

fact sheet

PERFECTIONISM — IS GOOD ENOUGH ENOUGH?



Perfectionism 29.6.22

Dr Brene Brown tells us, “Perfectionism is a belief systems that feeds the thought of ‘If I look perfect, do it perfect, work perfect and live perfect, I can avoid or minimise shame, blame and judgment’”. This way of living can take a lot more energy and deplete us. It is like a relentless fault-finding machine that needs a re-work!

During the perinatal period we may become more aware of behaviours, thoughts and feelings that may be unhelpful to us or are no longer sustainable. We may find ourselves having to learn new ways to function that are founded in genuine self-care and positive self-regard. This is where the good enough parent concept comes in and perfectionism may need to take a back seat for while!

PERFECTIONISM v GOOD ENOUGH?

We know that good enough parenting means creating a safe environment for our baby, where we respond to their physical and emotional needs sensitively and empathically. To be good enough we also know that we cannot always respond to our children immediately in this way and that's OK too.

We can't always get it right and that is part of the human condition. It is important for children to see this and learn how we manage our feelings and life when things don't go to plan. It builds their resilience.

Perfectionism can actually end up distracting us from being present and engaging with our family. It can reduce our overall wellbeing, satisfaction and fulfillment. In fact it can be very depleting to our physical and emotional wellbeing as we continue to strive for perfection even though we know we are getting exhausted by it.

It is important to take a step back, and see where it comes from, what maintains it and see where we can relax around it.

As a result of our perfectionism, we may think it's not enough to simply meet our baby's needs by holding them tenderly or spending time watching them. Rather, we may feel we are failing by not 'doing more' or fear others may regard us as not being good enough.

Perfectionism shows up in some of these ways:

- a strong inner-critic telling us that we should have done things better
- stops us from trying new things for fear of failure
- rumination over what we perceive as errors or flaws
- avoiding tasks for fear we might do them incorrectly
- spending disproportionate time completing tasks or re-doing things over and over until satisfaction is reached
- black and white thinking with rigid rules and limited flexibility
- discount positive feedback
- physical complaints
- lack of self care/compassion

SOME SIMPLE, SELF-CARE IDEAS

Notice how you speak to yourself and gently re-word your thoughts.

“Everyone is going to look at me like I'm a bad mum if my baby cries at playgroup,” becomes, “I'm worried about how I will manage or cope when my baby cries, but a playgroup with other mums and babies is a good place to see how it will feel.”

Noticing positive things about yourself that are not linked to striving or achieving:

For example, “I really listen to my friends”,
“My body really relaxes when I take a bath”.



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REALITY CHECKING THOUGHTS:

“Everyone at work will have seen the typo on the presentation. They’ll think I can’t do my job now I’m a mum,” becomes, “That presentation stimulated helpful conversation in the team”.



OTHER TIPS TO TACKLE PERFECTIONISM:



- work out when you need it and when you don’t
- mindfulness based activities
- self-compassion which includes: courage, warmth, empathy, non-judgement and acceptance
- having realistic expectations of self
- make time to celebrate your achievements before deciding ‘what’s next?’
- self-soothing when things don’t go to plan

If perfectionism has been impacting on many aspects of your life, then learning new ways to operate can feel overwhelming. This is where support through counselling or being surrounded with people who accept us for our whole selves is important.

At Gidget Foundation Australia, our Clinicians will take the time to help you understand what perfectionism is and ways to manage it. Understanding why we may think and behave in certain ways can aid our readiness to change and with support, you can do it at a pace that feels right. 🌸



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Gidget Foundation Australia exists to support the emotional wellbeing of expectant and new parents to ensure they receive timely, appropriate and specialist care.