

# Enough

Many of our children are drenched in the insecurity of feeling incomplete, inadequate, insufficient. And even our seemingly confident and competent kids are struggling. The ones who are “succeeding”, the ones who are ticking all of the right boxes, the ones who are “winning”, are often the WORST at feeling like they’re “enough”.

I wish it weren’t true, but it is our well-intentioned attempts to optimise our children’s success in the future that can leave them feeling like it’s all too much. After evaluating over 50 studies, one pair of researchers concluded that “increases in excessive parental expectations and harsh parental criticism offer perhaps the most plausible explanation for rising perfectionism to date.”

This is not to lay the blame solely at the feet of parents. Rising levels of societal individualism, focus on attainment, increasing economic inequality and rising competitiveness have created a societal background that easily leads to controlling parenting practices and excessive parental expectations. We have the best of intentions in wanting our children to succeed, but in trying to secure a good future for our kids, we expect too much, criticize too harshly, and minimise their autonomy. All of this leads to a tremendous number of kids feeling that they’re not ‘enough’.

Yet with so many of our children feeling that they are not enough, a helpful question to ask is:

## What does ‘enough’ look like?

“If I could only... then I will be enough”, “If I can just... then I will be enough”, “When I achieve... then I will be enough.” A sense of “enough” will never come this way. It can’t. Because even when those things are achieved, there will always be someone more beautiful, smarter, or funnier. Valuing self based on extrinsic characteristics will always lead to feeling incomplete, inadequate, insufficient, imperfect.

Another form of success – what I call intrinsic success – is built on the development of character. It accumulates over time through steady, consistent effort and an emphasis on doing the inner work of becoming a better person.

Here are five things we can do to help our children overcome their anxieties and perfectionism and achieve intrinsic success:

## 1. Show them they matter

People who know they matter are more resilient and engaged in life than those without a sense of mattering. We show someone they matter by demonstrating that our love and care for them is not conditional upon performance.

## 2. Teach them who they are

Children who are told family stories believe they are responsible and that they are capable of controlling things rather than being at the mercy of external or environmental elements.

Children who know their family identity tend to feel better about themselves. They have “roots”.

### 3. Be a hope builder

If we are hope-ful we know where we're going (goals), can see a way to get there (pathways), and believe we can actually walk that path (agency). As parents, we must be hope builders in our children's lives. We do that by helping them identify things that are worth working towards by setting goals based on personal interests and passions. We help them break the goal down into smaller tasks and make sure they have the resources, tools, and information required to pursue their goal. And we celebrate their achievements, provide reassurance when they face difficulties, and remind them that setbacks are opportunities for growth and learning.

### 4. Encourage them to do hard things

Competence is a vital human need. Yet you don't become confident by shouting affirmations in the mirror or having your parents pump up your tyres with false praise. It comes from doing the hard thing again and again. And then it comes from celebrating achievement. When they do the hard thing, ask your child how it felt to progress. Boost them up with real compliments and genuine praise – praise that reflects their own positive self-evaluations and helps them feel good about their efforts.

### 5. Help them make a real difference

We all need to be a part of something larger than ourselves. Spencer W. Kimball, a former leader of the Church of Jesus Christ, said, "We become more substantive as we serve others—indeed, it is easier to "find" ourselves because there is so much more of us to find!" Perhaps we might help our children realise they are enough by encouraging them to step outside themselves and look outwards in service to others. In so doing, I believe they'll discover that, while no one may ever be quite "enough", they will be more than they ever could have been otherwise.

Ultimately, here's what I want our kids to know:

I am enough because of who I am right now in this moment.

Being enough isn't something that our kids need to achieve. It isn't something that is determined by what they have done. It is their ability to accept themselves completely in the present moment that gives them the ability to feel like they are enough.

They are enough. Right now. Just the way they are.



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