PERFECTIONISM

“When nobody around you seems to measure up, it’s time to check your yardstick.” ~Bill Lemley

The following articles and links help to explain the role perfectionism plays in student academic achievement and social-emotional intelligence. They provide perspectives from gifted education, academia, and general psychology. The articles reflect recent research by defining various categories including: Self-oriented perfectionism (high standards and motivated to attain perfection); Socially oriented perfectionism (significant others have high expectations); and Perfectionistic self-presentation (focused on the perfection/imperfection of self and others). Their purpose is to stimulate thought on a topic that often affects gifted and talented children and to point out strategies that enhance student well-being. Full articles are accessed by copying/pasting links into your browser.

I. PERFECTIONISM AND GIFTED CHILDREN

1.

‘In this interview, Dr. Rimm, respected Gifted Education researcher, explains why perfectionism seems to be a problem for gifted children. She suggests that perfectionism is very close to excellence, and, of course, parents and teachers have high expectations of gifted students. Further, “Gifted children deliver this excellence, and it becomes both a good and bad habit—good when they strive for excellence; and bad when they can’t tolerate mistakes or criticism, or when their fears of a less than perfect performance prevent their performing at all.” ’ [Quoted from: Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (sengifted.org)]

https://sengifted.org/archives/articles/sylvia-rimm-on-perfectionism-in-the-gifted

Rimm lists external symptoms, defines differences between girls and boys who are perfectionists, suggests that self-esteem plays a role, and provides tips to help abate perfectionism that interferes socially and emotionally.

2.

www.hoagiesgifted.org/perfectionism.htm

The hoagiesgifted.org site is noted for information on gifted/talented children. The article Perfectionism is Not a Malady by Linda Kreger Silverman, director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development and the Gifted, provides insights from a researcher of the gifted. Silverman gives six reasons why gifted children are perfectionistic including “Gifted children set
standards according to their mental age rather than their chronological age.” She addresses issues such as: “Once (perfectionists) recognize the positive value of their drive for perfection, they are able to deal more effectively with the negative aspects, changing attitudes and behaviors that are self-defeating and retaining those aspects that further their development.”

“ABSTRACT: Perfectionism is the most misunderstood aspect of the personality of the gifted. The psychological field characterizes it in extremely negative ways, which may be counterproductive to the development of the gifted individual. There are positive as well as negative aspects of perfectionism, depending on how it is channeled. As one gains higher consciousness, perfectionism becomes a catalyst for self-actualization and humanitarian ideals. Dabrowski’s theory allows us to see how perfectionism changes in form at different levels of development.”

3.
An article from Psychology Today, Pitfalls of Perfectionism by Hara Estroff Marano was published on March 1, 2008 - last reviewed on November 21, 2013 and can be found at:

https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200802/pitfalls-perfectionism

This article takes a view of perfectionism as undermining achievement and creativity. It provides advice on how to give praise to children plus specific approaches for developing positive self esteem.

“The push for perfection comes at a high cost to children. But the biggest problem with perfection may be that it masks the real secret of success in life. Success hinges less on getting everything right than on how you handle getting things wrong. This is where creativity, passion, and perseverance come into play.” (April 27, 2015)

II. DEFINITIONS OF PERFECTIONISM

1.
A NEW MEASURE OF PERFECTIONISM: THE PERFECTIONISM INVENTORY


In this academic article, researchers undertook 3 studies to produce a new set of perfectionism scales. They describe several factors that play into two categories of perfectionism. First, “Conscientious
Perfectionism includes Concern over Mistakes, High Standards for Others, Need for Approval, Organization, Parental Pressure, Planfulness, Rumination, and Striving for Excellence. Second, Self-Evaluative Perfectionism includes Rumination, Need for Approval, Concern over Mistakes, and Parental Pressure.

This article reviews the literature, supplies statistics, and charts exploring an in-depth analysis of perfectionism. The authors suggest that perfectionism is complex involving either depression and anxiety on the negative side or that it may be positively related to happiness and well-being.

2.

Perfectionism and Depression: Vulnerabilities Nurses Need to Understand

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3169326/

This research concerns recognizing Perfectionists. Essentially for therapists, Gordon Flett provides a quick check-list for the lay person.


Top Ten Signs You a Perfectionist

(1) You cannot stop thinking about a mistake you made.
(2) You are intensely competitive and can’t stand doing worse than others.
(3) You either want to do something "just right" or not at all.
(4) You demand perfection from other people.
(5) You will not ask for help if asking can be perceived as a flaw or weakness.
(6) You will persist at a task long after other people have quit.
(7) You are a fault-finder who must correct other people when they are wrong.
(8) You are highly aware of other people’s demands and expectations.
(9) You are very self-conscious about making mistakes in front of other people.
(10) *You noticed the error in the title of this list [45].
This noteworthy article reviews Paul Hewitt’s research defining perfectionism into three categories: Self-oriented perfectionism (high standards and motivated to attain perfection), Socially oriented perfectionism (significant others have high expectations), and Perfectionistic self-presentation (focused on the perfection/imperfection of self and others). He examines the desire to excel along with the desire to be perfect.

III. HELPING GIFTED STUDENTS COPE WITH PERFECTIONISM

1. The Davidson Institute for Talent Development is noted for supporting talented and gifted young people. [www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10459.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10459.aspx)

The following article: Parenting for High Potential [National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)] June 2004 written by Michael Pyryt provides advice on how to help your gifted child handle perfectionism. He touches on three components of perfectionistic thinking including “dichotomous (1. all-or-nothing) thinking”; 2. “wants” transformed into “musts”; and 3. thinking that is focused on unmet goals and challenges rather than savoring successes — that is, “the focus is in the future instead of the present”. He suggests that perfectionism and giftedness may not be as strong as the gifted education community believes and that it can lead to underachievement. Pyryt includes a recommended reading list.

2. Tips for Parents: Perfectionism Resources
[www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10203.aspx](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10203.aspx) - 33k - 2011-03-01

This is an extensive website that covers all topics on gifted/talented children.

3. Helping Your Child Deal With Perfectionism by Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D., Director Vanderbilt Programs for Talented Youth
Professor Stambaugh has put together an excellent, concise power-point on perfectionism: Helping Your Child Deal with Perfectionism - Vanderbilt pty.vanderbilt.edu/.../perfectionism-SAVY-Parent

Some high points include coping strategies parents can use with young children: Biography studies of failures/successes (Edison); Watch and discuss sports or Olympics; Movies and books with discussion (realism); and “Some of My Best Friends are Books”.

4.

In the article Perfectionism and the Highly Gifted Child, Shaun Hately discusses his personal experience of coping with perfectionism. His list: Pursuit of Excellence vs. Perfectionism is insightful.

http://hoagiesgifted.org/perfectionhg.htm