

The pursuit of perfect - when perfectionism has a hold on your child

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January 31, 2023



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Can tend to hold perfectionism up
as an insignia of worth

Increasing pressure in our image-
based culture

Young people today are more
preoccupied with the attainment
of the perfect life – told that if you
only work hard enough you can
achieve whatever you want



Understanding of perfectionism

- Combination of high standards / striving as well as feeling that it is never good enough / intolerance of mistakes
- Can arise early in a child's life
- Can be domain specific or more general
- Psychological theory that perfectionism is focused on striving to repair sense of defective self
- Correlated with mental health challenges including depression, OCD, anxiety and eating disorders
- Not a fixed trait

Double edged sword

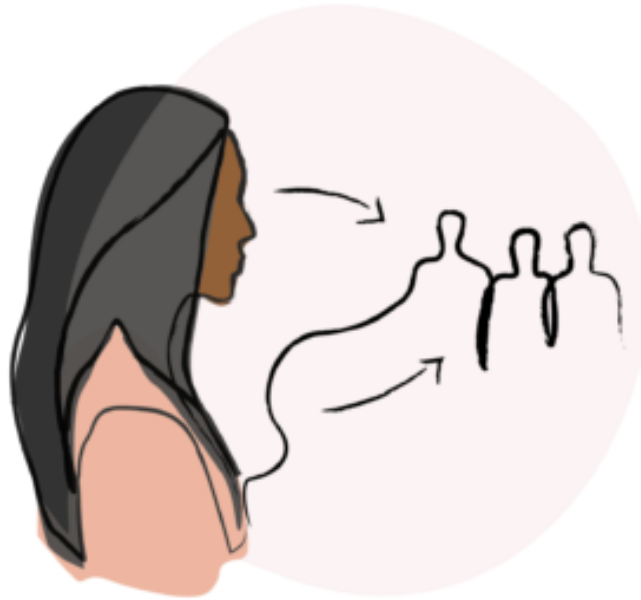
STRIVING
NEVER ENOUGH



Can take a variety of forms



SELF-ORIENTED



OTHER-ORIENTED



SOCIALLY PRESCRIBED

Perfectionism is common and increasing

Studies put the rate of "maladaptive perfectionism" between 25-30% by the time children reach adolescence (Flett, Hewitt, & Gale, 2016)

In a meta-analysis of British, American and Canadian university students, rates of perfectionism were also show to be increasing - it is speculated that this may be due to general shift to more individualistic and materialistic culture as well as young people now facing more competitive environments, more unrealistic expectations, and more anxious parents than generations before (Curran & Hill, 2017)

Signs of problematic perfectionism

A pattern of being excessively self-deprecating

Difficulty getting over perceived failure

Avoiding new things

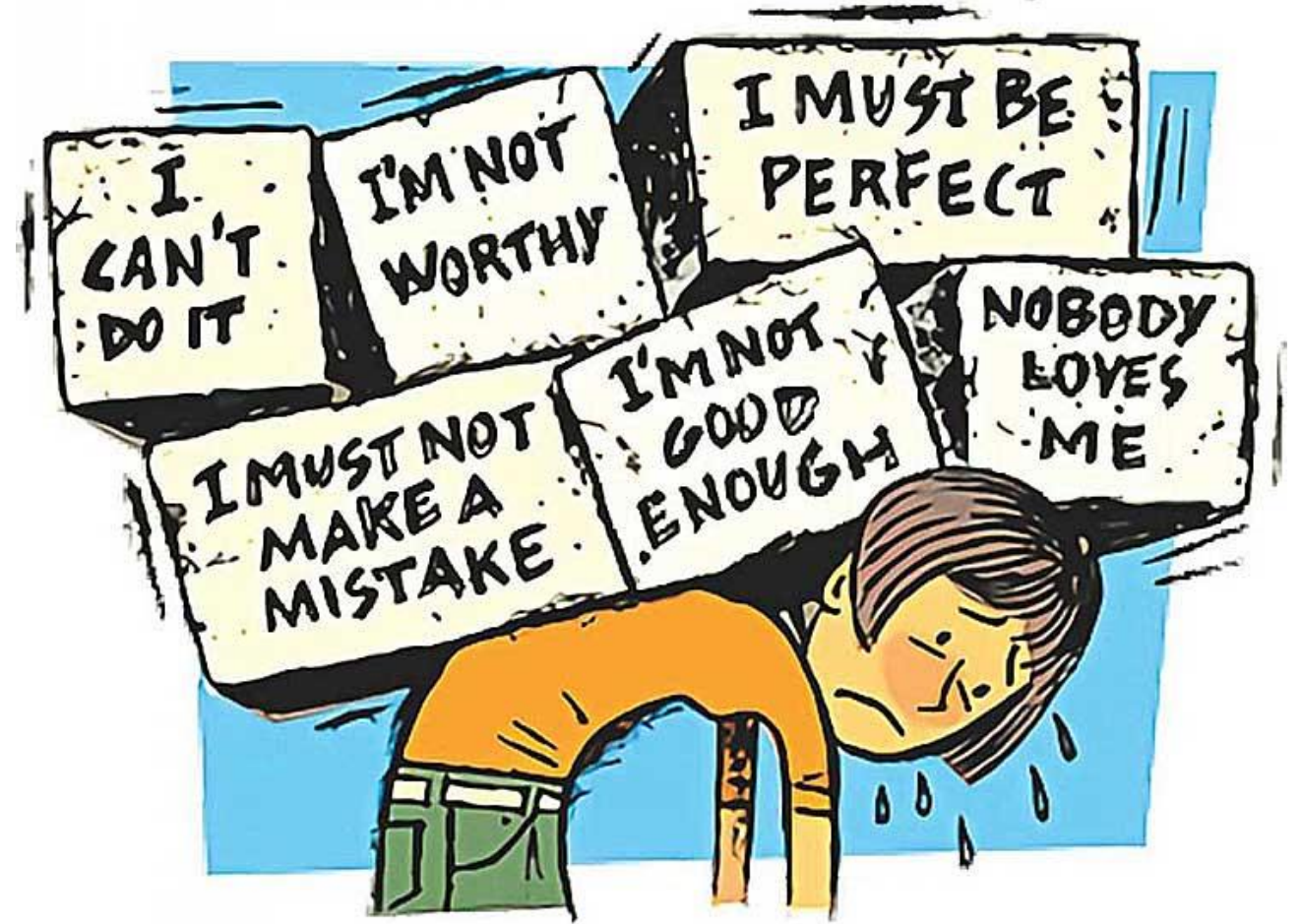
Lack of ability to be happy or satisfied with accomplishments

Source: Jessica Grose, New York Times, How to Help Your Perfectionist Kid, July 1, 2020

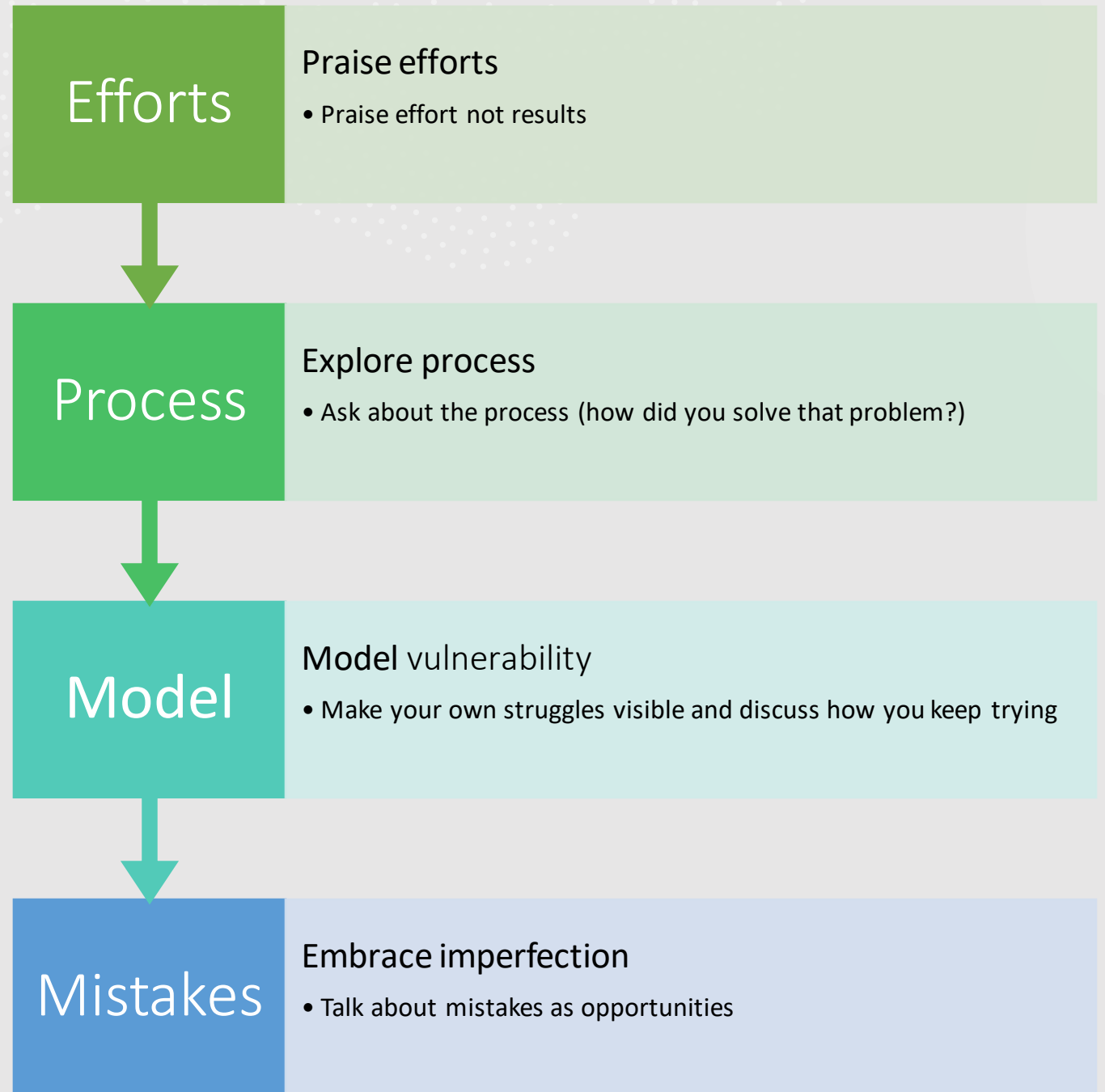
Cycle can
take hold



Perfectionism can be connected to core belief that "I'm not good enough"



Shifting the focus





Praising –
noticing
effort –
growth
mindset

"I can see you are working hard"

"I like how you used a lot of different strategies to figure that out"

"Wow, I really noticed how you kept on trying"

"Are you proud of your work?"

Responding in the moment

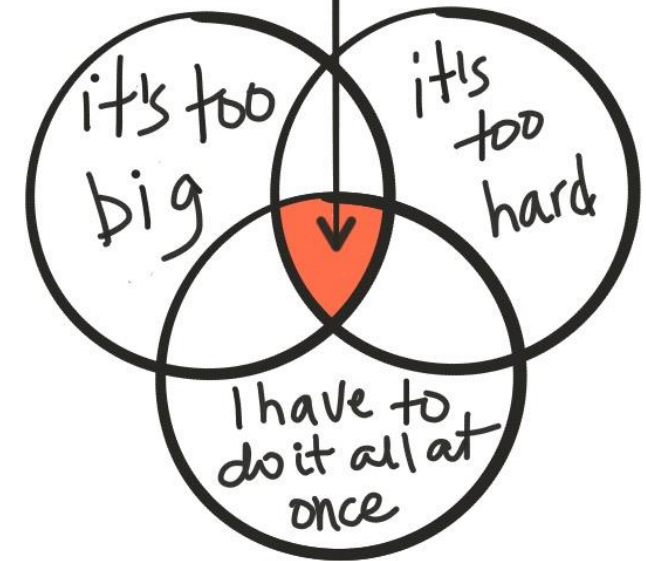
- Be present
- Validate the emotion "you feel so much pressure right now" or "this is so hard"
- Not a moment to challenge the expectation
- Listen



Untangling perfectionism and procrastination

1. Aim to have a realistic schedule
2. What is the goal of the assignment or project?
3. Break down steps – assign how much time to spend on each
4. Collaborate on setting priorities

procrastination

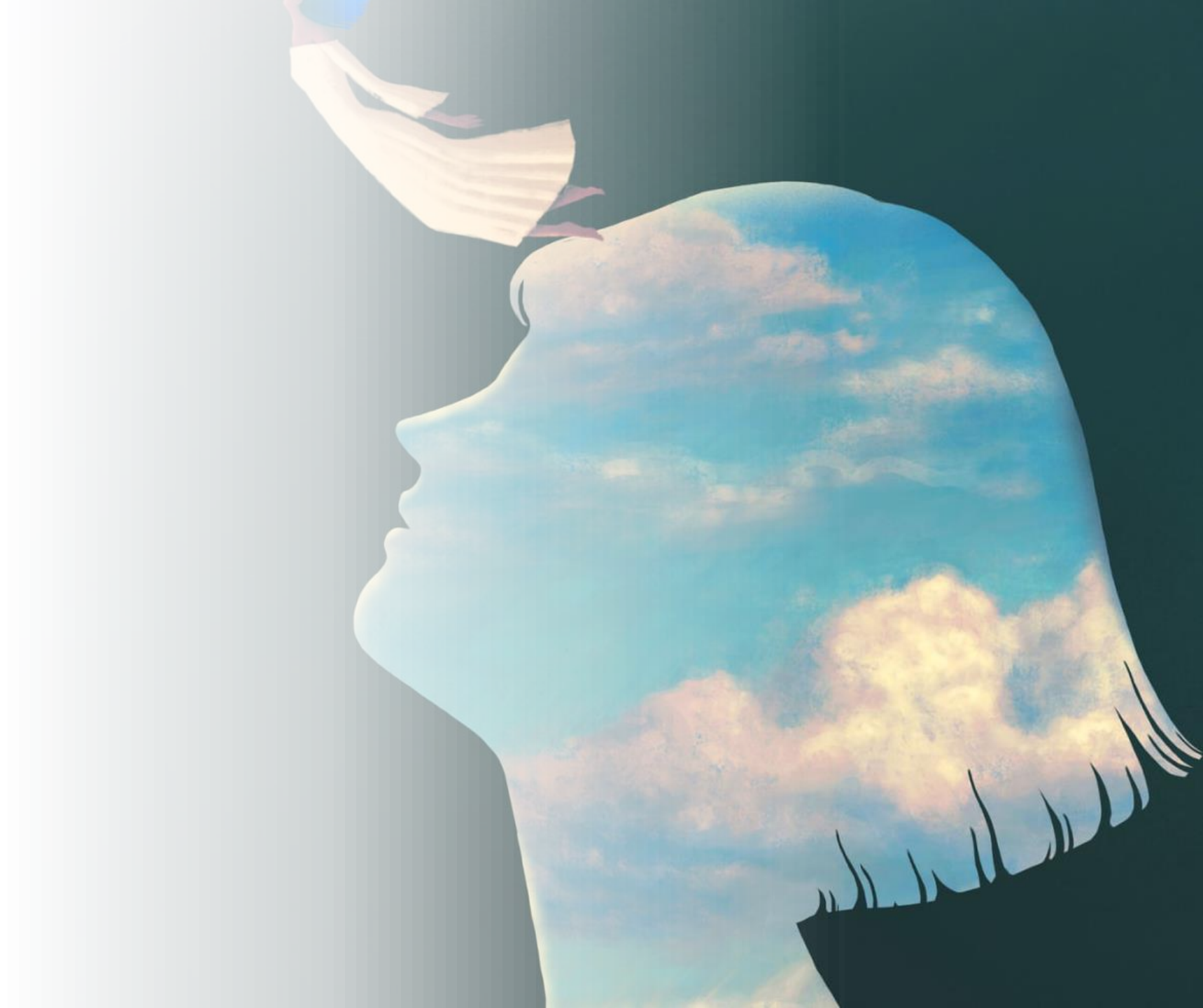


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Nurture psychological flexibility

Skills


- 1) Awareness – noticing what is happening in the present moment
- 2) Openness – allowing yourself to experience and process difficult thoughts and emotions
- 3) Connection to values – knowing what matters to you



Modelling vulnerability

- Changing our relationship to mistakes
- Being aware of how we speak about others and ourselves when we make a mistake
- less comments about body, marks, achievement etc.



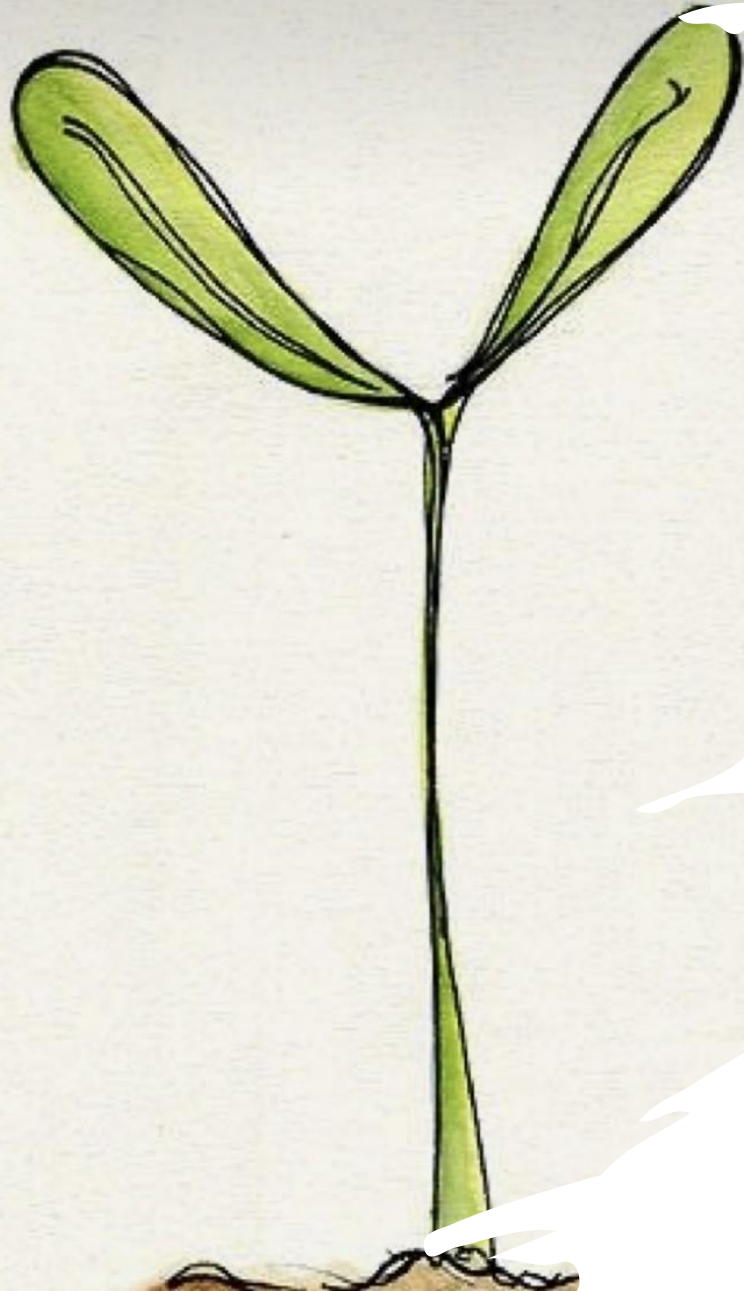


Antidote to perfectionism - unconditional regard

Child needs to know that they matter, regardless of grades, behaviour, achievement etc

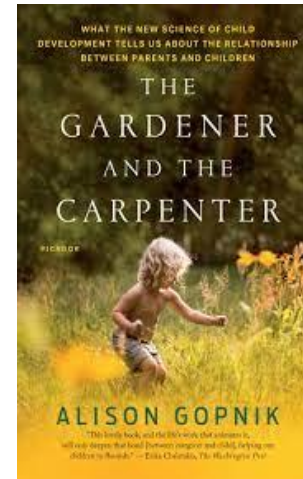
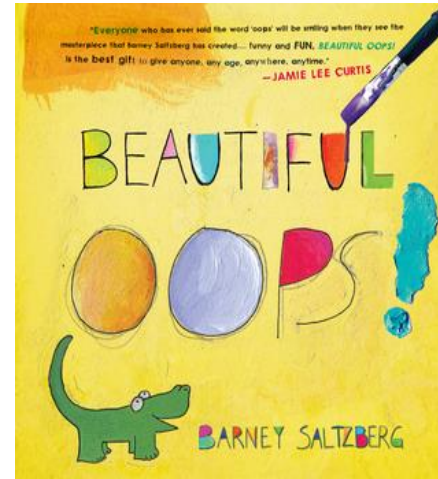
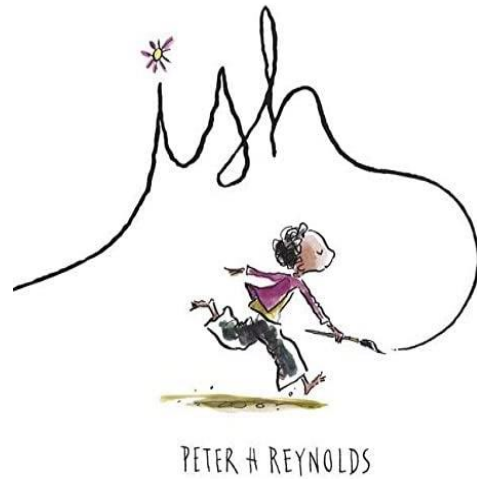
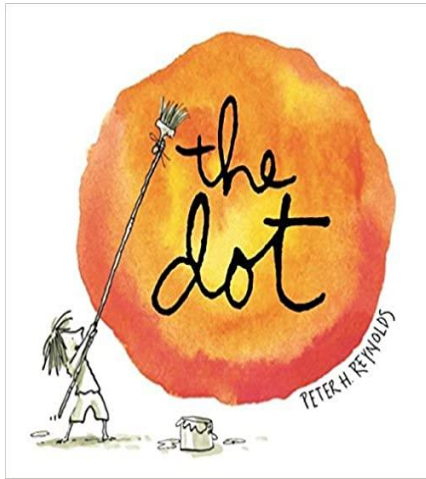
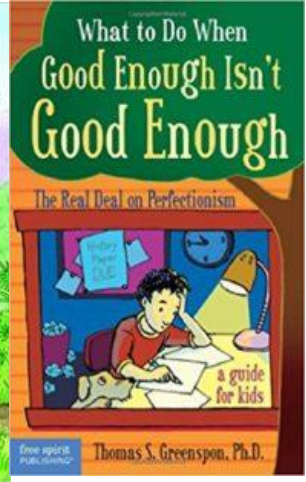
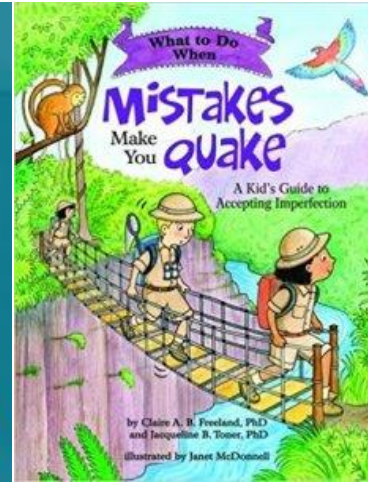
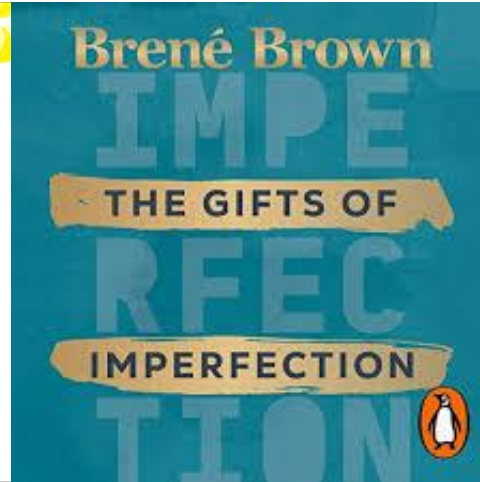
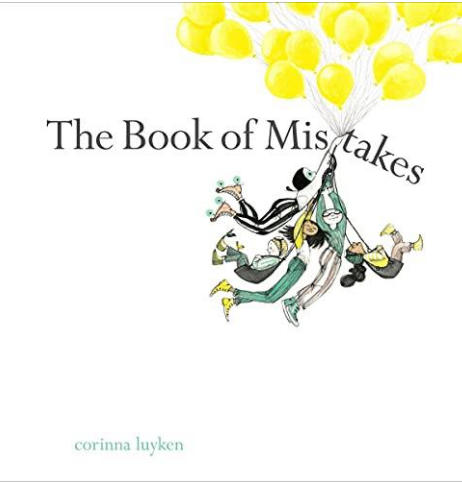
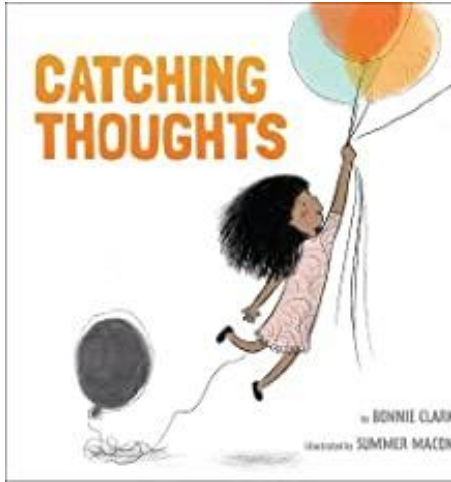
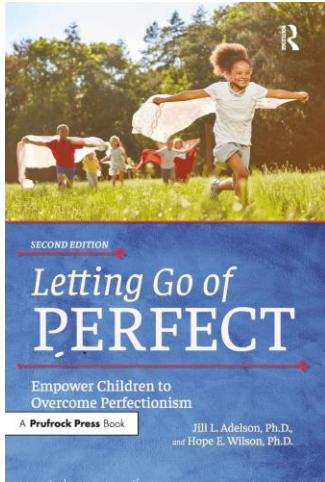
Communicate to child through actions and words "you are cherished and loved for whoever you are"

Supporting child and giving space, to develop sense of confidence within self, unhooking from external validation



"Our job as parents is not to make a particular kind of child. Instead, our job is to provide a protected space of love, safety and stability in which children of many unpredictable kinds can flourish."

Allison Gopnik, *The Gardener and the Carpenter*



Thomas Curran – Ted Talk, Our Dangerous Obsession with Perfectionism 2018

Resources

Question

- Could you consider tips for managing work completion with an imminent deadline (strategies to support good enough vs. perfect)?