

# It's Good Enough For Now

By Linda Murphy, MS, CCC-SLP



Nobody's  
Perfect

In our dynamic world, things are hardly ever black and white. Yet, our kids with social learning challenges thrive in absolutes: right and wrong, good and bad; complete (success) or not completed (failed) as well as statements that are literal and those that make no sense. Their natural thinking patterns focus on an endpoint that is clear.

Examples for our kids include math problems, fitting the right piece into a puzzle; assembling train tracks that work. There is a right and a wrong answer and it's clear when the task is done.

But what about the many times in life where perfection is not possible? For example, time really is relevant: "I know you want to finish building your Lego structure, but the school bus will be coming in five minutes." Or it may not be realistic to match your child's skill level with the materials at hand: "I know you want your craft to look exactly like the one in the book, but we don't have all the materials."

This is when things get hairy! Having a black and white mindset not only leads to high expectations of oneself, it often can crush high expectations, because what "done" looks like might not compare to a picture, for example.

High expectations are not bad, but, in the real world, there may be a mismatch between a child's self-imposed expectations and what's possible in the moment. For some kids, this self-imposed pressure for perfection hinders their ability to get started. In their eyes the project may look so big, they avoid starting it. Other kids never quite get their creation to where they want it to be, so they resist

stopping, despite what the clock says.

There must be a better way.

Kids with social learning challenges don't intuitively know that perfection all the time (or even most of the time) is not possible or expected for *anyone*. As functioning, independent adults, you accept the idea of imperfection constantly, whether you are aware of it or not!

For example, when you park the car, are you always perfectly between the lines? When you bake, is it okay that you accidentally added a little less than one teaspoon of vanilla extract? Or when you arrive to a movie, does it matter if you are three minutes late? In a world where everyone must balance constantly changing priorities, imperfection is the norm, an acceptance that becomes an automatic skill.

What is the best way to help kids with social learning challenges embrace and become comfortable with this truth?

Use a powerful phrase I learned while training to become an RDI® Consultant: "that's *good enough for now*." In fact, the phrase "*good enough for now*" has become one of the most important tools in my therapeutic tool bag when I'm wanting to ease the worry of a child who puts the weight of the world on himself.

There are so many moments throughout the day when this concept is used by you, you can help your child notice by talking about them.

Here are several specific examples of 'good enough' thinking, along with language you could use to comment in the moment. Note: you should always use declarative language\* for the most impact:

## Good enough quality for now

- My handwriting isn't the neatest on this card for Grandma, but she will be able to read it, so I think it is good enough for now.
- The clothes I just took out of the dryer are still a tiny bit damp. But I think they are good enough for now. I know they will dry some more once I hang them in the closet.

## Good enough substitute for now

- Hmm...we are all out of blueberries. We could use strawberries for our pancakes instead. I think that would be good enough for now.
- Oh! We are all out of staples. I guess we could paperclip your papers together. That is good enough for now.

## Good enough amount (quantity) for now

- Let's squeeze some chocolate syrup into your milk. That looks good enough! Now let's stir it.
- I'm shading in my answer on this form. It's a little light, but I think that is good enough.
- Let's water the plants. There, they are wet but not drowning. That is good enough!

## Performing an action to a good enough extent

- Next we stir the eggs and mix together for the brownies. I'm going to keep stirring until I don't see any dry mixture..... There! I think that is good enough for now. The batter looks mostly wet.
- I raked leaves in the backyard. I got most of them ... all but a few pieces here and there. I think that is good enough.

## Not quite done, but "good enough," given the time that we have

- I could spend a lot more time on this Sudoku puzzle, but I see that I



only have five minutes left before we leave. I'm thinking it is good enough for now, and if I want to come back to it later, I can.

- It can also be helpful to use the word *pause* in conjunction with *good enough* instead of the word *stop*. Kids often think that "stop" means they must be done forever. Because their skills in executive functioning, such as planning and reflecting, are still developing, they may not realize there will be opportunity to come back to something that is important to them. The word *pause* is friendlier, and inherently suggests that you are not asking them to stop forever, but, rather, you are asking they stop for now, at a *good enough* place, with the intention of coming back to it soon.

Remember, black and white thinkers are at risk of assuming their best work is always required. It is hard for them to appraise the subtle differences in expectations for which each situation calls. When you approach kids with this understanding, it becomes easier to provide the care and empathy needed to help the child work through a situation that is worrying them.

By including your child in your thought processes during the many

small but significant "good enough" moments in your day, you will begin to help them feel okay to let go a little. You will help them learn to consider when their very best work is required and when it is not, which will lead to better time management.

Most importantly, you will gradually help them see how the world operates from a place of "good enough" thinking, so that this is a more relaxed place to be.

\*A "RDI Consultant" focuses on the relationship development ad works with families with children on the autism spectrum.. She trains and helps parents to guide their children and understand the deficits of autism.

*For more information on declarative language, see Linda's article What we say and how we say it matters! in the August 2018 issue of AAD. ■*



Linda Murphy, MS, CCC-SLP, is involved in Peer Projects Therapy From the Heart in Beverly, MA 01915. The advice is in this column

is the product of her and her colleagues' therapeutic program. Their site is [www.peerprojectstherapyfromtheheart.com](http://www.peerprojectstherapyfromtheheart.com).