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Introduction

What's Wrong with Perfectionism?

Does your child or teen . . .

- seem highly competitive and constantly compare himself to others?
- find it hard to relax and enjoy the present moment?
- hesitate to take risks for fear of failing?
- experience frequent stress and anxiety?
- seem prone to discouragement?
- procrastinate often because of a need to do things perfectly?
- have difficulty in relationships because he expects too much of himself, or of others?
- appear to be a compulsive planner?

If you've noticed any of these tendencies, your child or teenager may be a perfectionist. None of them alone is a sure sign, but the more of them you've noticed, the more likely perfectionism is at work.

A perfectionist is someone who sets unrealistic goals and then feels extremely frustrated when the goals can't be met. Perfectionism can be seen at any age, even in very young children. It manifests itself in many ways, making it a challenge to combat. All the more reason to learn as much as you can about it.

Help for Your Child—and for You

Chances are, you're reading this book because you want help in dealing with your child's perfectionist ways of thinking and behaving. You don't want your child to be limited and frustrated by them. And frankly, your child's perfectionism may be driving you crazy.

You may also be wondering if you or others in your family have perfectionist tendencies that fuel those of your child. If so, reread the

list on page 1 and see if any of these tendencies apply to you or to other adults in your household or family. If the answer is yes, then this book may be even more helpful than you had hoped. You will not only learn a new approach to your child's perfectionism, you will also learn new ways of handling perfectionist tendencies in yourself and other important people in your family life. Whether or not you are a perfectionist, this book is about changing how you and your child relate to one another, so it involves everyone in the family.

If your family is affected by perfectionism, it makes sense that you would want to make some changes, because perfectionism is painful. Perfectionists suffer greatly from their own self-criticism, and even if they do well at something, they can't enjoy it because they feel they should have done better. Intimacy seems elusive, because perfectionists avoid the vulnerability and risk-taking that intimacy requires. Work becomes overwhelming, because everything has to be done just right. Creativity slows to a trickle. Physical exhaustion is common, and there is little "juice" in life. Their high expectations, procrastination, and critical tendencies make everyone around them ill at ease.

No wonder you want to make changes.

I'm glad you're taking the time to read these pages and think about ways to get out from under the burden of perfectionism, whether you see it in your child, yourself, or other family members. Your interest in working on this means that your children and your family life are important to you, and that's the cornerstone of the plan I'll be showing you for overcoming perfectionism.

You're in Good Company

Perfectionism is a concern for many people. Whenever I speak publicly on any topic related to parenting or relationships, people in the audience are always eager to talk about their experience with perfectionism. No one can say just how widespread perfectionism is, partly because there are several ways to define it, but we do know that the modern winner-take-all attitude of our culture encourages it.

I've been a psychologist and marriage and family therapist for more than 30 years, and perfectionism has always interested me. I've read, written, and lectured widely on the subject, and I've helped many clients free themselves from perfectionism. In this book, I'll pass along to you what I've learned about perfectionism and how to

Freeing Our Families from Perfectionism

Does your child or teen ...

- seem highly competitive?
- constantly compare himself to others?
- have a hard time relaxing and enjoying the moment?
- hesitate to take risks for fear of failing?
- experience frequent stress and anxiety?
- get discouraged easily and often?
- procrastinate a lot?
- expect too much of herself or others?
- appear to be a compulsive planner?

And ...

- Have you noticed any of these tendencies in yourself?

If so, you're not alone. Perfectionism is a problem for many families. The good news is, you can free your family from perfectionism. This accessible, encouraging book is your guide.

First, you'll learn that perfectionism is *not* about doing your best. It's *not* about the struggle for excellence, or the striving for high goals. And it's *not* the key to success. In fact, perfectionism can block your ability to do well. It is a burden that takes a heavy toll—on your self-esteem, performance, creativity, talents, energy, relationships, health, and capacity to enjoy life to its fullest.

Psychologist and therapist Tom Greenspon has helped many families free themselves from perfectionism. Drawing on his professional and personal experiences, sharing stories, research, insights, and strategies gathered over the years, he describes a healing process for transforming perfectionism into healthy living practices and self-acceptance. His ideas have worked for others—and they can work for you.

Thomas S. Greenspon, Ph.D., is a Licensed Psychologist and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice. He lectures and writes on a variety of topics including perfectionism and the emotional needs of gifted children and adults.

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