

A Peek Inside a Perfectionists Perspective

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Prioritizing the holistic wellness of our next generation through mindset, community and resilience.



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Have you ever wondered why perfectionism is so prevalent among dancers? Like many other athletes and artists, dancers tend to be their own worst critic. As we close competition season and enter recital time, it may be helpful to understand why dancers trend towards a perfectionist outlook.

Seeking Recognition & Approval - In class or rehearsal, a dance instructor may give their dancers a compliment or praise for executing a step particularly well. While this may seem like a healthy form of positive reinforcement, it has the potential to be psychologically detrimental. In order to gain attention or approval from their instructor, a dancer may experience pressure to be “perfect” in their performance. If they achieve that “perfection”, they are more likely to receive that sought-after praise or attention. To them, external validation is deemed as a success.

Social Media’s Portrayal - Dancers of all ages are flooding social media with impressive choreography and tricks. While this can be a source of inspiration and motivation for young dancers, it can also negatively influence their perspective of what it means to be a dancer. They develop a perception that a “good dancer” or the “ideal dancer” has impressive technique and “picture-perfect” performances.

Consequently, dancers become consumed by this expectation and relentlessly pursue it. And when something does not go to plan? Well, even the smallest of errors tears them apart.

Implicit Expectations = Pressure – Dancers also experience pressure to meet the expectations of their dance instructors. For example, a dancer may think, “An expectation of my dance teacher is perfect pirouettes.” And what happens when they don’t nail their pirouettes? They become disappointed because they feel as though they let their instructor down. This is known as an implicit expectation – an expectation that is not verbally articulated, but somehow still understood as a benchmark for approval.

Now that you have a bit more insight and context surrounding perfectionism in dance, let’s discuss your role as a support system and how you can personally influence their perspective:

- *Be invested!* Ask questions and if you don’t understand something, ask clarifying questions. Even more important? Follow-up with your dancer; whether they mentioned an event they were particularly nervous or struggling with recital choreography, get an update from them. This indirectly communicates that you were actively listening to them and are invested in their growth.
- *Give time and space to process.* Offer encouragement and support with the understanding that dance is a very personal experience. There may be times that your dancer does not want to share and that’s okay. Just make sure that when they do decide to open up, you are all ears.
- *Keep your ears peeled* for phrases such as, “I just want the dance to be perfect” or “I messed up my solo and I am so disappointed”. Encourage your dancer to focus on the creative experience and to embrace their individuality, rather than how they look in the mirror or how they compare to others on Instagram.

