THE PRESSURE OF BEING PERFECT: AND HOW TO BREAK FREE

Written by Rylee Gellner

Youth Employees from left to right: Mia Nanita, Rylee Gellner, Braley Hix, Jaxon Roop

If you're a teen today, chances are you've felt the pressure to be perfect – whether it's in school, online, or at home. The truth is chasing perfection doesn't make you successful. It makes you exhausted. It takes a toll on your mental health and happiness. Perfection is a lie and it's time to address it.

Why perfectionism hits teens so hard?

Perfectionism is a constant feeling that anything less than perfect means you failed. For teens today, the pressure is more intense than ever. Social media platforms show everyone else's "highlight reel" making it seem like everyone else is thriving, but what you don't see is their struggles. Academic pressure and the race for perfect test scores is detrimental. The fear of falling short can be overwhelming. Perfectionism in school doesn't guarantee success, and it certainly doesn't guarantee happiness.

What perfectionism can do to you:

Living under constant pressure to be perfect takes a toll—on your mind, body, and overall well-being. Teens who struggle with perfectionism may often experience anxiety, burnout, self-doubt, and isolation. The problem with perfectionism isn't just about being hard on yourself—it's about losing sight of who you are and what you really want.

How to start letting go of perfectionism:

You don't have to be perfect to be enough. Here are some steps to break free from the pressure of perfectionism:

1. **Redefine success**. Start by changing the way you define success. Instead of saying, "did I get it right?", ask *"what can I learn from this?"* Success isn't about flawless outcomes; it's about showing up, trying, and improving. Failure is part of the process—don't let it define you.

2. **Take social media breaks.** Set boundaries. Limit your time on social media, and unfollow accounts that make you feel bad about yourself. Curate a feed that inspires you, not stresses you out.

3. **Learn to fail.** Failure doesn't make you less of a person—it makes you a person who is learning, growing, and getting closer to your goals. If you're afraid to fail, you'll never take

risks. Failure is a necessary part of growth. So, instead of fearing it, learn from it. It's an opportunity to bounce back even stronger.

4. **Surround yourself with supportive people.** You don't have to do it all alone. Surround yourself with friends and family who accept you for who you are—not who they want you to be. Positive, supportive relationships can help ease the pressure of perfectionism and remind you that you are enough, no matter what.

Conclusion

Remember, there is no such thing as perfect. You can never check off every box or live up to every expectation. You are worthy not because of what you achieve, but because of who you are.