

(NOT SO) GREAT EXPECTATIONS

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR HIGH EXPECTATIONS.

IT'S THE NIGHT BEFORE her English exam and Amber, 16, isn't studying. She isn't watching *Glee*, or even IM-ing her friends. She's at her desk, doing... nothing. Paralysed by a fear of failure, she can't even begin to study. What if she doesn't ace it? What if she can't remember the names of all the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*? What if?

Sound familiar? That's coz it is. We're constantly putting crazy-high expectations on ourselves, which leads to a stress overload, and/or complete freak-out. But, why? And whose expectations are they anyway? Tracy Tresidder, MEd teen and family coach (coaching4teenagers.com.au), helps us take the pressure down, and manage our expectations.

YOURS, MINE AND THEIRS

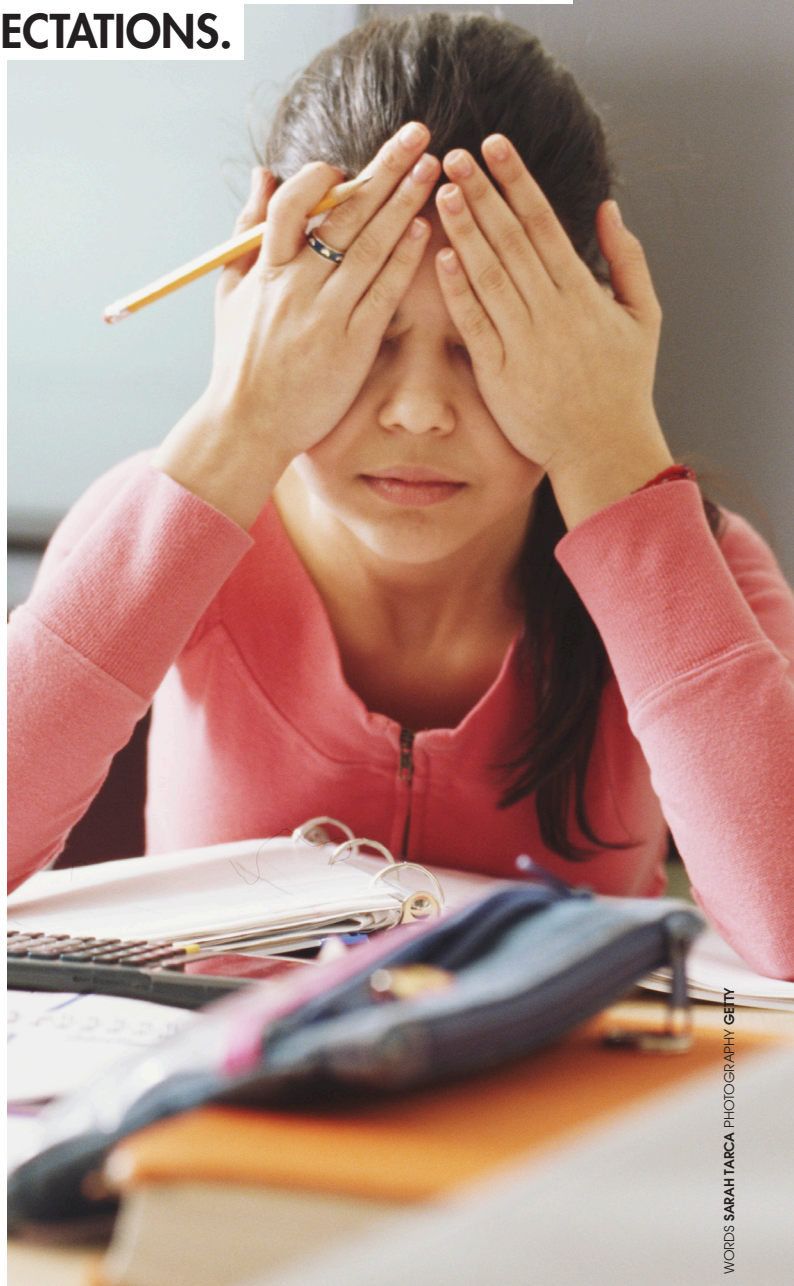
The first step to a less stressed you is working out just whose expectations are causing you to feel this way. Tracy says parental expectations are usually obvious and stated by the parent like, "you must be home by midnight". Whereas self-expectations are set by – and should be managed by – you. Ask yourself, are they realistic goals? Are you setting expectations too high for yourself, and if so, why are they so high? Is it because you want to, or you think others want it from you?

EXPECTATION DESTRUCTION

High self-expectations can be dangerous because the higher you set the goal, the greater the risk of failure. "When you set a goal that's unrealistic it puts the chance of success way out of your reach," says Tracy. This sucks for a couple of reasons: Firstly, it leads to things like procrastination, because if you feel that the task is beyond you, you're likely to try to put it off for as long as possible so you have an excuse for not achieving the goal; and secondly, your self-esteem takes a massive hit when you can't achieve the goals you've set for yourself. Tracy adds that it can also create a sense of failure which will lead to increased pessimism and can also discourage positive risk-taking for fear of failure (e.g. not enrolling in a higher level of maths). So all in all, it's a bag of no-good. Yet we continue to set the bar ridiculously high for ourselves. Which begs the question: why so high? Some researchers believe the many decades of efforts to boost self-esteem have created unrealistic expectations for us, but that is also coupled with the inability to determine what is actually realistic for you.

CRASH COURSE IN MANAGEMENT

So you know why we set the bar too high, and you know that it's bad for your self-esteem... but now you need to know how to manage it so you won't end up with a breakdown. Firstly, here's how to recognise whether your expectations are too high: look at society norms, and what other people in your grade are achieving, and also consider how much effort you're putting in. Obviously, if you're only willing to spend 10 minutes on your algebra homework, expecting to get an A+ is unrealistic. Then, Tracy suggests these tactics: "Tap into your inner strengths and develop an optimistic attitude toward stress, then practise some positive self-talk." When it comes to other people's expectations of you (your maths teacher, mum) communication is key. You need to talk to them if you're feeling overwhelmed, or you think it's beyond your capabilities, and make sure they know that you're putting in a lot of effort. "Emphasise doing your best, not being the best," she says.



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TAKE THE PRESSURE DOWN

STILL STRUGGLING? TRY THESE TIPS:

- Aim for accomplishments rather than perfection.
- View mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Recognise what you can change and what you can't.
- Take pride in your opinions/ideas.
- Make a contribution.