smith, 1990)
  - Workaholics (Brophy, 1986)

Some Perfectionistic Behaviors:

- Overcommits
- Rarely delegates work to others
- Has a hard time making choices
- Always has to be in control
- Competes fiercely
- Arrives late because one more thing had to be done
- Always does last-minute cramming
- Gets carried away with the details

Some Perfectionistic Behaviors:

- Never seems satisfied with her work
- Constantly busies himself with something or other
- Frequently criticizes others
- Refuses to hear criticism of herself
- Pays more attention to negative than positive comments
- Checks up on other people’s work
- Calls herself “stupid” when she does something imperfectly
- Procrastinates
Some Perfectionistic Thoughts:

- If I can’t do it perfectly, what’s the point?
- I should excel at everything I do.
- I always have to stay ahead of others.
- I should finish a job before doing anything else.
- Every detail of a job should be perfect.
- Things should be done right the first time.
- There is only one right way to do things.
- I’m never good enough.

Some Perfectionistic Feelings:

- Deeply embarrassed about mistakes she makes.
- Disgusted or angry with himself when he is criticized.
- Nervous when things around him are messy.
- Worried a lot about details.
- Angry if his routine is interrupted.
- Stressed if he is not very capable.
Some Perfectionistic Feelings:

- Exhausted and unable to relax
- Plagued by self-hatred
- Afraid of appearing “stupid”
- Afraid of appearing incompetent
- Afraid of being rejected
- Ashamed of having fears

Costs of Perfectionism

- Depression
- Performance anxiety
- Test anxiety
- Social anxiety
- Writer’s block
- Obsessiveness
- Compulsiveness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Loneliness
- Impatience
- Frustration
- Anger

Excellence v. Perfectionism

Excellence is risk. Perfectionism is fear.  
Excellence is effort. Perfectionism is anger and frustration.  
Excellence is openness to being wrong. Perfectionism is having to be right.  
Excellence is spontaneity. Perfectionism is control.  
Excellence is flow. Perfectionism is pressure.  
Excellence is confidence. Perfectionism is doubt.  
Excellence is journey. Perfectionism is destination.  
Excellence is acceptance. Perfectionism is judgment.  
Excellence is encouraging. Perfectionism is criticizing.
### Perfectionist vs. Healthy Striver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perfectionist</th>
<th>Healthy Striver</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sets standards beyond reach and reason</td>
<td>• Sets high standards, but just beyond reach</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is never satisfied by anything less than perfection</td>
<td>• Enjoys process as well as outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Becomes dysfunctionally depressed when experiences failure and disappointment</td>
<td>• Bounces back from failure and disappointment quickly and with energy</td>
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<td>• Is preoccupied with fear of failure and disapproval – this can deplete energy levels</td>
<td>• Keeps normal anxiety and fear of failure and disapproval within bounds – uses them to create energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sees mistakes as evidence of unworthiness</td>
<td>• Sees mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Becomes overly defensive when criticized</td>
<td>• Reacts positively to helpful criticism</td>
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<td>• Avoids new experiences because you are terrified of making mistakes, especially in public</td>
<td>• Willing to try new things, take risks, and learn from your experiences and your mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Throws a fit because the editor of the school paper tampered with your work</td>
<td>• Reads the story you wrote for the school paper and notices that the editor improved your copy</td>
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Healthy Strivers learn to ask themselves the following:

1. Is it good enough?
2. What’s the worst thing that can happen?
3. Will it matter in the long run?

PERFECTIONISM DOES NOT DETERMINE SUCCESS — TALENT, ENERGY, and COMMITMENT DO.

Remember, there are no mistakes, only lessons. Love yourself, trust your choices, and everything is possible.

Chene-Carter Scotts
PERFECTIONISTS ARE SUCCESSFUL DESPITE THEIR PERFECTIONISM — NOT BECAUSE OF IT.

It is during our failures...

...that we discover our true desire for success.

Interventions for Perfectionism
Three universal facets of human experience...

• Making sense of the world ...What does it mean if I make a mistake?
• Regulating emotions ...Managing the fear of making mistakes
• Maintaining human connections ...Seeking acceptance by others/ Wanting a place to belong and feel important

Parents can help

• Teach courage: “I know you can try.” Reward trying.
• Expect progress, not perfection, “Finished” is sometimes a better goal than perfect
• Applaud persistence, “You kept on trying, even when you didn’t know how it would turn out”
• Break down the task - “Inch by inch, it’s a cinch. Yard by yard, it’s hard.”
• Acknowledge learning - “what did you learn while you were doing this?”
  — “What part did you enjoy most?”
  — “What might you try next time?”
  — “How might you do it differently next time?”

Teach the Student

Don’t Take It Personally
• Separate self-worth from products
• Grade reflects how their work matches to grading criteria; it is not a reflection on student’s worth
• Share rubrics with students and discuss how they are used

Know When to Quit
• Make sure students know not to work forever – there needs to be a stopping point
• Have clear expectations – consider including maximum as well as minimum requirements
• Monitor student progress throughout project time frame (Pyryt, 2004)
Teach the Student

Match the Time Commitment to the Value of the Assignments
• Weight assignments appropriately
• Encourage students to put most effort into assignments that count the most

Set Goals and Focus on Improvement
• SMART goals – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timeframe-provided
• Incremental improvements can lead to achievement – a huge leap is not necessary

Teach the Student

Study the Lives of Eminent People
• Realize the path to success is not an easy one
• Persevere in the face of obstacles
• Revising and refining is part of the process
• Failure can be constructive

Enjoy Each Day
• Participate in community service projects (make a difference)
• Engage in hobbies and pursuits that are enjoyable

Teachers should

1. Learn to recognize the manifestations of perfectionism when it becomes stressful: a delayed start, an unwillingness to share work, refusal to turn in work or accomplish a goal; an inability to tolerate mistakes, and impatience with others’ imperfections.

2. Expect excellence but not perfectionism from your students; talk with your students about the difference. Examine their own behaviors that encourage perfectionism. Don’t compare one student’s performance with other’s or sibling’s.
Teachers should

3. Encourage and role model the principle “dare to dream.”
   Talk with students about how high standards can serve as motivators. Have them share how they have handled failure and successes in their own life.
   Use biographies of famous people in all subject areas to illustrate overcoming failures. Study an expert’s changing arguments or styles over time to illustrate how an individual’s ideas evolve.

4. Teach the skills of task analysis, time management, and goal setting in your classrooms. This will help students understand the value of more manageable steps.

Teachers should

5. Teach and use creative problem solving process.
   Encourage and reward creativity in thought and product. Gifted perfectionists need opportunities to use their creative abilities within a structured framework that is applicable beyond the classroom.

6. Use specific criteria for assignment, projects or products. Show students exemplary products that other students have created. This will help the perfectionist to set realistic goals and not be overwhelmed in thinking they have to produce beyond the classroom.

Teachers should

7. Help perfectionistic students to shape their thinking by setting goals and expectations prior to classroom assignments, to deal with situations as they work, and to evaluate their work during and after it is finished. Use contracts to encourage underachieving gifted perfectionists to finish or share their products.

8. Provide opportunities to fail in a safe environment. Introduce gifted perfectionists to new experiences so they can learn to take risks. Focus on open-ended activities. Offer more choices so that they don’t always choose the things at which they are most successful. This is helpful for those perfectionists who take no chances and who go through enormous effort to ensure their success.
Teachers should

9. Focus on the perfectionistic gifted adolescents’ strengths and successes, not on the mistakes they make. Be careful about criticism because it can add to their own self-criticism for not being the perfect student.

10. Try not to grade all assignments or use pass/fail at times. Provide rewards that are connected to improvement, not perfection. Limit the use of extra credit work; perfectionists like to go above and beyond for an A+ grade, even if they are struggling in a subject.
The Procrastination Trap

- Studies show that often perfectionism is at the core of procrastination.
- Procrastination acts as an insurance policy.
- Procrastination is a complex problem that leads to irrational behavior.

The Cycle of Procrastination

1. "I'll start early this time." (hope)
2. "I've got to start soon." (anxiety, hope)
3. "What if I don't start?" (foreboding)
   - "I should have started sooner." (guilt)
   - "I'm doing everything, but everything, but..." (rationalization)
   - "I can't enjoy anything." (guilt, apprehension, disgust)
   - "I hope no one finds out." (ashamed)
4. "There's still time." (hope)

The Cycle of Procrastination

5. "There's something wrong with me." (fear)
6. THE FINAL CHOICE: To do or not to do

Path 1: Not to do
a. "I can't do this!"

Path 2: To do—On to the bitter end
a. "I can't wait any longer."

b. "Why bother?"

b. "This isn't so bad. Why didn't I start sooner?" (relief, puzzled, relief)

c. "Just get it done!" (relief, exhaustion, resolution)

7. "I'll never procrastinate again." (relief, exhaustion, resolution)
Interventions for Procrastination

What Doesn’t Work
• Saying, “Just do it!”
• Nagging and being a watchdog
• Using criticism, ridicule, and threats of extreme or exaggerated consequences
• Doing it yourself

(Burka & Yen, 1983)

Specific Techniques
1. Establish clear limits, deadlines, & consequences.
2. Help the procrastinator set small interim goals.
3. Help the procrastinator be concrete & realistic about what he or she needs to do.
4. Reward progress along the way.
5. Tell the procrastinator directly if you do get angry.
6. Let the procrastinator know that he or she is more to you than just his or her performance.
Ten Tips for Procrastinators

1. Allow more time than you think a project will take.
2. Set realistic goals, but don’t set them in stone. Stay flexible.
3. Break down big & intimidating tasks into smaller, doable ones.
4. Reward yourself after each accomplishment, large or small.
5. Make a conscious effort to realize that your paper, project or whatever can’t be perfect.
   - This helps deflate the fear of failure.

6. Develop a “backwards schedule.”
   - Start with things you most enjoy doing (things you usually save for last)
   - Then add things you’re supposed to do
   - Plan to have fun without feeling guilty
7. Begin your day with the most difficult or most unpleasant task.
8. Keep a diary of your progress – what you accomplish each day.
9. Remove distractions from your workplace.
10. Keep a list of backup projects, things you mean to do when you have time.

Do You Have Any Questions?
Resources

- Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days! By Stephen Manes (elem.)
- Here's to You, Rachel Robinson by Judy Blume (middle/high)
- On the Devil's Court by Carl Deuker (middle/high)
- Ordinary Jack by Helen Cresswell (elem.)
- Winners and Losers by Stephen Hoffius (middle/high)
- Mistakes that Worked by Charlotte Jones and John Obrien (elem.)
- Nobody's Perfect: A Story for Children About Perfectionism by Ellen Flanagan Burns
- Too Perfect by Trudy Ludwig (elem.)
- A Taste of Perfection by Laura Langston (middle)
- What to Do When Good Enough Isn’t Good Enough: The Real Deal on Perfectionism by Thomas S. Greenspon, Ph.D.