

## Mental Health Information for Parents from FSUS

# PERFECTIONISM

**Perfectionism** is a personality trait that drives an individual to achieve the best result in a situation (Fredrick et al., 2016).

## Is it helpful or harmful?

**BOTH!** It can be helpful and harmful, depending on the perceptions of the perfectionist.

**Benefits** can include good hygiene, clean room, homework turned in on time, good time management, etc.

Benefits can become **negative** if the teen's perception of their accomplishment or value is negative.

## Examples

### Earning 95% on a test

**Helpful:** "I earned an A. I am proud of myself, and my parents will be proud, too."

**Harmful:** "I am upset with myself for not getting 100% and my parents will be ashamed of me, too."

### Receiving 3rd place in a race

**Helpful:** "I did my best and am proud of making it into the top 3. I will be able to learn what I can do better next time to improve my own time."

**Harmful:** "I am worthless if I don't come in first, even if I improve my time every race."





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### **Research shows...**

Helpful (or **adaptive**) perfectionism is negatively associated with anxiety and depression, meaning anxiety and depression symptoms are **less** likely. Harmful (or **maladaptive**) perfectionism is positively associated with anxiety and depression, meaning these symptoms are **more** likely.

Harmful perfectionism can lead to:

- **mental effects** like anxiety, depression, self-harm behaviors, OCD, eating disorders, & increased general distress
- **physical effects** like fatigue, headaches, insomnia, & disordered eating

### **Strategies to Help**

- Challenge “black and white” perfectionist thoughts by exploring alternative scenarios in which non-perfect results still turn out fine.
- Provide alternative perspectives or ways of viewing the situation they are catastrophizing.
- Encourage activities or tasks that have loose interpretations and little to no rules.
- Encourage challenge over achievement (improving upon themselves versus living up to outside standards or expectations).
- Encourage & reward non-perfectionist behaviors as they try them

### **Resources**

- Dobosz, A. M. (2016). The perfectionism workbook for teens: Activities to help you reduce anxiety and get things done. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/helping-kids-cope/201809/the-perils-perfectionism-in-kids-and-teens>
- <https://adaa.org/webinar/consumer/helping-your-perfectionistic-child>