

Introduction

Has this ever happened to you? The teacher hands back your book report and you got an A minus, which is a great grade—right? But somebody else in class got an A, and that little minus haunts you the rest of the week. You act grumpy to your family and you can't stop worrying that the teacher thinks you're stupid. You might even call *yourself* stupid.

Or how about this: you have to turn in a social studies project in one week, but every time you start it something seems wrong so you rip it up and start over. As the due date gets closer, you worry more and more, but you still can't seem to get started. Every time you try, it isn't good enough. The worrying gets so bad you can't sleep well. Finally, the night before you have to turn it in, you stay up late throwing something together that could have been way better if you'd just started earlier.

Are you afraid to try new things because you might not be good at them? Are you afraid to speak up in groups because you might say something stupid? Do you get really upset when people criticize you?

All of these things can be signs of **perfectionism**, and many people experience them. Perfectionism can make a person feel lots of pressure, worry, fear, and even anger. And it can be exhausting.

People who know about their perfectionism will sometimes say it is a burden to them. It's like an annoying noise in the background all the time, or a heavy weight on their shoulders. A famous writer, Anna Quindlen, has talked about her own perfectionism as a "backpack full of bricks." What makes perfectionism such a burden is the almost constant fear and worry about how well you're doing. You're *always* on the alert, because there might be something you forgot . . . or one more thing you should do . . . or something you just did that is not quite right. No wonder perfectionism can be exhausting! Every perfectionist has a fear, deep inside, of not being good enough—of not being acceptable to others—and it's always there. That's a heavy load to carry around, and one that can prevent you from relaxing, being happy, and doing your best.

The good news is that you *can* lighten your load. With time and a willingness to change, you can learn to have less worry and fear and feel good enough no matter how well you do at things. *And you can do just*

as well as you always have. Lightening the

load of perfectionism

doesn't mean thinking

it's okay to do a crummy job at anything. It just means worrying less about how you do.



I want to help you make the burden of perfectionism lighter. I am a psychologist, and I have helped many kids and their families with their perfectionism. Over the years I have learned a lot about what perfectionism is and where it comes from. The things that helped those kids and families are the things that are in this book—they can help you too!

Sneak Preview (What's Inside This Book)

Part 1 of *What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough* focuses on what perfectionism is, how it affects your life, and what you can do to make life easier and more fun for yourself.

- **Chapter 1** shows you how perfectionists **act**, **think**, and **feel**, so you can see just what “perfectionism” means. Some pencil-and-paper exercises help you decide how much of a problem perfectionism is for you.
- **Chapter 2** explains how trying to do things well is different from being a perfectionist.
- **Chapter 3** has seven “Load Lighteners,” or coping skills you can use to feel better any time.
- **Chapter 4** explains how people become perfectionists. It also explains something called your “self-view” and what role that plays in perfectionism.

- **Chapter 5** has some pencil-and-paper activities to help you learn to think of yourself differently, so you can accept yourself without having to be perfect.
- **Chapter 6** is a really important chapter that shows you how to get your parents or other trusted adults to help. Overcoming perfectionism is easier if you can talk about it with people who are important to you.
- **Chapter 7** discusses some of the ways to keep handling your perfectionism in the future. It's hard work overcoming perfectionism, and you will have ups and downs. This chapter suggests ways to keep at it, even through the downs.

Part 2 focuses on bigger issues that can be hard to handle on your own.

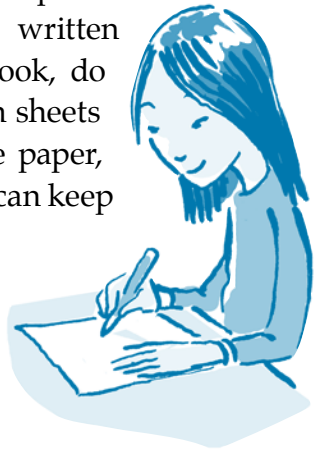
- **Chapter 8** discusses other problems that can sometimes get mixed up with perfectionism, or make it worse. Perfectionists often worry a lot or feel sad and hopeless, and sometimes this means there are other things going on besides perfectionism. You'll learn how to tell if this is true for you, and what to do if it is.
- **Chapter 9** explains what it's like to go to counseling. If you have one of the problems described in chapter 8, or if you're having a

very hard time with perfectionism, you'll learn how an expert can help.

Lightening the load of perfectionism is a process, not just one thing that you do, and it takes time. You can begin the process by reading this book so you can understand perfectionism, how it affects you, and how you can start changing things for the better. Next, you can do the activities in this book, which include talking to the important adults in your life about how you see yourself and how they see you. What's great about these activities is that you can't pass or fail them, and you can't do *well* or *poorly* on them. If you pay attention to the suggestions, and try them, things will begin to change for the better—and that's what's *really* great. Every time you do one of these activities, you are removing another brick from that perfectionism backpack.

Keep a journal to do the written activities. You can use a notebook, do them on a computer, or write on sheets of loose paper. If you use loose paper, put the sheets in a folder so you can keep them together.

Some of the activities are for you to do by yourself, and some are for you to do with others. You might work with friends, teachers, or relatives



outside your home, but it's probably most helpful to talk with your parents*. Ask your parents or another adult helper to join you as you work on easing your perfectionism. Ask them to read this book with you, especially the "Note to Grown-ups" at the end (you can read that, too). You will be thinking about yourself a lot, and I hope the adults who support you will think about themselves as well. Talking about these things together will help everyone.

The most important part of this process is that you keep on doing these activities and having these conversations. Over time, you'll lighten the load of perfectionism, brick by brick. You'll learn that you have lots to offer and that it is possible for people to accept you for who you are, rather than just for what you can do. You don't have to be perfect to be acceptable.

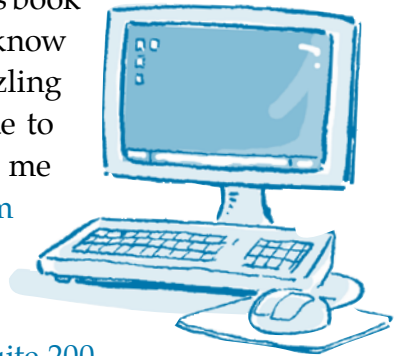
Even though this process takes time and involves talking to others, there are things you can do on your own right now to feel better. If

***A Note About "Parents":** Many kids have two parents living at home and many kids don't, so when I talk about "parents," I mean the trusted adults who have the most to do with your life and who you feel closest to. When you see the word "parents"—or "mom or dad"—think of the person or people in your life who fit that description. This might mean biological parents, stepparents, adoptive parents, a single parent, grandparents, other adult relatives, or friends you live with. To make things simple, I'll just say "parents," because "adult caregivers" sounds like I think you live in a zoo!

perfectionism has you feeling worried or pressured right now, see “Chapter 3: Load Lighteners.”

If you are reading these words, you’re already starting the process of easing the burden of your perfectionism. The fact that you are interested in learning about this, and that you might be willing to do something about it, means you can succeed. All you have to do now is stick with it. Many kids and adults have overcome their never-good-enough feelings using the ideas in this book, and *you* can, too.

I’d like to know how this book helps you. I’d also like to know if something here is puzzling to you or if you would like to know more. You can email me at help4kids@freespirit.com or send me a letter at:



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Be sure to send me your address, so I can write back to you. Best of luck on your journey!

Dr. Tom Greenspon