

Perfect Princess Syndrome... Tools & Resources to Equip Girls

"You are imperfect, permanently and inevitably flawed.
And you are beautiful" – Amy Bloom

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Escaping the Trap of Perfectionism

Perfect Princess Syndrome (PPS) is growing as a very common trap that girls are falling prey to. It's deceiving messages can create devastating effects in the lives of our girls, being sucked into the trap of comparison, while striving for the unattainable and impossible "perfect live".

"Perfectionism resounds throughout social media, magazines, billboard, music – all screaming 1001 ways we should look, act and speak, in order to have the perfect life."

We need to educate our girls, helping them understand the myth.

Resource Activities

Perfect Princess Syndrome Article for Girls + Discussion Questions

This is a short article for girls to read through, to gain some insight into the lies of perfectionism. An easy read written for them specifically.

Found on page 2.

You can have discussions after the girls have read through it, asking for example:

- What stood out to you?
- Do you think you sometimes fall into the trap of perfectionism?
- Why do you think it is a trap?
- What advice would you give someone in this trap?

These 2 resources work really well together – the article giving an insight and starting the conversation, then the activity sheets helping girls work through the traps of perfectionism.

Activity Tool Sheets

These sheets contain a series of steps and tools to climb out of the perfectionism trap, including identifying and challenging irrational thoughts, replacing with positive statements, gaining perspective and understanding the bigger picture.

Each step contains tools and exercises to help girls work through these challenges.

Found on pages 3-4.

Perfect Princess Syndrome

Have you ever thought: "I wish I looked like that...", "if only I could do that...", "why can't things be like this..."? Be careful; you may be knocking on the dangerous doors of perfectionism. This one-way door to unhappiness can swing wide open at any time if we are not watching out for its alluring traps.

Be on guard; the whisper of perfectionism resounds throughout social media, magazines, billboards, music – all screaming 1001 ways we should look, act and speak, in order to have the perfect life. It forces us into a constant state of comparison – how exhausting! These messages are NOT real, yet they deceive us to believe perfection is what we must attain. This burden of striving for the unattainable is destined to lead us to disappointment, loneliness, fear and self-destructive behaviours. STOP NOW. Don't listen to the lies society feeds us. Perfection is a worthless standard! It does not exist.

What DOES exist is your unique life, worthy, just as you are! Esteem Designz Program is extremely passionate about championing girls to know their identity and value, find confidence in who they are, and be empowered with new skills to flourish in life. It is our differences that make us beautiful. Your value is in WHO you are, not your appearance or achievements. When accepting the truth that life can never be perfect, you are free to really live! No limitations, no unrealistic expectations, no pressure to strive for the unachievable...just freedom to be you.

The chick-flick *Mean Girls* supports this. To the outsider, the life of the Plastics seems perfect. Everyone wants to be like them; but underneath the gloss and glamour are lost and broken girls insecure in their identity. It isn't until they break free from trying to be perfect that they relax in who they are, find genuine friends and truly begin to enjoy life.

We too need to gain perspective. Let's take off the dreamlike Instagram filter to see what's real, and BE real. Let's focus on what is really important: like developing character, building honest friendships, doing our best, being encouraging and giving to others, growing from mistakes and being content with what we have.

In participating in Esteem Designz, Jas in grade 8 broke down some of these struggles and gained new perspective. With a smile that went for miles and holding her favourite Design Project, she said: "I discovered more about myself and learnt to trust and believe in who I am. Through the awesome projects I now know that I can cope with anything and I learnt really helpful ways to deal with life. I also learnt that we all have a purpose and not to put others or ourselves down. I feel much more confident in myself".

If the statement 'believe in yourself' is hard to digest, repeat it until it sinks in. What pressures are you currently facing? Do you need to gain perspective? Give yourself a break. Write down what's important in your life; share it with a friend or trusted adult, and strive after the things that bring you meaning and joy. Remember: perfection is a myth, but your value and beauty is a true reality.

Perfectionism makes us overly critical of ourselves and others.

Challenging Irrational Thoughts

Complete these exercises for each of the following unhealthy thought patterns:

- Write down your own explanation of what each thought pattern is.
- Think of some more examples of that thought pattern.
- Have you ever thought this way? Write down an example.
- How were you feeling when you thought this way?

Black-and-white thinking – thinking only one extreme or another, good or bad, right or wrong, perfect or failure. (e.g. "Anything less than perfection is a failure", "If I need help from others, then I am weak")

Catastrophic thinking – believing the worst-case scenario will definitely happen or continuing to think about it over and over (e.g., "If I make a mistake in front of my peers, I won't be able to survive the humiliation", "I can't handle having someone not accepting me", "If I don't look really good, I can't leave my house")

Probability overestimation – predicting that something is likely to happen even though the actual chance of it happening is low. Overestimating the likelihood that something negative or dangerous will occur (e.g., "Although I spent all night doing an assignment, I know I won't do well", "My skin is looking ok at the moment, but any day now it will look bad")

Should statements – You believe you must live up to excessively high standards, & may also have excessively high expectations of others. You believe you should have known/done better, even when that would have been impossible (e.g., "I should never make mistakes", "I should never come across as nervous or anxious", "I should always be able to predict problems before they occur")

Positive Statements

Replace irrational and self-critical thoughts with positive, helpful statements.

Below are some simple examples. Come up with your own positive statements and continue to repeat these positive statements until you believe them. Put them somewhere you can regularly see.

Try going back over your irrational thoughts and replace them with positive ones.

- "Nobody's perfect!"
- "All I can do is my best"
- "The real me is more valuable than a fake version"
- "Believing in myself -- even when I'm making mistakes -- will help me do better!"
- "It's okay if some people don't like me. No one is liked by everyone!"



Perfect Princess Syndrome

Gain Perspective

To help overcome perfectionism, it is really important that we gain perspective.

We need to understand that mistakes are actually opportunities for growth, and that imperfections can be beautiful.

Write down as many points as you can about the value of the following (continues on the next page) - why are they so they and important.

The Value of Mistakes:

- "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly." (Robert Kennedy)
- "Take a chance and you may lose. Take not a chance and you have lost already." (Soren Kierkegaard)
- "Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." (Benjamin Disraeli)

Perspective Taking Tools

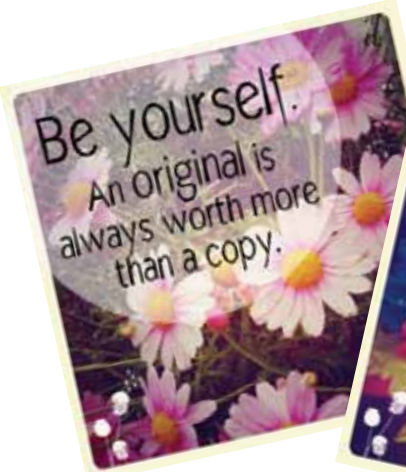
When you are dealing with irrational thoughts or facing perfectionism, answer the following:

- How might someone else (e.g. a close friend) view this situation?
- Are there other ways to look at this?
- What might I tell a close friend who was having similar thoughts?

Understanding the big picture

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does it really matter?
- What is the worst that could happen?
- If the worst does happen, can I survive it?
- Will this still matter tomorrow? How about next week? Next year?



Steps to help with Perfectionism:

- Identify and challenge irrational thoughts
- Replace irrational thoughts with positive statements
- Write these somewhere you can constantly see – repeat and repeat again
- Gain Perspective
- Understand the value of mistakes and imperfections
- Identify your strengths
- Use some perspective taking tools – questions
- Understand the bigger picture
- Reward yourself - any steps forward is worth celebrating

The Value of Imperfections: