

Assessment Tool for Parents

Perfectionism is a personality trait that can be healthy or destructive. Perfectionism is not a mental health disorder itself, but it can contribute to depression, anxiety, and disordered eating or exercise habits, and it increases the risk of suicide. This assessment can help you determine if your teenager is suffering from unhealthy perfectionism.

Rate each of the items below on a scale of 1 to 5:

1. I do not or rarely see this trait in my teen, or this trait causes no distress for my teen.
2. I occasionally see this trait, or it causes mild distress.
3. I see this trait sometimes, or it causes moderate distress.
4. I see this trait often, or my teen is very distressed.
5. This trait is present almost all the time, or it strongly interferes with my teen's life.

_____ Highly self-critical, holds herself to unrealistic standards

Examples:

- Panics about any academic, creative, or athletic performance that is less than "perfect"
- Excessively criticizes her appearance, controls eating and exercise, beats herself up for any deviation from diet
- Worries about minor mistakes in past social encounters, or avoids going out to social events out of fear of embarrassing herself

_____ Holds others to unreasonable standards, very demanding and critical of friends or family members

Examples:

- Becomes angry at minor disappointments or changes in plans
- Feels very hurt, withdraws from friendships after small conflicts

_____ Avoids trying new subjects, sports, or activities out of fear she won't be good at them

_____ Gives up quickly when he finds he is not great at a new activity

Examples:

- Quits teams after a bad performance
- Drops a class before a difficult assignment is due or after a bad grade
- Declares activities are stupid or pointless after trying them only once

_____ Procrastinates or doesn't finish work out of fear she can't do it perfectly

Examples:

- Does projects at the last minute, with high anxiety
- Predicts she'll get a bad grade because she "didn't have enough time" to do it well

_____ Focuses almost exclusively on mistakes, flaws, and failures

Examples:

- Talks about mistakes that happened long ago, can't seem to let them go
- Appears sad or anxious after a victory and can only talk about what went wrong or upcoming challenges

_____ Has difficulty enjoying positive or pleasant things in life

Examples:

- Becomes highly uncomfortable when praised or complimented
- Dismisses or expresses disappointment in good grades or achievements because they are "not good enough"

_____ No longer enjoys learning, or playing an instrument or sport he used to enjoy, because he is so focused on getting to a perfect outcome

_____ Compulsively makes lists or plans

Examples:

- Reviews homework or other projects repeatedly to check for errors
- Makes elaborate lists planning every moment of the day

_____ Has inflexible ideas about how things “should” be done

Examples:

- Polices other people for breaking rules
- Becomes angry or anxious when she has to do things in a different way than usual

_____ Hides imperfections and flaws from others, tries to look effortlessly perfect

Examples:

- Downplays or denies studying, practicing, or preparing
- Does not acknowledge stress, sadness, or other “negative” emotions
- Is highly critical of others who show they are struggling or working hard

_____ Believes she has to be perfect in order to be loved or liked

Examples:

- Makes comments about family members no longer loving her if she gets a bad grade or has a poor performance
- Worries she will no longer be liked or respected by teachers, coaches, or other adult authority figures if she makes mistakes

Add up the numbers. If the total is 36 or higher, your teen may be struggling with unhealthy perfectionism. *The Perfectionism Workbook for Teens* can help your teen build skills to transform these destructive traits into healthy ambition and self-acceptance.

FAQ: Myths and Truths about Perfectionism

Myth: If I stop being a perfectionist, I won't be successful, ambitious, or hardworking anymore.

Truth: Your perfectionism is not actually helping you achieve; in fact it's probably holding you back! Perfectionism often causes anxiety, stress, depression, and other feelings that get in the way of your thinking clearly or creatively. Perfectionist behaviors like procrastination and avoiding generally lead to less impressive performances in classes, sports, and activities. You might be worried that letting go of perfectionism will make you "lazy." The truth is, it's more likely that your schoolwork, performances, and relationships will improve once perfectionism doesn't have such a tight grip on you!

Myth: Perfectionism is actually a good thing.

Truth: "Perfectionist" is sometimes used as a "humble brag" or the cliché answer to the interview question: "What is your biggest weakness?" That's because there can be healthy perfectionist qualities, like paying attention to details, working hard, and having high standards. But there are unhealthy qualities of perfectionism too. High standards become impossible standards. You are so focused on your future ambitions that you can't enjoy the present. Attention to detail turns into criticizing yourself ruthlessly for the tiniest mistakes. For too many teens (a Johns Hopkins study found 28 percent of teens are dysfunctional perfectionists) perfectionism is definitely *not* a good thing—it's a real and serious problem.

Myth: Perfectionism isn't serious because it's not a diagnosed mental health disorder.

Truth: While perfectionism itself isn't a mental health disorder, many studies have shown clear links between unhealthy perfectionist personality traits and depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Perhaps most disturbing, perfectionism is a predictor of both suicidal thoughts and attempts in adolescents.

Myth: Everyone else looks effortlessly perfect; I have to keep up!

Truth: People often present a very polished version of themselves to the public, especially on social media. But appearances deceive! No one has a flawless life, and no matter how casual someone acts or how amazing her online posts and photos look, there is usually a whole lot of effort behind that grade, performance, or picture. Comparing yourself to those perfect personas will almost always leave you feeling disappointed with yourself—you can't compete with something that isn't real!

Myth: I've tried to change, and it didn't work. I'm stuck like this.

Truth: You can change your perfectionism! Your perfectionism was built over time, from many repetitions of thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and actions. Unwinding these patterns also takes some time, as well as the right tools. There's no one tool that works for everyone; you are a unique person and your experience of perfectionism is unique too! You may have to try some different techniques to find what works for *you*. That's why *The Perfectionism Workbook for Teens* has a lot of different activities for you to try, so you can find the right tools for *your* toolbox.

Quiz: Am I a Perfectionist?

Perfectionism affects a lot of young people, making school, sports, relationships, and other parts of life pretty painful. Is perfectionism a problem in your life? Read through the statements below. Do you recognize yourself in any of them? Click “True” for the statements that sound more like you than unlike you.

- True / False When my friends make a mistake or struggle with something, I can think of lots of kind and reassuring things to say to them. But when I make a mistake, I can think only mean and critical thoughts.
- True / False I don't think I could handle failing or making a mistake. I'd fall apart.
- True / False The most important things about me are my grades and my awards and titles. Without them, I am nothing.
- True / False I obsess about little things that I said “wrong” in social situations or avoid going out because I'm worried I won't look or act perfect.
- True / False I feel really angry at friends or family who forget plans or disappoint me.
- True / False I don't like to try new sports, subjects, or activities unless I'm certain I'll be great at them right away.
- True / False I have quit teams, dropped classes, or stopped activities after one bad grade or performance.
- True / False I try to look effortlessly perfect, so no one knows how much I study, practice, exercise, and so on.
- True / False I am worried if I don't perform perfectly, my parents will hate me, friends will drop me, or teachers or coaches will stop respecting me.
- True / False I procrastinate a lot. If I get a bad grade, I usually blame the fact that I rushed.
- True / False I recheck and revise things many times or make detailed lists planning every aspect of my day, month, or year.
- True / False When I do well on something, I feel almost no pleasure or pride. I think about the little things that went wrong and stress about whatever is coming next.

If you chose 7 or more as true, you are likely struggling with unhealthy perfectionism. Maybe you feel stressed, sad, worried, or frustrated. Maybe your grades or relationships are suffering. Maybe you're just plagued by the feeling that nothing is ever good enough.

You're not stuck with these thoughts, feelings, or habits. There are a lot of things you can do to change your experience of perfectionism. Check out [The Perfectionism Workbook for Teens](#) for some tools to help you feel better now.