

## HOW TO STOP MOVING THE GOALPOSTS

A guide to overcoming perfectionism in the gifted brain

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## SETTING EXPECTATIONS



We are here to learn what we can about perfectionism and develop some techniques to manage it



I am going to ask for some participation



Let's keep the questions for the end



We are all learning together!



## BUT FIRST...



## **PERFECTIONISM**

- Characterized by a person's striving for flawlessness and setting high performance standards, accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.
- In a word = ANXIETY
- Multidimensional
  - Cognitive
  - Behavioral
  - Emotional

Best understood as an aspect of personality that plays out in interactions with demand situations (personal and professional)



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#### Adaptive

- Motivation is high, but healthy/realistic
- Deriving pleasure from success, opportunities
- Achievement oriented "What can I do?"

#### Maladaptive

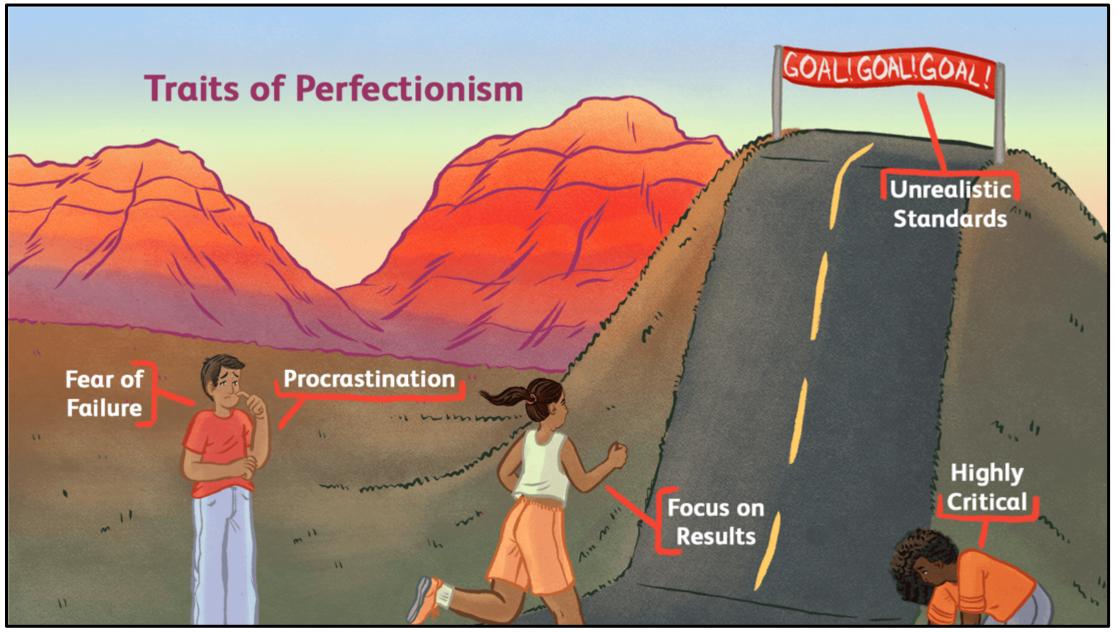
- Unattainable goals and impossible standards
- Leads to depression and anxiety
- Success doesn't lead to pleasure, only relief
- Failure oriented "What will happen if I don't succeed?"



- Self-oriented perfectionism imposing the desire to be perfect on yourself
- Other-oriented perfectionism holding others to unrealistic standards of behavior
- Socially prescribed perfectionism perceiving unrealistic expectations from others

### DIRECTIONS OF PERFECTIONISM









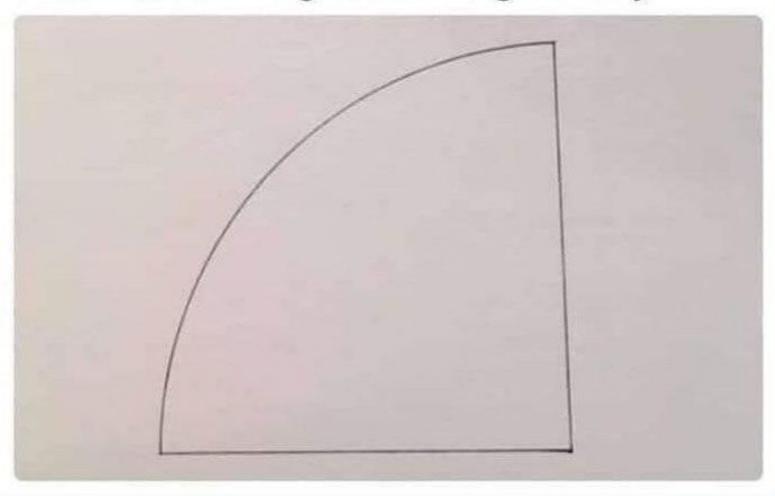
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of contingent worthiness I only have value if I succeed
- All-or-nothing thinking
- Depression
- High anxiety/panic attacks
- Workplace dissatisfaction
- Medical problems high BP, stroke, ulcer
- Diminishing social and romantic connections
- Lack of creativity
- Procrastination

### PROCRASTINATION? REALLY?

- Who here has ever procrastinated on a big project?
- Procrastination is about trying to <u>control</u> anxiety
  - If I never turn it in, I don't have to get feedback
  - As long as I keep my idea in my mind, it gets to stay perfect
  - One more paragraph will really drive my point home...
  - If I do 5x the work that's expected of me, they will be so excited that they won't look too closely
- Anxiety makes the problem seem bigger and keeps us avoiding it
- "There are no awards given for books that were never written"



Hey, perfectionists. This is an 89° angle. Have a good day!



## COMPARISON EFFECT

- Perfectionistic feelings are increasing across the globe across all SES and cultural groups
  - Closely follows the rise of 24/7 media and social media
- It is difficult (impossible?) to not compare yourself to others
- If we compare
  - Find REALISTIC targets for comparison
  - Focus on what you can learn from a person/work
  - Remember that we NEVER know the whole story of others but we ALWAYS know our own story

"Don't Compare your chapter to someone else's completed book."

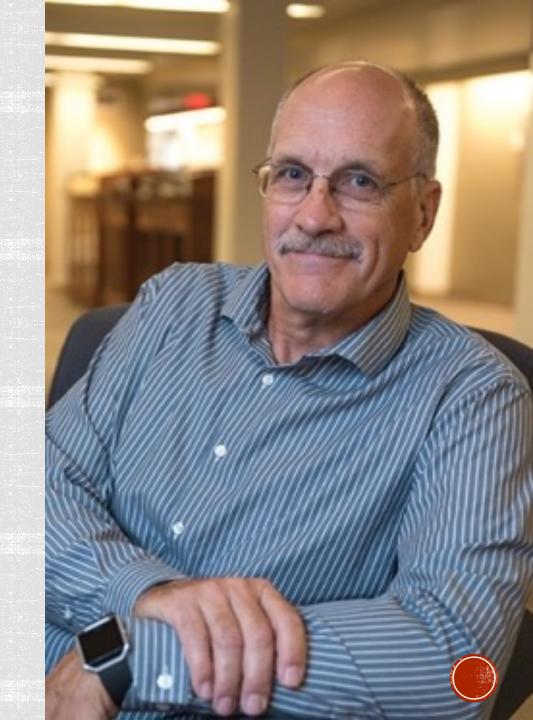


### RANDY FROST - FMPS

Created the "Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale"

#### Perfectionism is marked by:

- Heightened concern over making mistakes (catastrophizing)
- High personal standards (striving for excellence)
- The <u>perception</u> of high parental expectations
- The <u>perception</u> of high parental criticism
- The doubting of the quality of one's actions
- A preference for order and organization.









# WHY GIFTED KIDS?

- Intellectual OE deep engagement with areas of interest, coupled with more emotional weight given to one's ideas
- Heightened creativity can see/conceptualize things that others cannot
- Intersection with skills/development asynchrony can contribute to perfectionism when mismatch occurs





## CASE STUDY

- Carl Friederich Gauss was a German mathematician and scientist who lived from 1777-1855
- Sometimes referred to as the *Princeps* mathematicorum
  - Number theory
  - Polynomial algebra
- Refused to publish any work that was not complete AND above criticism
- "If Carl Friederich Gauss had published his work in a timely manner, he would have advanced mathematics by 50 years."
  - Eric Temple Bell





# YOU MIGHT BE A PERFECTIONIST IF...

Some examples of perfectionism include:

- Spending 30 minutes writing and rewriting a two-sentence email.
- Believing that missing two points on a test is a sign of failure.
- Difficulty being happy for others who are successful.
- Holding oneself to the standards of others' accomplishments or comparing oneself unfavorably and unrealistically to others.
- Skipping class or avoiding a chore because it is pointless to make an effort unless perfection can be achieved.
- Focusing on the end product rather than the process of learning.
- Avoiding playing a game or trying a new activity with friends for fear of being shown up as less than perfect.





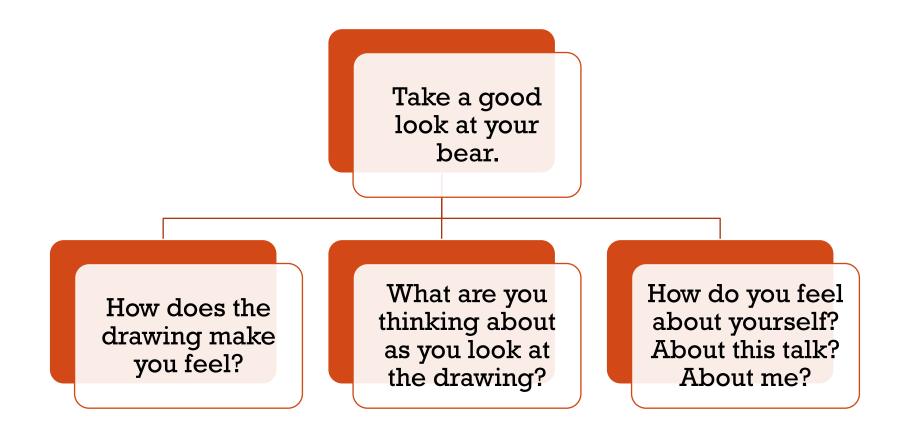
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"Now you can send it."

## TREATMENTS



## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BEAR, DR. MATT?!!?



## COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)

- Changing your cognitive relationship to your thoughts
- Perfectionism gives us maladaptive thinking patterns
  - All-or-nothing ("If I don't get a 100%, I've failed!)
  - Catastrophizing ("If I get a note flat, I'll be kicked out of the orchestra")
  - Black and white ("I'm either perfect at this, or not worth anyone's time")
- Work on "bottom up" thinking (instead of "top down") thinking
  - What have you done?
  - What can you give yourself credit for?
  - How much progress have you made?
- Watch your "shoulds"
- Name perfectionism for what it is... ANXIETY!



# EXPOSURE AND RESPONSE PREVENTION (ERP)

- It is really hard to "just stop" being perfectionistic
- Treat it as an anxiety regimen
- Work on something and then stop BEFORE you want to/it's done
  - How do you feel?
  - How hard is it to stop working on it?
  - What thoughts are coming up? Feelings?
  - How can you calm yourself? (In addition to working on it some more)
- Repeat until you improve the resiliency time and your coping skills (the bear!)
- Anxiety lies to us! You are training your body to know otherwise



## ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCpll16GCXI
- Our feelings can overwhelm us, and we spend tremendous energy trying to ignore and/or fight off these feelings
- When we see the feeling and acknowledge it, we make room for it lessening its power over us
- "Oh, this is something that makes me feel perfectionistic." <- no value judgement
- Feelings are not good or bad they simply exist to be observed like us
  - Step out of the traffic jam and watch the cars go by



# WHAT CAN PARENTS DO

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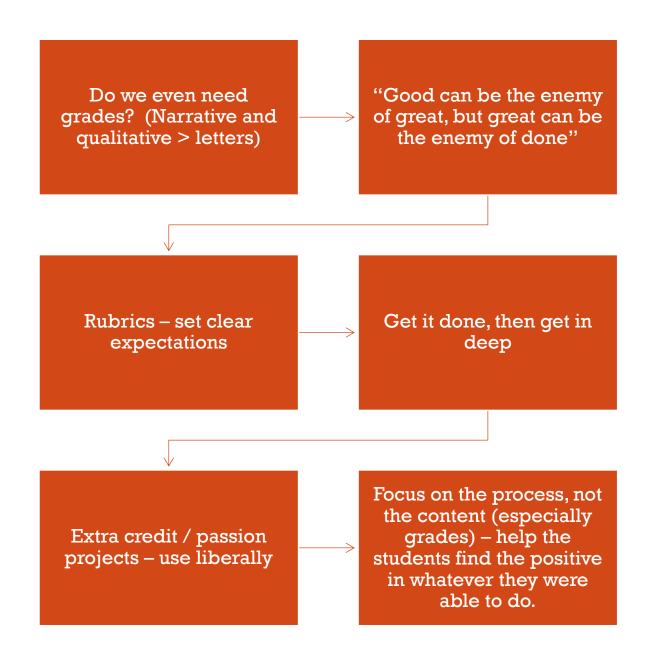
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- Understand the perfectionism isn't rational it is hard to "just stop"
- Be proactive what causes problems? How can we plan ahead?
- Help model emotionally-focused language help name feelings for feelings
- Encourage breaks
- Encourage perspective-taking (from empathy "I know that this feels like the most important audition ever. There will be others in the future, but right now this is the most pressing thing."
- Don't problem-solve: "How can I help?"
  - Two most powerful words in the English language?
- Communicate with teachers/school





# WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO



#### "PERFECTIONISM"

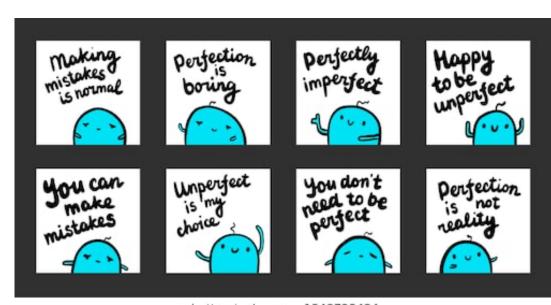












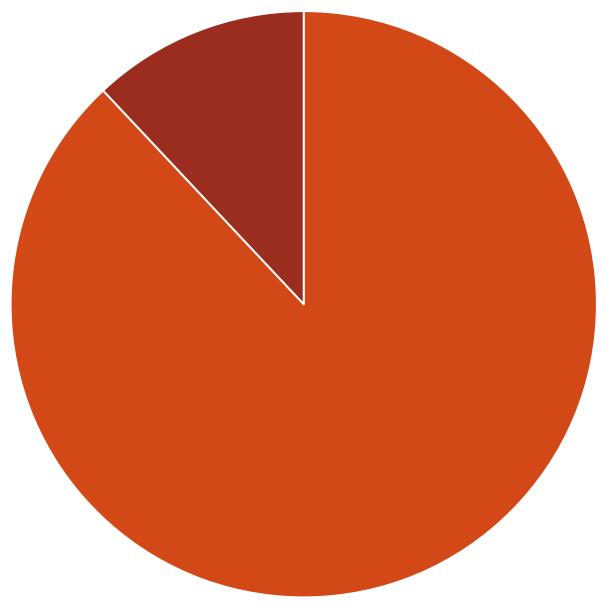
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#### LET'S BE "ANTI-PERFECT"

- Perfectionism is impossible. Say it. Believe it.
   Accept it. Put it somewhere.
- Context ALWAYS matters
- Perfect is boring!
- "You either win, or you learn."
- You are good enough. You were always good enough.
- The 93/7 Rule
- Everyone gets feedback. Everyone Googles.
   Everyone has to try again sometimes
- Struggling means that you're going in the right direction.
- "Done is better than perfect."
- F.A.I.L. = Frequent attempts in Learning.



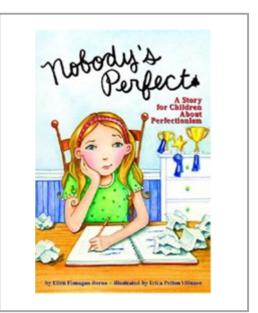
#### Your Chosen Area

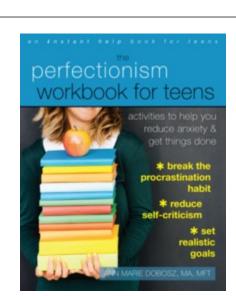


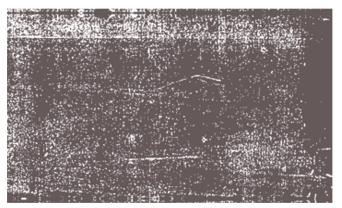


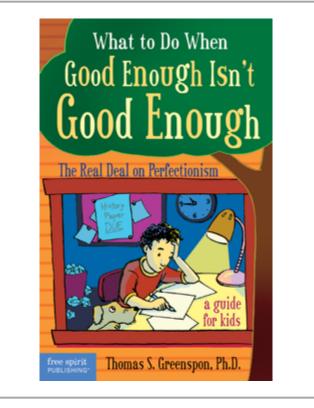
### MORE RESOURCES

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAoakO64ixA
- <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPL2FE7ZPTg</u> (TedX Syracuse)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GR hq7OVzHU (TedX University of Nevada)
- https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/Perfectionism.pdf
- http://kennethwang.com/apsr/scales/APSR-English.pdf
- https://www.psycom.net/perfectionism-teen-anxiety/
- https://middleearthnj.wordpress.com/2019/10/14/how-tocombat-perfectionism-in-teens/
- https://www.withunderstandingcomescalm.com/perspective-perseverance-perfectionism/ (for 2e learners)











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## QUESTIONS?

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- Follow me at <a href="https://www.facebook.com/drmattzakreski">www.facebook.com/drmattzakreski</a>
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