



Episode #229

**Lisa Van Gemert Talks About Perfectionism and
Differently Wired Children**

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Debbie: Hey, Lisa, welcome to the podcast.

Lisa: Thanks so much for having me, Debbie, I'm really excited to be with you today.

Debbie: This is a conversation that I've been personally wanting to have. And I hear this from so many parents, this idea of perfectionism, it is pervasive in our twice exceptional kids, our gifted kids and just differently wired kids in general. So I think this is going to be a super useful conversation. But before we get into that, I always ask guests to just tell me a little bit about, you know, their personal, why for doing the work, and maybe how you came to be doing this work?

Lisa: Well, unfortunately, I came by it naturally, and honestly, that I had struggled a lot with my own perfectionistic tendencies. And I had developed a speech that I did about it. And I was giving this speech one time, and a man named Jim Webb, who's very well known in the gifted world, who's unfortunately since passed away, he happened to be in a session that I did when I was speaking about perfectionism. And he came up and said, that needs to be a book, you have no idea how many people struggle with this, just like you have. And that's how I got started in moving it beyond just looking at how to handle perfectionism in a school environment, to looking at perfectionism in a population of children, especially, but in the research, I was doing branched out into adults, because it turns out, it's way more common in lots of populations than most people realize.

Debbie: Hmm. And I just have to say, I love that Jim Webb is a part of your story. He's a part of the story of a number of guests I've had on this show. And it's just such a testament to the legacy that he leaves behind in this world.

Lisa: Yes, when he was alive, on he was my publisher for the book,

Debbie: I do want you to tell us a little bit more about your book. And we'll do that towards the end, talk about your book, *Perfectionism*. But let's start from the very beginning, let's talk about even defining perfectionism, is it different from having high standards, or just simply someone who really wants things to be a certain way?

Lisa: So the difficulty with defining perfectionism is that people have different things that they mean by it when they use the term. So some people mean high standards, right? Like, oh, I'm such a perfectionist about my house, meaning that they just like to have things picked up. And then there are other people who when they say, I'm a perfectionist mean, and it paralyzes me, right. So in some ways, perfectionism is like anxiety in that way, where a certain amount of anxiety is normal, right? If you have no anxiety, you run out in front of traffic and get hit by a car, but you can have anxiety that does not work for you and paralyzes you. The same thing is true of perfectionism, where everybody has certain tendencies of perfectionism. Like if your doctor gives you a medication and says, if you don't take this, you know, your infection isn't going away, you

want to be somewhat of a perfectionist and taking that medication. On the other hand, you can have children, especially, who get so tied up in their perfectionism that they don't turn in work, or they get paralyzed by it. They feel frustrated all the time. It impacts their relationships, right? So one of the difficulties in defining perfectionism is it lots of times people see it as a dichotomy, they see it as you're either a perfectionist, or you're not, when the truth is really that it's more of a continuum, and that we can be more or less perfectionistic in different areas of our lives, and more or less perfectionistic compared to other people. The way that I define perfectionism is unreasonably high standards, combined with a lack of self love.

Debbie: Wow, can you say a little more about that? I wasn't expecting self love to be a part of this equation. And it makes so much sense just even hearing those words. Can you talk a little more about that?

Lisa: Sure. When I was doing the research on the book, and I was reading all of the peer reviewed journal articles about perfectionism, a lot of them were brushing up against what perfectionism looks like in the DSM. So they were looking at what is perfectionism as it manifests itself in certain mental health conditions for which perfectionism is one of the accepted symptoms or diagnostic criteria. But what they really weren't looking at is what perfectionism looks like on a day to day basis for real people. And when I was looking at that, in my experience with my own self, and in my experience as the youth in education ambassador for Mensa for six years, and the thousands of gifted children that I worked with there, and especially because a lot of the children in Mensa a disproportionate number of the children in Mensa are twice exceptional. And I think the reason for that is that if you have a gifted child without an exceptionality, you're not necessarily going to seek out the community in the way that you do if you have a child who's who's differently minded. So I saw these tendencies. And what I saw was not just high standards, because a lot of people are capable of accomplishing great things, high standards for themselves, is not a problem. It's not perfectionism, it's reasonable. If you have high capability, it's reasonable to have high standards for yourself. The problem was when the standards were unreasonable. And the person did not love themselves enough to forgive themselves when they were unable to reach those standards. So even if you have unreasonably high standards for yourself, but you're able to do kind of an Elsa Frozen, let it go, when it doesn't work out, then you're probably not struggling that much, when you're really going to struggle is when you have expectations of yourself that you really can't meet. And you don't have it in you to forgive yourself for your own humanity. And when you have that combination is when it is dangerous and can be literally deadly.

Debbie: I'm just wondering if you could talk about what this looks like in kids. I know what it looks like in my child. But I'd love to know, you know, how does that actually play out in terms of maybe give us some examples with regards to schoolwork, and how a perfectionistic child might struggle?

Lisa: Well, I think almost every parent who has a child who has any perfectionistic tendencies at all, can relate to the scene where a homework assignment that a

teacher may have sent home that the teacher in good faith thought was a 10 or 15 minute assignment can turn into a six hour marathon frustration, Battle of epic proportions at the kitchen table, where a child has an image in their mind of how the work should look right, like, Oh, I'm making this project, a poster or brochure, whatever PowerPoint slide doesn't matter. They have an idea in their mind of how it should look how they want it to look. But they're unable to drag it out of their mind and onto paper or screen in the way that they had envisioned it. And because they can't do that, they become frustrated and frustrated, you'll get tearing of paper pulling out of hair yelling tantruming, even in children, who are much older than you would expect a tantrum where like, if other people saw it, they would think, Wow, there is something wrong with that kid, right? Why is that 11 year old literally pounding the floor? And so frustration, I think is the number one thing that we see extreme frustration, where they will physically harm themselves or others and definitely emotionally harm themselves or others, where they get angry at adults around them because of their own frustration. The second way I think it manifests itself most commonly is in risk avoidance, where they don't want to do anything unless they can be assured of a perfect outcome before they start.

Debbie: Yeah, I mean, that all resonates, that disconnect between the vision and the six hours for something that a parent might think could take 10 minutes, like why, you know, why do you have to care so much about it. And something that I've heard and I know other parents here is there's an unwillingness to do something that isn't at the highest standards of what they believe is possible, right? And so why would I do something that isn't going to demonstrate what I'm capable of? And that block seems to get in so many people's way?

Lisa: Yes, so there are two researchers Adelson and Wilson did some work on perfectionism specifically related to what it looks like in students. And one of the things I think was most important about the work that they did was the fact that they categorize perfectionists in two different types of perfectionist rather than painting everyone with the same brush. So we're used to the kind of perfectionism where if a kid gets a 98, they want extra credit, right? Like if, if I don't get 100 the world as we know it is going to stop spinning on its axis. But there are other ways that manifests itself. One of those is in risk avoidance. And there is another side of that coin and what Adelson and Wilson call it is a controlling image manager. And this is really common in a gifted populations So, controlling image managers and risk avoiders are very similar in that the motivation is to control the way that one is perceived. Risk avoiders, risk evaders, they avoid anything that will confront their own view of themselves. And that's what you're talking about. We're like, I don't want to do it if it doesn't look amazing, because I have this standard for myself that I should produce amazing work. And on the other side of that is a controlling image manager, who will say, I don't want to do that. If I don't think I can do it wonderfully well, because I want to control how other people see me. Like, I don't want to take a chance that somebody will see that I did it, and I didn't do it well, and then they will think that kids are not gifted or that kids are not smart, or, or even, you know, the absolute worst, right? That kid is so stupid. And so controlling image managers, and risk evaders look different on the outside, but the motivation is

really the same, which is controlling the way one is perceived either by oneself or by others. But you also get another type of perfectionist, which is called aggravated accuracy assessors. So these are kids who are fixated on redoing stuff, they'll erase paper until there's a hole in the paper. They just want to redo stuff and redo stuff. And you and I both know, and most adults know that when you make a mistake, you often make it worse when you try to fix it. Like you have a poster and you spell something wrong, when you try to make it look better, you actually draw more attention to it. And so that happens with kids, they start trying to fix it, and they make it worse, and then they start circling the drain.

Debbie: So interesting. I love that this terminology too, that you're introducing and what you talked about what the the control image manager, the risk avoider, that makes so much sense because I think for a lot of gifted kids, their self worth or self image is really rooted often in their intellect or the abilities that they probably are well aware of, you know, the gifts that they have. And so I can imagine anything that would threaten that would be really scary and uncomfortable.

Lisa: Whenever you are on either side of the traditional bell curve in any quality, right? Whether it is height, weight, intelligence, if you are not in the middle, if you're on either extreme, it will become a central facet of your identity. And so this is true of gifted. And it's also true of students with very low IQ. And so whenever we're different from that normal curve Bell, the farther away you are from that hump, it will become more and more a part of who you see yourself and who other people see us. And so that is I think, speaking to what you're saying, there's one other type of perfectionist that is the civically problematic in this gifted population, and that is procrastinating perfectionist. So they'll put something off for Adelson and Wilson say they put it off because they're concerned that they won't be able to get a really good grade, right? Like, they have a complicated relationship with the number zero because they feel like a zero for not doing it all is better than an 80 if they had done it, but I think that what we often see is that when kids are given tasks that are disrespectful, and by that I mean like busy work, right where the kid can see right through that there's no real value in this task. Maybe there actually is value in it. But either the teacher didn't explain the value well, or the student just didn't buy into the value of the task. For whatever reason, the student doesn't perceive the task as being worth their time. And so they will procrastinate it so that they can build up that mental energy that they need to do it by letting it be really too late to do it. And so then they have adrenaline and cortisol flowing through their systems, because they know they have something that's due the next day that really needs a week or so of time. They don't have enough time. And now they have all those stress hormones coursing through their bodies. And now that gives them the energy, the mental energy that they need to complete the task. And so I think a lot of parents of gifted and twice exceptional kids are woken up disproportionately in the night to be told that they need a poster board for the next morning, right?

Debbie: Yes, 100 percent. Wow, this is super interesting. So, one of the questions I had to ask which I feel like I now know the answer, but I'm going to ask it anyway, is are perfectionistic kids born? Or are they made?

Lisa: So this is actually a complicated question, because like almost every other human trait, it's a complex interdependence of both. So I've interviewed probably a dozen neuropsychologists, who specialized in this or specialized in other mental health conditions for which perfectionism is one of the key symptoms. And they almost all say that it's impossible to tease it apart. Because it's almost like the field of epigenetics, right. So where maybe you have perfectionistic tendencies, but your home can make you go either way. And some parents feel guilty because they themselves are perfectionists, and they feel that they are creating perfectionistic tendencies in their children. But I've seen many, many homes, where a parents extreme, extreme behavior the other way where the parent is almost too laissez faire awakens a perfectionistic monster in a child who feels that they have to run the household. And so they're going to control it because there's almost a power vacuum. So what I say to parents is, if you feel that your own perfectionism, your own perfectionistic tendencies are getting in your way, then the best thing you could do to help your child is to try to heal yourself. And then once you have worked on yourself in that way, you'll be able to see more clearly the impact of your attitudes and behavior on your children. But it's very, very, very difficult, and very unusual for a parent who's struggling with the exact same thing that the child is struggling with, to be able to really get an accurate view of the impact of their attitudes and behavior on their child while they are still themselves in the midst of the pain. So the short answer is, is it nature and nurture?

Debbie: Good answer. Yeah. And I'm sure I mean, I certainly both my husband and I are perfectionistic. And in certain ways, and you know, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree with these kids. And so that makes sense a lot. You know, a lot of my work at tilt parenting is really helping parents do their own work, so that they can better show up for who their kids are. So I love that that is an important piece of this as well. I wanted to ask you about the way that perfectionism is misunderstood, because I can just imagine there are a lot of teachers and educators and people who interact with perfectionistic kids who don't get it and don't really understand perfectionism, and they may just think a child is being problematic or avoiding demands or whatever other reason, or lazy or however they're interpreting it. So what are some of the more common misconceptions or misunderstandings about perfectionism?

Lisa: So I think that the two most common misperceptions about perfectionism, that impact people the most, there are dozens, but the two that I think are the most problematic, are the first one is that people see perfectionism as almost like a disease like cancer, where the only really good outcome is to cure it completely. Like, I want to stop being a perfectionist. And in actuality, like I said, it's not a dichotomy. It is a continuum. And so you, you really don't want to not have high standards at all, you don't want to go from being someone who cares very deeply about one's work to being someone who doesn't even show up for work, right? what you're trying to do is manage it. So in that way, it's much more like a condition like type two diabetes, right, that is controllable, something that you may live with, but that you can control and can still live a healthy life. It's not necessarily something that you're trying to rid yourself of. If you completely rid

yourself of any quality that you perceive as negative in yourself, you have to accept that the other side of that quality had probably a benefit for you. Right. So perfectionists get things done, usually, right, unless they're really, really hampered and paralyzed by it. But most people who are perfectionistic are the ones that you would go to when you really want something done well, and some perfectionists tend to choose career paths that benefit that right like, I don't want a neurosurgeon, who is just like, you know if it works, it works well. do my best, you know, I'll try. I might be, right. We, we want that, right like you there are certain areas of our lives where we want to be perfectionistic. And so I think one of the biggest misperceptions is that people walk around feeling badly about themselves, because they identify as a perfectionist, rather than taking a hard look in inventory and saying, In what ways does this perfectionism benefit me? And in what ways, does it not? And how can I mitigate the way it doesn't benefit me, though, I can harness the power of it, because there is power in it. People who have perfectionistic tendencies tend to have stronger task diligence, as again, as long as they're not paralyzed by it. If they can learn to manage it, they can harness it. So that's the first and biggest misperception I think, is that people think they have to get rid of it altogether. The second misperception, I think that exists is that people who are not perfectionistic sometimes don't understand that some of the things that they say to a perfectionist actually make things worse. So they can, a teacher might say something to a student, like, you know, it's fine, just just throw something down on the paper, just turn in something it doesn't even matter it you know, all that matters is that you turn something in, and the perfectionist, those are like shots fired across the bow, right? Like, that's, that speaks to their deepest fear. And so I think a lot of times, people who maybe don't struggle with perfectionism themselves, don't realize how innate and how tied to personal identity it is, and how dangerous it can feel to people to reach out beyond it. And so in some ways, they may not be as sympathetic. And I'm not saying at all that then just because you have perfectionistic tendencies, then you shouldn't have to turn your work in. That's not what I'm saying. But what I am saying is that, rather than just throwing out platitudes that do not help and often make it much worse, it's way better if people can have a few strategies at hand, that are actually useful.

Debbie: We'd love to get to some strategies in a minute, but I just wanted to touch upon what you said as well, that this isn't about reading our kids ourselves of perfectionism. It's about managing it. And that, I love that too. Because with all kinds of neuro differences, it's about self awareness, understanding, this is the way that my brain is wired. There are strengths that come along with this, and then how do I figure out how to, to hack, you know, my own personal system or way that I move through the world so that I can make this work for me, as opposed to holding me back? And I would love then, you know, you mentioned that there are some strategies. So what is the best way to deal with a perfectionistic kid? I mean, let's even just get really specific. Going back to that homework assignment. We see our kids especially now as we're recording this, our kids are back to school, and the first couple weeks are probably done in the homework might be piling up. And now we've got a bunch of classes, which might each have different projects and things going on. And we can just as parents see, oh, my gosh, we're heading, we're heading down a dark path where

there's simply not going to be enough hours in the day for all of this work to be completed in the way that my child is going to expect to do it. So how do we support our kids in navigating that?

Lisa:

Well, the first and most important answer to this is the least popular answer that I ever give any group of people. And that is that we have to make sure that the child is getting basically the four walls and we need to make sure that we're looking at are they getting enough and good quality sleep? Are they getting gross motor exercise? are we managing screen time, and this is so difficult in our current situation where kids might be on screens, far more for educational purposes than we would care for, but then we need to even dial back further recreational use of screens, and then are they eating well, so those four things have to be in place. If they're not, it won't matter what else you do. It won't matter. Any little strategy I can share, and I'm going to share specific strategies. But the fact is, if those four walls are not in place, it won't matter what furniture you put in the house. You'll just be rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic and that and all four of them are really important, but I think that the two that parents often overlook is gross motor exercise outside And how important that is to child development, and then also the quality of sleep. So those are two things, and they can be impacted very much by parent behavior. So all four of those things are essential for a child, a child's well being, and they are all dependent upon good parenting. So once you've got that in place, then some of the strategies that I think are really useful, are if you have a child for whom let's take that homework battle that that you brought up in that we discussed earlier, when a child comes home, with homework, and you and you have a situation, you'd like you know that this is an ongoing problem, I think it's important for there to be good communication between the parent and the teacher about what is being expected. So I recommend to teachers and I, as a teacher do this, where I put the amount of time on each assignment that I think that assignment should take. So if a teacher has said, you know, this is a 20 minute assignment, then the parent can look it over briefly. And I think this is a step that a lot of times, parents don't look at what their child's been expected to do until the child's in a meltdown. And by then they're not ready to listen, they can't hear anything anymore. There's a definite connection between level of frustration and auditory processing. So the more frustrated you get, there's an inverse relationship to how well you hear. So if a parent will take a glance at the work and get a feel for what's being expected, and then have before and all lights up on fire, right? We don't need to wait till the kid gets to DEFCON one. We can say, oh, okay, it looks like you're being expected to do XYZ. Is that how you see it? And then the child says, either yes or no. And then the parent can ask questions, ask rather than tell kids, rather than saying to kids, so this says it should only take you 20 minutes. So you've got 20 minutes, or this says such and such, you should do it this way, rather than asking kids questions like, do you feel that you can do it in that amount of time? Or do you have the supplies that you need? Do you feel like this is something you want to do in your room? Or do you want to work at the table with me? Do you want to snack for it, like asking him some questions first and getting them to a position of empowerment of themselves and making them feel that they have some control that they have some autonomy over what they're facing? And then ask him, Do you feel confident that you know how to do this

before they get into the mess, right. So all too often, we wait until the kid is tied up in knots. And then we're trying to unravel that knot. But in fact, a little bit of preventative medicine could have gone a long way. The strategy that I use with this also is probably my favorite strategy, which is writing things on a scale of one to five. So one is just like it needs to be done. But it doesn't really matter how well it's done. Like, for instance, if you're taking out the trash, it needs to be done. Definitely unless you want to show up on a TV show. But you want to take out the trash. But does it really need to be done? Well, and what does that mean? And I think as a society, unfortunately, we have this very common thing. Everybody knows the saying, anything worth doing is worth doing. And everybody listening to this podcast can fill in that last word and write anything worth doing is worth doing well. But I don't think that's true. I don't think that anything worth doing is worth doing. Well, I think a lot of things that are worth doing are just worth a lick and a promise. That's what my grandma used to call it. And so if you're gonna take out the trash, just take it out, right, you don't need the can perpendicular to the curve, but you don't need to tie the little red string in a perfect bow or whatever, right. And so that's a one a one is just something that needs to get done. But it isn't necessary, it doesn't need to show up on Pinterest. A five is where something life or death is at stake. Right? That's a five a five is life or death. Now, the problem is perfectionists see everything as a five. They want to die on every hill. When in reality, most things are about a three.

Lisa: And so one of the things that we can do as parents and teachers, and grandparents and friends, anybody interacting with a child or even an adult who struggles with this, it says have that become part of our conversation. Right? So this looks like this assignment, like a To Do you feel like it's a to write or even like cleaning your room, right? So maybe Normally, the cleaning of a child's bedroom is in my mind, a three but some kids see it as a one and the parent might see it as a five and then when you have when you have a disconnect between the level That one person perceives something and the level that someone else involved in that thing perceives it. That's when you're going to have conflict. And it may be that you say, you know, normally cleaning your room is like a two or three, but grandma's coming. And so it's a four. Right? So when we can bring in that kind of language and vocabulary, it's a very, very, very helpful strategy. It actually works with emotional stuff as well. So I developed the strategy to be used with perfectionism. But it turns out after I had somebody read the book, who contacted me and said that they have a child who's bipolar, and that that one through five strategy helped with managing emotion as well like this incident, what does it feel like to you? And then what are you treating it like? And, and that's one of the activities that I suggest is going through some of the common things that the child experiences and participates in in their life and asking them to rate it on a scale of one to five of how they treat it. And then consider on a scale of one to five, how do other people perceive that activity? And if there's a disconnect, if there's a difference between those two levels that you think it is, and other people think it is? Would it benefit you to move closer to the way that other people perceive it? When we send these things as invitations as lures rather than pushes? It's more.

Debbie: These are such great strategies. I love that they're empowering. I love that they're promoting self awareness, especially this rating scale, it does remind me of, you know, what we would look at with emotional regulation. You know, where are you on this? Where, what are you feeling right now, but this is also good for our kids to understand how they show up. So one question about that, as we build their awareness, or as they start to really understand that, wow, I tend to treat things like a five. And actually, I'm learning that this is really a three, what does that actually look like? Can these kids learn to let go? And what does that process look like? For a typical atypical student, if you will?

Lisa: Sure. So it lends itself to a discussion, right? So I suggest to teachers that they put on the assignment, just like I said, they should put a suggestion on time I see, I suggest that they put a Suggested Level, right, so this is a three slash 20, meaning it's a level three assignment, and it's worth 20 minutes of human life, or it's a level two, or it's a level four. To me, there's nothing at school, that's a level five, there's nothing at school, it's a level five, the only exception to that is an outcry. When a student makes an outcry to a teacher, that's a five. But other than that, everything at school, the highest ever gets is four. So what it looks like in real life, when you're working with it is you have a kid who comes home, they have an assignment, or maybe they did it online, you know, whatever their schooling situation is, and they have something that they're working on, then you see them working on it. And if everything's fine, everything's fine, right. But as the first sign of trouble, what often happens, which is that we see the child start to go, right, we see the signs, we see their physical manifestations of their frustration. And if anybody has not read the book, the body keeps the score, they definitely must read this book, because it really goes into the way that our bodies physically manifest a lot of emotion. And it can help you in reading other people, but especially children. So when I see the signs that my child is starting to get frustrated, and I have a lot of parenting experience myself, I have raised three of my own children, I've had two foreign exchange students and 12 foster children, in addition to the thousands of children that I've taught in school, and every single kid I've had living in my home has had a different way that they manifested when their stress was starting to rise. Some of them bit pencils, some of them twisted hair. Some of them had habits, I won't even discuss that they had crazy habits. And then once I start to see that the first thing I'm going to do, I'm going to intervene early. I'm just going to say, so what are you working on? Oh, what level? Is it? Like? What level Do you think this is? And what does that look like when it's done? Right? So one of the difficulties is that kids have to understand that a level two, activity for school looks different than a level three or level four, right? We maybe don't need to redo it to correct a mistake, maybe it's fine to put a line through it and right above. Maybe it's okay if there's some more racing, or a splotch or if water got spilled on it, or if there's a typo, or maybe if one or two of the problems are wrong. It may not be like if you're doing something that's just for printing Practice, getting some of them wrong is actually part of the practice. That's why it's a two. If it's a test, then that's a four. And then it's worth the time to correct the mistake. So some of this is going to depend on the kind of assignments that your child is doing. One of the things that you can do if you feel like your child is struggling with this is to ask the teacher to share examples of what different levels of them look like. So one of the problems

is, a lot of times in school, teachers are giving examples, and the examples are all the best ones, right? So some kid the year before turned in this amazing poster. And so that's the one that the teacher shows as the example. And I actually feel like that infuses the classroom with the flavor of perfectionism, right? Like that. What was amazing last year now becomes the standard. And I think that's dangerous. So I think one of the things that's very helpful is if you can ask the teacher like, could you show? What does an A look like? What is a B look like? What does a C look like? Can the teacher just take a little picture and put it in Google Drive of what they want the homework to look like? Because one of the problems and this is where we get a lot of contention between parents and children, is that the child is telling the parent that the parent doesn't understand the direction that the teacher gave him the class. And so the child gets very frustrated, because the parent is looking at the thing going, this isn't that big of a deal. Like why are we having this big battle? Why are we at DEFCON one, but the kid is like you don't get it? You understand? You don't know? Right? And they're worried about what's going on with the teacher. And so a lot of this depends on really good open communication between the parent and the teacher, in the sense of what are your expectations? How well do you want this done? Because my kid is acting like this is being turned in for an Academy Award, when you think it's just a home video, right? So we have to make sure we're on the same page in real ways. But we also have to make sure that our children stand for themselves, like, what's the standard that's being asked of you in this circumstance? And what does that really look like? One of the opportunities that parents have, I think, to make this happen, is to work with children. So one of the dynamics I think that is natural, but can cause problems is a lot of times while kids are working on their work, and they're sitting like at a desk or at the kitchen table, or wherever they're working. And the parent is doing their own stuff all around. And so we're just kind of checking in every now and then. And we may miss those early warning signs. But not only that, if a child is struggling, I'm not saying that everybody needs to do this. But if this is a struggle for a child, my strong recommendation is that parents find something of their own, that they can do alongside the child. So if you have a letter strike, if you journal, if you have a scripture study habit, if you are taking a class yourself, if you need to return an email, go sit next to the child, and do your work alongside them. The reason that I recommend this is because it's very difficult. And this is true of adults as well, it's very difficult when you're in the middle of doing something, and you're getting frustrated with it, and somebody who's not doing it just comes in, out of nowhere, like out of the clear blue, they come in. And they want to, like tell you what you're doing wrong or why you shouldn't be frustrated. There's nothing more frustrating than that. But if you're sitting right next to each other, not only will you see the early warning signs, but you're more likely to be having kind of natural conversation about it. And so some of these things can be addressed before they become a problem, because you're right there. Now, I'm not saying that every parent in America or the world needs to do homework at the table with their kid. But what I'm saying is, if you know that this is a struggle for your child, try it.

Debbie: This is just so helpful. And you have so much wisdom to share on this. And I would love for you to just take a minute and tell us about your book, you wrote a

book called Perfectionism: A Practical Guide to Managing "Never Good Enough." And tell us about that for a minute and any other resources that you suggest parents who want to explore perfectionism and their kids further should check out.

Lisa: So as I mentioned in the beginning, I did this session on perfectionism. And Jim Webb was like, oh, that needs to be a book. And so I wrote a book called perfectionism. And in the book, I read all of the research that exists on perfectionism, and then tried to distill it into practical strategies. So there's a lot of what we've talked about today. But obviously more in depth and lots more strategies. So every chapter has information, but then it also has activities, takeaways, and things to consider trying, and there will be something for everyone, because not every one of these strategies will work for everyone. But in the book, you can definitely find whatever type of perfectionism your child is struggling with, or you yourself are struggling with, and you'll be able to find suggestions for that. In addition to that, it also gives if you're a parent, the book has lots of different tips for teachers. And so what's helpful about that is that if you have a child who, whether informally, is struggling, or formally and has like an IEP, or a five, a four, either way, you're going to find some strategies that you can suggest to the teacher, or in a IEP or 504, meaning that you would like as an accommodation. So I think it's reasonable and fair to ask a teacher to share with you how much time they think an assignment will take. One of the things that I suggest in the book actually is, if you have a child who's really struggling, who's paralyzed by this perfectionism, is to ask the teacher to accept work, that is what the child was able to accomplish in 20 minutes. So even if it isn't done, they only have to work on it for 20 minutes. And then they turn that in. And then as they keep doing that, as they realize, okay, I'm not going to have to sit here for two hours, so that they can dial back into it. So if people want more suggestions on it, more ideas, more information. On the website, on the gifted guru website, I have a lot of things tagged with perfectionism. I write about it quite a bit. And so you can search on the website, I'll pull up all of the articles on perfectionism. And I've talked about perfectionism that you can listen to that. And also find the book there, you know, on Amazon, or Barnes and Noble or wherever books are, but there's lots for free on the gift to guru website.

Debbie: Fantastic. And listeners, I will include links to Lisa's website, her book and the other resources we talked about. I'll try to get some links for some of the research as well, all on the show notes pages. So Lisa, thank you again, you spend a little extra time with us today. And I'm so grateful. There's such a rich conversation and I really appreciate all the time you took with us today.

Lisa: Thank you. It's been a true pleasure. I hope that I did a reasonably acceptable job like a level three.

RESOURCES MENTIONED:

- Lisa's Gifted Guru website
- Lisa's VocabularyLuau website
- Gifted Guru on Facebook
- Gifted Guru on Twitter
- *Perfectionism: A Practical Guide to Managing "Never Good Enough"* by Lisa Van Gemert
- *Living Gifted: 52 Tips To Survive and Thrive in Giftedland* by Lisa Van Gemert
- *Gifted Guild's Guide to Depth and Complexity: Finding Your Way Through the Framework* by Lisa Van Gemert
- Mensa International
- James T. Webb
- *Letting Go of Perfect: Overcoming Perfectionism in Kids and Teens* by Jill Adelson and Hope Wilson
- *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* by Bessel Van der Kolk

