PERFECTIONISM: BEING A GOOD LOSER

For many children learning how to lose can be a hard lesson. It applies also for gifted children, as their perceptions of their abilities sometimes can cause them to feel a failure for not always achieving and succeeding, and can be further complicated by the child having social and emotional concerns.

**Action worth considering:**

- **Explaining the concept**
  - Children have to learn to be a good loser, they need to be told exactly and simply what is expected of them, what is against the rules, and the consequences/discipline which will follow.

- **Understanding the Value of Participation Skills**
  - Through social activities children can be taught how to play fair, take turns, team work, experiencing losing and celebrating other’s winning, in compliment to the reason of playing to win. Enjoy socially rewarding activities which have no winner or loser, for example a bicycle ride rather than a bicycle race.

- **Learning How to Fail**
  - Children need to learn and experience failure, with supportive parents praising the hard work and effort rather than highlighting the result.

- **Reward and Encouragement**
  - Praise the child at every opportunity, as rewarding positive behaviour is more effective than disciplining negative behaviour.

- **Use of Social Stories**
  - Stories which offer opportunities to discuss character’s behaviour and emotions are excellent tools to get children thinking about their own behaviour and emotions, and what is acceptable/appropriate in particular situations.

- **Use of Relevance and Context**
  - Show empathy to your child when they lose by relaying a time when you experienced similar loss, or think of real life examples such as a team losing the cup final, getting a bronze medal in the Olympics, failing a driving test etc.

- **Discuss Consequences of Actions**
  - Talk about your child’s reactions and how their anger or resentment at losing can affect how they are perceived by others, disrupting their friendships and relationships with peers, team mates etc.

- **Set Goals for Effort and Improvement**
  - Try to avoid goals based purely on winning, but concentrate rather on sustained effort and improvement.
Encourage other interests

Participating in an area in which a child isn’t gifted or talented can help with perfectionist issues if they are not expected to be “best” or “top” but are similar to other participants, and it gives them a broader range of skills/social peers.

Show understanding

Empathising and understanding the importance of the occasion for the child is important, as being emotive shows how much it means to the child. Emphasise it is ok to feel angry or upset sometimes, but it isn’t acceptable to display inappropriate behaviour because of those feelings.

Further Guidance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds Parentline</td>
<td>Informative website and helpline for all concerns regarding children’s mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slip! Slide! Skate! by G. Herman</td>
<td>Children’s book to encourage discussion about perfectionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tales for the Perfect Child by F. Heide</td>
<td>Children’s book to encourage discussion about perfectionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism and Gifted Children, by R. Callard- Szulgit</td>
<td>Informative book for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Perfect isn’t Good Enough: Strategies for Coping With Perfectionism by M. Antony</td>
<td>Informative book for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Highly Sensitive Child by E.N. Aron</td>
<td>Informative book for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeing Our Families from Perfectionism, by T. Greenspon</td>
<td>Informative book for parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With thanks to © The National Association For Gifted Children Limited (“NAGC”) for providing the materials on which this article/section was based.