**Article Summary**

*Recognizing Perfectionism in Gifted Children*

By Debra Troxclair

This article was written for both parents and teachers of gifted children who suffer from a symptom of giftedness known as perfectionism. It was identified as one of the problems associated with student motivation and learning.

Perfectionism finds its roots in the three levels of personality development identified by Erik Erikson, trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. doubt, and initiative vs. guilt. In the trust vs. mistrust stage, children who experience security feel in control of their lives and productive. Children who do not feel as if they are being controlled by the world. In autonomy vs. self-stage, perfectionism is stimulated when parents are overprotective and overly use the word “no”. A parent’s attempt to sharpen a child’s skills by correcting them or redoing their chores, even teasing them about something they did poorly, contribute to the idea that their best is not good enough. In initiative vs. guilt stage, a child is in danger of failing to become a risk-taker if overprotection or criticism is too frequently used.

As a personality trait, perfectionism makes children feel a duty to do everything perfectly. They often develop morally before their peers, and so they often feel a moral obligation to get it all right, all the time. This aspect of giftedness is considered a “developmental vulnerability”. Another issue that can arise is children may then project their idea of perfectionism on to those around them, leading inevitably to frustration.

There are specific behaviors associated with perfectionism as well. Procrastination, a seemingly unlikely behavior, is addressed first. Often children who are perfectionists would rather not start a task than to start knowing they cannot complete it without error. They fear failure, fear success, fear control, separation, and attachment. Other behaviors include mood swings, fluctuation between elation and depression. They are often never satisfied with the number of accomplishments, they can’t let go of what could have been, and they can’t complete a project until it’s perfect. Additionally, loneliness can occur as perfectionists isolate themselves from their peers in an attempt to be the best at everything they do.

Helpful hints for parents and teachers include becoming knowledgeable about perfectionism, talking openly to children about the trait and when it is seen around them, and teaching kids that it is all right to make mistakes. “Oh, well” is a great phrase for them to learn. Additionally, focus on the idea that life is not always fair for those times when their best didn’t get them what they thought it would. It is helpful to model the behavior and talk openly with children about it to ensure the growth and development of a happy and confident gifted child.