



# FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

## HUMAN SERVICE CENTER - FSUS LOCATION

### MENTAL HEALTH INFO FOR PARENTS:

# PERFECTIONISM

**How it affects your child and how you can help**

### What is perfectionism?

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.

### For example...

#### 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"



## What Research Has Shown

Helpful (or adaptive) perfectionism is negatively associated with anxiety and depression. Harmful (or **maladaptive**) perfectionism is positively associated with anxiety and depression.

## Effects of Harmful Perfectionism

Mental: anxiety, depression, self-harm behaviors, OCD, eating disorders, increased general distress

Physical: fatigue, headaches, insomnia, eating disordered behaviors

## Ways to Help Your Child

- ✓ 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 and reward/support non-perfectionist behaviors as they try them out.

## 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/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/reducing-perfectionism-teens>