

**OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/IB/TOPS/MACS/HANDOUT 25****NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_**REFLECTION (PART 1)****Are you a perfectionist?**

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**Read this article about perfectionism in teenagers.****Perfectionism in Teenagers***by Alissa Fleck, Demand Media**(Adapted from <http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/perfectionism-teenagers-6068.html>)*

According to an article published in Psychology Today in 2011, the nation's teens are more at risk than ever to be inclined toward perfectionism. Perfectionism in teens manifests in certain notable behaviors and is often destructive to the individual's well-being, particularly in the long run. Parents, mentors and other authority figures in teens' lives can take an active role in making sure desires for success and achievement do not get out of hand.

**Why it Happens**

There's no single definitive reason someone becomes a perfectionist, but according to Kenneth Ginsburg, M.D., in Psychology Today, today's teens are especially prone to perfectionism because of societal pressure to be the best. Ginsburg describes a myth teenagers face -- if they do not push themselves to be perfect, they are doomed to a life of mediocrity. This pressure comes not only from society itself -- which places a premium on being the best at everything and idolizes public figures, like sports stars, who are the exception rather than the rule -- but can also come from peers, educators

and families. Teens then internalize and perpetuate this dangerous myth in their own lives. In some cases, perfectionism is self-imposed, no matter how much support and praise teens receive from external sources.

**What it Looks Like**

Perfectionism in teenagers is accompanied by an extreme fear of failure and, therefore, a diminished willingness to think creatively. Perfectionists are less resilient and less able to respond well to constructive criticism. For perfectionists, life is all about scores and tangible achievement -- they want to perform at 100 percent all the time. Sometimes the desire for perfection manifests in the need for a perfect physical appearance. For some, they may be able to make mistakes privately, but the respect of others is of utmost importance, and they fear public failure above all.

**Destructive Side Effects**

While some teenagers may seem to handle their perfectionism just fine, those who cannot cope when their unrealistically high standards are not met are at greater risk for serious problems in life, like anxiety, depression and eating disorders. They are consistently dissatisfied and disappointed in themselves, which only exacerbates these issues. These teens may experience extreme performance anxiety and struggle to function well in front of others.

**How to Help**

There are many ways to help teenagers who struggle with perfectionism, including challenging their own irrational thoughts about accomplishments and failure. Guide these teens to more rational explanations and encourage them not to see things as entirely black and white when it comes to success. It's also important to be a good role model for teenagers who struggle with perfectionism -- let them see your reactions to your own performance and that a less-than-perfect result is not the end of the world. In some cases, a teenager's perfectionism is a sign of a more serious condition or an inability to see beyond certain self-imposed belief systems and it may be wise to seek professional help from a mental health expert.

**Do you have a friend who is a perfectionist? After reading the article, what advice would you give to her or him?**

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## REFLECTION (PART 2)

What do you love more than you love yourself? Spend some time reflecting on this question. Share your thoughts with your peers if you are comfortable doing so.

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Watch Elizabeth Gilbert's TED Talk "Success, Failure, and the Drive to Keep Creating":

[https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth\\_gilbert\\_success\\_failure\\_and\\_the\\_drive\\_to\\_keeep\\_creating?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_success_failure_and_the_drive_to_keeep_creating?language=en)

According to Gilbert, why is it important to think about the question, "What do you love more than you love yourself?"

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**ESSAY WRITING** (The TOPS English essay, is designed to see how you think, how well you express yourself, perhaps even how willing you are to take a risk or two! It is an essay, but the topics are either word or photographic prompts. You will need to adapt and to think on your feet. Non-electronic dictionaries are permitted.)

Look at the following four photographs. Which space or spaces would you like to be in?





**THE END**