

# Perfectionism in Gifted Children

Perfectionism tends to be expressed in children during **specific circumstances** (e.g., when doing homework, creating art projects, or doing classwork). It can be classified as **healthy** or **unhealthy**. While frustrating for parents and teachers, perfectionism can be lessened by **focusing on process over product, creating safe places to take risks, and modeling mistakes**.

## The Academic Achiever

### “I Must Achieve 100%”

The academic achiever has defined his or her identity based upon having perfect (or near perfect) academic achievement. They are highly concerned with external evaluations of their work.

## The Aggravated Accuracy Assessor

### “Focus on Exactness and Fixation on Redos”

The aggravated accuracy assessor will spend inordinate amounts of time fixing minor mistakes and errors, even for work that is not expected to be a final draft. They may feel increasing levels of stress and anxiety regarding their work.

## The Risk Evader

### “It’s All or Nothing”

The risk evader will only attempt a task if he or she feels like she will be able to execute it successfully. This may include not participating in competitions unless expected to win, or not taking advanced coursework for fear of failure.

Perfectionism can manifest itself in many ways in gifted children. The following profiles can help identify perfectionistic behaviors and tendencies among gifted children. *Note that many gifted children exhibit characteristics from more than one of these profiles.*

## The Controlling Image Manager

### “I Could Have If I Wanted To”

The controlling image manager works to create the image of perfection to others. This may include crafting “excuses” for imperfections or manufacturing circumstances that would prevent themselves from being judged by others.

## The Procrastinating Perfectionist

### “If It Stays in My Mind, Then I Can’t Fail”

The procrastinating perfectionist will delay in executing ideas or assignments. This child recognizes the discrepancy between what they can achieve in their mind and their ability to produce the product. This can be related to asynchrony in development. The procrastinator can also use his or her “lack of time” as an explanatory factor for the perceived imperfections in the final product.

For more information see:



**Letting Go of Perfect:  
Overcoming Perfectionism in Kids**  
by Jill L. Adelson and Hope E. Wilson  
Prufrock Press 2009