

The Social-Emotional Needs of High Ability Students: What Parents Should Know

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with acknowledgement to

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Today's Agenda

- Understanding the social-emotional needs of gifted students
- What gifted children want parents to understand
- Risk factors affecting achievement of gifted students
- Communicating with your gifted child
- Practical suggestions

Stereotypes of Gifted Individuals

Let's name a few....

Then let's go to the
Internet where
all truth is found!

Stereotypes of Gifted Children



Stereotypes of Gifted Children



Stereotypes of Gifted Children



Stereotypes of Gifted Children



Stereotypes of Gifted Children



Need "more"!
They'll figure it out.
Driven

They will be fine.
Better mental health
Need faster pace



Career direction is a given!

Fewer worries
Strengths will protect

No problem transitioning
to college/leaving home



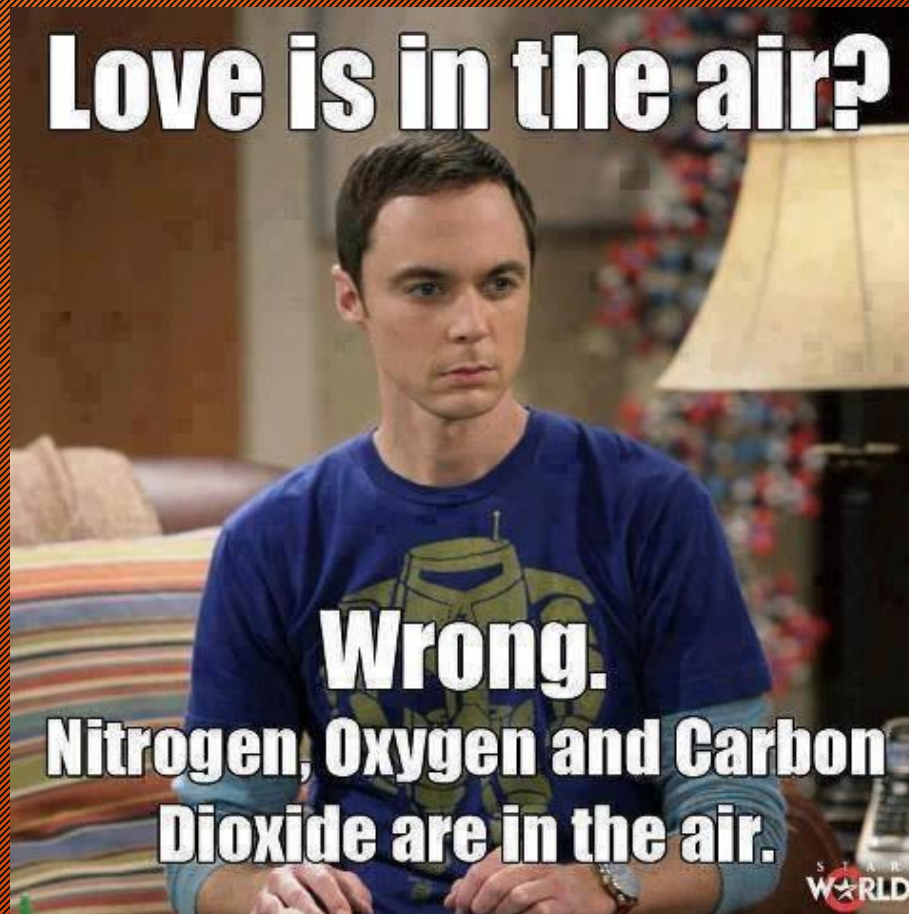
Stereotypes of Gifted Children



He's just so adorable!



A Well-Played Gifted Individual



Understanding social-emotional needs is important

Adults who do not understand the unique characteristics, needs, and experiences of gifted youth

- May misdiagnose or misinterpret social & emotional concerns
- May fail to adequately support gifted students at home
- May promote underachievement

Unique Characteristics and Needs of Gifted Youth

• Heightened Awareness

- “enhanced awareness of behavior, emotions, and cognitions pertaining to self and others” (Mendaglio, 2007, p. 39)
- often recognize ironies, intricacies, possibilities, inconsistencies
- implications for transitions—family, school, developmental, loss

• Divergent Thinking

- see many aspects & variables of situations at once
- love to think deeply, to question, to resist conformity

Gifted youth may want to question frequently, discuss topics at length and from different angles, and identify and explore inconsistencies. *It is important to not take this behavior personally or judge it as arrogance or disrespect, but rather provide opportunities that encourage this depth of inquiry.*

Unique Characteristics and Needs of Gifted Youth (cont.)

• Asynchronous Development

- Cognitive development outpaces physical, social, and emotional development

Gifted youth may continually feel mismatched in some way to their environment (Silverman & Conarton, 2005) & with “peers.”

• Multipotentiality

- Interest in & ability to excel in more than one talent or interest area
- Balance between exploration of more than one interest area and over-involvement

Gifted youth need to learn skills to manage potential over-extension.

Unique Characteristics and Needs of Gifted Youth (cont.)

• Perfectionism

- May experience elevated performance concerns (Fehm & Schmidt, 2006; Tsul & Mazzocco, 2007)

Gifted students struggling in this area may have difficulty starting or completing projects, or avoid becoming involved in new things due to **fears of failure or not being good enough; fear taking risks**. *Reassurance and encouragement, as well as normalizing mistake-making and imperfection can assist these students.*

• Twice Exceptionality

- Gifted students with co-existing disabilities (cognitive, social/emotional, physical) (Baum & Olenchak, 2002)

A Definition To Consider

Giftedness is *asynchronous development* in which *advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity* combine to create *inner experiences and awareness* that are *qualitatively different from the norm*. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The *uniqueness* of the gifted renders them *vulnerable and requires modifications* in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to *develop optimally*.

The Columbus Group, 1991

And Another Definition

Giftedness is...

a greater **awareness**,

a greater **sensitivity**, and

a greater **ability** to understand and transform perceptions into **intellectual and emotional experiences**.

- Annemarie Roeper

Gifted students are like all children with regard to normal developmental tasks, but the **intensity** and **sensitivity** of gifted students may add an extra layer to their **internal response to these developmental challenges**.

They may also experience these developmental tasks at different times than other children.

Gifted students are like most children in regards to stressors, but the **intensity** and **sensitivity** of gifted students may contribute to **problematic responses to stressors** (family transitions, death, loss, change, trauma)

Social and Emotional Characteristics

A note before we proceed

- Not all gifted students will have all characteristics.
- Some students will have some of the characteristics who may not be gifted.
- Positive and negative manifestations of these characteristics are possible.

Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities

Dabrowski explained the sensitivity and intensity experienced by many gifted individuals in terms of overexcitabilities—a greater capacity to be stimulated by and respond to external and internal stimuli. Overexcitability permeates a gifted person's existence and gives energy to their intelligence, talents, and personality.

Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities

- Psychomotor
 - Need for movement
 - Less sleep required
 - Rapid speech
 - Intense physical activity (ADHD? Ability to focus?)
 - Heightened excitability—neuromuscular system
 - Difficulty relaxing
- Intellectual
 - Strong desire to know and to understand
 - Curiosity; abundance of questions
 - Desire to learn

Overexcitabilities (cont.)

- Emotional
 - Deep
 - Strong attachments
 - Strong empathy and compassion
 - Intense joy and exuberance
 - Concern with death, fears, anxieties, and depression
- Sensual
 - Enriched perceptions of and reactions to sensory experiences
 - May be one or more senses
 - Sensory experience may be viewed as too intense
 - Seeking sensory outlets for tension (e.g. a soft blanket, a soothing smell)

Overexcitabilities (cont.)

- **Imaginational**
 - Rich imagery, visualization, invention
 - Difficulty separating real from imaginary
 - Vivid dreams
 - Fantasy play; imaginary friends

He's just so adorable!



I am more
than a brain
or a test
score!

Handle with Care

- Adults assume that gifted children and teens are handling social and emotional concerns adequately, *but they may not be and they may be **hiding their insecurities***. Help them focus on strengths, not problems.
- Even gifted students themselves often believe that they should be able to deal effectively with personal problems, difficult circumstances, low morale, and low motivation, *but they **should be encouraged to seek help when they need it and not to feel “less than” when they do***.

All gifted students,...

even though they wear a façade of invulnerability,

- **worry** about the future,
- **need support**,
- want to be **taken seriously**,
- are **sensitive to family tension**, and
- may be more prone to feel **stressed**,
angry, **guilty**, **socially inept**,
discouraged, and maybe even
depressed . . .

. . . but they may

- lack **expressive language**,
- want to **protect the image** they have crafted (and may be imprisoned by),
- want to **protect others**,
- don't want to **disappoint**, and
- Feel that **only their achievement makes them special.**

J. Peterson (2013)

Let Them Be Children

- Recognize asynchronous development
- Recognize the potential distress of asynchrony
- Avoid being judgmental and critical regarding what they're "not mature" about
- Encourage play (and join them!)
- Encourage noncompetitive activities
- Offer non-evaluative statements of support
- Offer statements without "an edge"; no sarcasm
- Be someone who's different from adults preoccupied with their performance (or nonperformance)
- Pay attention to them in the PRESENT

Communicating with Your Child

- Listen, listen, listen—to verbal as well as nonverbal.
- Make statements; avoid questions
 - If you ask questions, stick with open-ended “What” and “How” to promote your understanding. Be aware that questions control the conversation; they reflect the listener’s agenda.
- Reflect feelings
- Check for accuracy
- Paraphrase and summarize
- Stop what you’re doing and listen actively
- Help them figure things out
- Don’t “catastrophize”

Help them know that their being loved doesn't depend on their performance or achievement. Assure them with your actions that your love is unconditional.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Be a parent, but also a human being—imperfect, vulnerable, sometimes insecure, sometimes strong, sometimes weak. The need permission to be human as well.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Value them as sons and daughters,
not just as “fulfiller of dreams” or
as central to your self-esteem.
Value them for “being” not just
“doing.” Have enough of a life not
to be dependent on, or to
overvalue, their accomplishments.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Support effort. Focus on strengths,
not problems.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Encourage activities that are not “graded.” Beware of overscheduling. Help them learn to conquer their boredom themselves.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Model play. Model balance in your life. Model appropriate risk-taking.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Model kindness to yourself when you make mistakes.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Model clear expression of feelings.
They need to know that feelings
don't have to be feared, denied, or
displaced.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Model a good level of assertiveness.
Be clear about what is your
responsibility and what is theirs.
That will help them take care of
themselves when you aren't
available.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Model good coping—with stress, challenge, competition, “mountains.” You are an important teacher of coping skills.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Beware of over-functioning. Let them make mistakes, fail, create their own style, arrange their own room, learn to problem solve. These are important, educational experiences. You will be contributing to their resilience and self-confidence.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Take note of your negative messages. They are heard, probably more loudly than other messages, and have impact. Criticism, even so-called “constructive criticism,” is not motivating most of the time.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Know that it is normal for them to be angry with you at times, especially during adolescence, often a confusing and frustrating time. It is part of identity-building and helps the separation process.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Model respect for others, for many kinds of intelligence, for other views.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Teach them how to advocate for themselves. Be “wise” advocates when you feel you need to intercede.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Just as you had (have) to figure out how to deal with your world, they also can use their intelligence to figure out how to deal with theirs.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Be a parent-friend, not a peer-friend. Above all, be a parent. Let them be kids.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

Encourage them to talk to someone they trust when they feel they can't talk to you.

Suggestions for Parents

(J. Peterson, nd)

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Final Thought

“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share in rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”

- Rachel Carson

THANK YOU!

Feel free to contact me!

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