

Is your child a perfectionist?

Tips from “**Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom**” by Susan Winebrenner

- Constantly reinforce the fact that your child is separate from his accomplishments. We are who we are, not what we do or don't do. Coach him/her to avoid statements like “I'm so stupid!” Help him/her choose statements like, “That was a careless mistake. Next time, I'll try this; I'll make sure I have all the materials I need before I start working.”
- Avoid the phrase, “Do your very best.” Replace it with, “Make your best effort.” This changes the emphasis from the product to the learning process.
- Help your child learn to set realistic, short-term goals and take satisfaction from accomplishing something he/she planned to do today.
- Ease your child into competitive situations by starting him/her out in those where he/she is competing only with him/herself. Gymnastics, self-defense classes, and other non-team sports are sometimes easier for perfectionistic gifted kids to handle, since they are totally in charge of the results themselves.
- Examine your own life and behaviors for signs of perfectionism. Model setting priorities and letting go of less important tasks.
- Laugh at your own mistakes. Avoid self-criticizing statements that indicate there's something wrong with a person who makes mistakes.
- Talk often about the value of learning from mistakes. Share examples from your own life. Help your child find and read stories and biographies of people who achieved success only after many frustrations and failures. The librarian at your local public library will be happy to assist.
- Let your child do things for him/herself rather than jumping in to show him/her the “right way.”
- Teach your child to give constructive criticism and receive it gracefully.
- Please don't “help” your child with his/her homework, especially not when your goal is to make it perfect. You are not your child's school teacher, and when you act like one, you may be sending a message that you expect your child to be perfect all the time and that you value him/her more highly if his/her grades are always superior.
- Please don't worry if your child doesn't read aloud fluently. Often, gifted children's eyes and thoughts are far ahead of what their mouth is supposed to say. The only valid test of a child's reading ability is comprehension.