



## **PERFECTLY IMPERFECT...**

### **Understanding perfectionism in young people and helping them overcome it.**

Does your child worry excessively about their homework or assignments, feeling the need to get things “just right”? Perhaps they spend much longer on a task than really necessary or find it difficult to get started at all? Even daily tasks such as getting dressed or packing a bag can become a major event. Whilst most parents want their children to be organised and do well at school, some children’s need for perfection can lead to stress, procrastination or paralysis. So what is it that drives perfectionism in young people and how can we help them let go of its menacing grip?

Perfectionism can be very alluring because it creates the feeling of being in control. When we feel that things are within our control, our world seems more manageable. The downside is that despite one’s best efforts to do things perfectly, there is always a chance that we may not. Trying to get things right all the time is not only exhausting, it reinforces the belief that everything we do must be right all the time. Children who worry a lot tend to overestimate the likelihood that something bad will happen if they don’t get it “right”. As a result, they may become anxious, immobilised or spend far too long on tasks or situations where they feel the need to do a perfect job. Perfectionism in young people can also cause them to become overly fixated on small flaws in themselves and others or to downgrade achievements.

It is important to help young people understand that mistakes and failures are a normal and inevitable part of life. Trying to get things right all the time will get in the way of getting things done. Ask your child, “what’s the worst thing that will happen if you don’t get this right?” Talk openly about their answer, helping them desensitise to the possible negative outcomes such as getting in trouble from a teacher if they haven’t finished their homework. Though it may sound counter-intuitive, encourage your child to leave something unfinished, make a mess or make a deliberate mistake in their homework. Have fun with it. They need to learn that their fear of severe consequences is normally unfounded, that life goes on and the consequences they worry about usually aren’t that bad after all. Here are some statements to teach your child:

Sometimes I make mistakes or do silly things but I’m still a good person.

I don't always have to get things right.

It's okay to make mistakes, everybody does and that's how we learn.

Just leave it now and see what happens.

I have done my best and now it's time to move on.

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