



THE COUNSELOR'S CORNER

“Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude.”

Ralph Marston

Character Traits

EXCELLENCE

Dr. Chris Drew, educator and research specialist, states that the key to establishing excellence is by creating a foundation for positive habits and positive attitudes early in life. It's critical that parents and caregivers play this role. There is over 40 years of early childhood research that has demonstrated that parent involvement is THE single-most important factor for determining a child's school and life success.

As you work to establish a foundation of excellence in your child Dr. Drew identified four principals to keep in mind:

- **Repetition:** We are what we repeatedly practice, what we repeatedly do.
- **Response:** We must have models to imitate, and we have to have feedback from coaches, teachers and, most importantly, parents.
- **Respect:** When we're training, the most effective student-teacher relationships are the ones wherein there is mutual respect for the person and the content.
- **Rhythm:** It's important that we establish a rhythm. Try to establish a routine for whatever it is your training in – a routine time, place, procedure.



10 Life Skills for Teaching Your Kids the Excellence Edge

One of your most important tasks as a parent is to teach your children skills that will help them excel in life. According to Vicki Caruana's book, *Giving Your Child the Excellence Edge*, parents play an integral part in determining if their children will succeed — not only in school, but in their future careers and relationships as well. Here are ten life skills for teaching your kids the excellence edge:

Teach your children to become

- **Quality Producers**

Do above what is expected.

- **Independent Learners**

Set academic and personal goals,

- **Creative Thinkers**

Creativity is the power of the imagination.

- **Critical Thinkers**

Apply the scientific method to daily

- **Information Managers**

Children need to know how to find information for themselves.

- **Cooperative Learners**

Negotiate with a balance of assertiveness, consideration, flexibility, and patience.

- **Effective Communicators**

Focuses on respectful listening.

- **Confident Learners**

Listen to the opinions of others, act as a leader, and have a defined vision.

- **Efficient Time Managers**

Create a timeline for completing tasks.

- **Self-Assessors**

Identify strengths and needs

<http://www.allprodad.com/10-life-skills-for-teaching-your-kids-the-excellence-edge/>

Jim Taylor Ph.D. The Power of Prime **Parenting: Raise Excellent -- Not Perfect - Children**

Perfectionism is one of the most destructive diseases among American children today. Perfectionism is a double-edged sword. One edge of the sword drives children to be perfect. These children push themselves to get straight A's, be top athletes, and save the world on weekends. The other edge of the sword is that I have never met a happy perfectionist. They can't be happy because they will never be perfect.

What is Perfectionism?

Perfectionism involves children setting unrealistically high standards for themselves and striving for a goal that they will never, ever achieve. Yet they believe that anything less than perfection is unacceptable. When they fail to meet those impossibly high standards, they berate themselves unmercifully. Perfectionistic children are never satisfied with their efforts no matter how objectively well they perform, and they punish themselves for not being perfect. After I spoke to a group of high-school students recently, a girl from the audience described to me how she had gotten a 100 on a recent test that also offered ten extra-credit points. She got seven out of the ten points for a total of a 107 out of 100 yet missing those three extra-credit points had been eating her alive ever since!

At the heart of perfectionism lies a threat: if children aren't perfect, their parents won't love them. This threat arises because children connect whether they are perfect with their self-esteem; being perfect dictates whether they see themselves as valuable people worthy of love and respect. The price these children believe they will pay if they are not perfect is immense and its toll can be truly destructive: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, and suicide.

By the way, children don't have to be perfectionistic in every part of their lives to be considered perfectionists. They only have to be perfect in areas that they care about, for example, there are perfectionists in school who have messy rooms or perfectionistic athletes who don't care about their schoolwork.

Perfection and Popular Culture

We live in a culture that reveres perfection. Our culture has elevated success to absurd heights where being good is no longer good enough. Children must now aim for the Ivy Leagues or the pros. They must make lots of money and have the perfect house and the perfect car. Our culture also worships at the altar of physical perfection. Children are bombarded by images of perfect people with perfect bodies, perfect faces, perfect hair, and perfect teeth, as evidenced by the popularity of cosmetic surgery and reality TV shows such as Extreme Makeover.

Perfectionism and Failure

Though it appears that perfectionistic children are driven to succeed, their singular motivation in life is actually to avoid failure because they connect failure with feelings of worthlessness and loss of love. Perfectionistic children view failure as a voracious beast that stalks them every moment of every day. If these children stop for even a moment's rest, they will be devoured by failure and that is simply unacceptable.

Though perfectionists often achieve some degree of success, because of this profound fear of failure, these children often don't fully realize their ability and achieve true success. The only way to attain true success is to risk failure, and perfectionistic children are often unwilling to take that risk. Though the chances of success increase when they take risks, the chances of failure also increase. So perfectionistic children hover in a "safety zone" in which they remain safely at a distance from failure (so they can still feel good about themselves) but are also stuck at a frustrating distance from success.

Perfectionism and Emotions

You might think that perfectionistic children experience excitement and elation when they achieve their high standards, but those emotions are far too normal for them. The strongest emotion perfectionistic children can often muster is relief! Where does the relief come from? They dodged another bullet of failure and can feel okay about themselves...but not for long. Recently, I asked a group of students how long they thought the relief lasts and a girl threw up her hand and declared, "Till the next exam!"

What emotion would perfectionistic children who inevitably fail to meet their high standards experience? You might think disappointment. But disappointment, a normal reaction that all children should feel when they fail, is far too kind an emotion for perfectionists. Perfectionists experience devastation because they perceive the failure as a personal attack on their value as people.

Where Does Perfectionism Come From?

After almost every parent talk, I've given, a parent says to me, "I swear that my child was born a perfectionist." Yet there is no scientific evidence that perfectionism is inborn. The research indicates that children learn their perfectionism from their parents, most often from their same-sex parent. Through their parents' words, emotions, and actions, children connect being loved with being perfect. This doesn't mean that there are no inborn influences; some genetic attributes, such as temperament, may make children more vulnerable to perfectionism.

Parents pass on perfectionism to their children in three ways. Some perfectionistic parents raise their children to be perfectionists by actively praising and rewarding success and punishing failure. These parents offer or withdraw their love based on whether their children meet their perfectionistic expectations. When children succeed, their parents lavish them with love, attention, and gifts. But when they fail, their parents either withdraw their love and become cold and distant, or express strong anger and resentment toward their children. In both cases, these children get the message

that if they want their parents' love, they must be perfect. Thankfully, in my twenty years of practice, I have only come across a few parents who were this overtly perfectionistic.

Other parents unintentionally role model perfectionism for their children. Examples of how perfectionism is communicated by these parents include having to have themselves and their home look a certain way, their career efforts, their competitiveness in sports and games, and how they respond when things don't go their way. Children see how their parents hate themselves when they're not perfect, so they feel they must be perfect, so their parents won't hate them. These parents unwittingly communicate to their children that anything less than perfection won't be tolerated in the family.

The final type of parents that convey perfectionism are not perfectionists at all; in fact, they are the antithesis of being perfect. But they are going to make sure their children are perfect! These parents project their flaws onto their children and try to fix those flaws by giving love when their children don't show the flaws and withdrawing love when they do. Unfortunately, instead of creating perfect children and absolving themselves of their own imperfections, they pass them on to their children and stay flawed themselves.

Excellence: The Antidote to Perfection

You should remove the word perfection from your vocabulary. It serves no purpose other than to make your children miserable. You should replace perfection with excellence. I define excellence as doing good most of the time (I use poor grammar intentionally because that's how most children talk-and I'm not perfect either!). Excellence takes all of the good aspects of perfection (e.g., achievement, high standards, disappointment with failure) and leaves out its unhealthy parts (e.g., connecting achievement with self-esteem, unrealistic expectations, fear of failure). Excellence still sets the bar high, but it never connects failure with the love you give your children (or the love they give themselves). Excellence actually encourages your children to fail-not repeatedly on the same thing due to a lack of effort, of course-because it understands that without some failure, true success isn't possible. Without a fear of failure, your children can turn their gaze toward success and pursue it with commitment and gusto knowing that you will love them no matter what.

You Don't Have to Be a Perfect Parent

There's even a book titled Perfect Parenting. What an impossible standard to live up to! But here's some news: you don't need to be a perfect parent, just an excellent one (I can hear the collective parental sigh of relief across America). Being an excellent parent means being good with your children most of the time. You can actually make mistakes with your children. You can occasionally lose your temper or act like a soccer-or stage or chess-parent. So, cut yourself some slack about being a perfect parent. Make sure you and your children do good most of the time and you will be a lot less stressed and they will turn out to be excellent people.