

Parenting Gifted Children: Spotlight on Social and Emotional Characteristics



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What is Giftedness?



“Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).”

**National Association for Gifted Children
(NAGC, 2010)**

What is Giftedness?



State of Illinois Definition: Gifted and Talented Children

For purposes of this Article, "gifted and talented children" means children and youth with outstanding talent who perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with other children and youth of their age, experience, and environment. A child shall be considered gifted and talented in any area of aptitude, and, specifically, in language arts and mathematics, by scoring in the top 5% locally in that area of aptitude.

Public Act 094-0410
From IAGC Website

What is Giftedness?



“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 particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.”

(The Columbus Group, 1991)

What is Giftedness?



“ Giftedness is a greater awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences.”

(Roeper, 1982)

Who is Gifted?



“A gifted child is one who performs or has the ability to perform at a level significantly beyond his or her chronologically aged peers and whose unique abilities and characteristics require special provisions and social and emotional support from the family, community and educational contexts”.

(Harrison, 2003)

Gifted Characteristics



INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Exceptional reasoning ability
- Capacity for reflection
- Intellectual curiosity
- Rapid learning rate
- Facility with abstraction
- Complex thought processes
- Vivid imagination
- Early moral concern
- Passion for learning
- Powers of concentration
- Analytical thinking
- Divergent thinking/creativity
- Keen sense of justice

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

- Insightfulness
- Need to understand
- Need for mental stimulation
- Perfectionism
- Need for precision/logic
- Excellent sense of humor
- Sensitivity/empathy
- Intensity
- Perseverance
- Acute self-awareness
- Nonconformity
- Questioning of rules/authority
- Tendency toward introversion

Source: Silverman, L. K. (1993). A developmental model for counseling the gifted. In L.K. Silverman (Ed.), *Counseling the Gifted and Talented* (pp. 51-78). Denver, CO: Love Publishing Co.

History of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration

- **Dabrowski the man**
 - Polish
 - Psychiatry and psychology
 - Artistic
- **Development of the theory**
 - Nature/nurture/third factor
 - Influenced by WWI and WWII experience
 - Work with psychiatric patients, artists, & gifted students

The Theory of Positive Disintegration

- Developmental personality theory
- Three factors influencing development
- Overexcitabilities
- Five levels of development
- Dynamisms or forces active during development

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Overexcitabilities (OE)

- Factor 1 component (original equipment)
- Intensity of experience (internal/external)
- Increased intensity, frequency, & duration
- Can have none, some, or all 5 forms
- Independent areas of functioning (with exception)
- Research supports more among GT groups, especially creative individuals

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

5 Forms of Overexcitability

- Psychomotor (P)
- Sensual (S)
- Imaginational (M)
- Intellectual (T)
- Emotional (E)

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Psychomotor OE

- Surplus of energy
 - rapid speech
 - marked excitation
 - intense physical activity
 - pressure for action
 - marked competitiveness
- Psychomotor expression of emotional tension
 - compulsive talking
 - impulsive actions
 - nervous habits
 - workaholism
 - acting out
 - drive

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski,)

What Psychomotor OE looks like:

I need to move my pencil, my hands, my feet or fidget with something to pay attention

I love to run and run until I just am ready to explode

I need to tell people about my thoughts and my feelings

Psychomotor Strategies for Kids

Intrapersonal - Individual

- explore strategies for self-soothing (exercise, meditation, doodling)
- brainstorm appropriate ways to channel excess psychic energy (tapping, movement)

Interpersonal - Global

- explore strategies used in other cultures that can be used to relax (games, movement)
- interview kids from other parts of the world to find out their means of dissipating excess energy

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Sensual OE

■ Enhanced sensory pleasure

- seeing, tasting, touching, hearing, smelling, and sex
- delight in beautiful objects
- delight in sounds of words, music
- delight in form, color, balance

■ Sensual expression of emotional tension

- overeating
- sexual overindulgence
- buying sprees
- wanting to be in the limelight

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

What Sensual OE looks like:

- I can only tolerate certain types of socks and textures
- The noise from a television (turned off but plugged in) bothers my ears
- Finding the “right” toothpaste has been a challenge
- I can't fall asleep if I don't have my pillow
- Riding the bus can make me sick—the fumes and the motion takes all my energy just to maintain

Sensual Strategies for Kids

Intrapersonal - Individual

- make opportunities to view objects of beauty (nature, art)
- self-acceptance of preferences for taste, texture, smell, touch

Interpersonal - Global

- investigate different cultural notions of beauty noting similarities and difference
- become aware of the nuances of tastes in other cultures-experiment with food

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Imaginational OE

- Free play of the imagination
 - frequent use of metaphor and image, facility for invention, fantasy
 - detailed visualization
 - poetic and dramatic perception, animistic and magical thinking
- Capacity for living in a world of fantasy
 - predilection for magic and fairy tales
 - creation of private worlds, imaginary companions
 - dramatization

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

What Imaginational OE looks like:

- All my stuffed animals are important to me because they are part of my family
- Not everyone can see my friends but they help me at home and school
- Sometimes I think about what might be real and it seems real to me

Imaginational Strategies for Kids

Intrapersonal - Individual

- keep a journal with all your thoughts, drawings, quotes and impressions
- express yourself in word, song, or dance and share your creativity

Interpersonal - Global

- survey kids from other places to find out if they have "imaginary friends"
- imagine expressing yourself in word, song or dance in another part of the world. How would it change?

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Intellectual OE

- Intensified activity of the mind
 - Curiosity, concentration, capacity for sustained intellectual effort, avid reading
 - keen observation, detailed visual recall, detailed planning
- Penchant for probing questions & problem solving
 - search for truth and understanding
 - forming new concepts
 - tenacity in problem solving

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Intellectual OE

- Reflective thought
 - thinking about thinking, love of theory and analysis, preoccupation with logic
 - moral thinking
 - introspection (without self-judgment)
 - conceptual and intuitive integration
 - independence of thought (may be critical)

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

What Intellectual OE looks like:

- I MUST be reading or learning or conversing when I uncover an area of passion
- I don't understand when my Mom has driven the same way so many times that she still needs a GPS
- Its so important the people understand the facts correctly!!

Intellectual Strategies for Kids

Intrapersonal - Individual

- find others that share your passion and form a study group
- locate a mentor to help answer your questions in your areas of interest

Interpersonal - Global

- adopt a different country and follow it in the news, in books and on the web
- read award winning books by authors in other countries

Emotional OE

Feelings and emotions intensified

- positive and negative feelings
- extremes of emotion
- complex emotions and feelings; awareness of a range of feelings
- identification with others' feelings

Strong somatic expressions

- tense stomach
- sinking heart, pounding heart
- blushing, flushing
- sweaty palms

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Emotional OE

Capacity for strong attachments and deep relationships

- strong emotional ties to people, places, things, animals
- difficulty adjusting to new environments
- compassion
- responsiveness to others
- sensitivity in relationships
- loneliness
- intense desire to offer love
- conflicts over depth of relationship

What Emotional OE looks like:

- I always cry when I am upset, scared or overwhelmed by emotion
- Losing something important is a devastating experience
- Most people don't understand my feelings and tell me to "toughen up" or "don't wear your heart on your sleeve" which tells me it's bad to have strong feelings

Emotional Strategies for Kids

Intrapersonal - Individual

- use books and videos to explore feelings of characters that are both similar and different from yourself
- identify the shades of feeling as they are experienced and try to accurately assess each for intensity

Interpersonal - Global

- view a "foreign film" and watch the expressions of emotion portrayed by the actors
- immerse yourself in languages and monitor your feelings as you begin to understand the nuances of each

(cited by Ackerman & Kane, 2003 in Piechowski, 1997)

Leta Hollingworth's Emotional Education

Gifted children need help from adults with these concerns:

- **Finding hard enough and interesting enough work at school**
 - *Rigor is essential—too much rigor creates stress*
 - *Perhaps an environmental change?*
- **Adjusting to classmates**
 - *Finding intellectual peers is key*
 - *Might need to find peers outside of school*
- **Being able to play with other children**
 - *Circles of friends for different purposes*
 - *Possible social skills training*
- **Not becoming hermits**
 - *However, introverts need time alone; a few close friends*
 - *Provide opportunities to move beyond "screen time"*
- **Developing leadership abilities**
 - *What is necessary for a global village?*
 - *Service learning is essential and meets many emotional needs*
- **Not becoming negative toward authority**
 - *Yet, individuation is the task of adolescence*

Leta Hollingworth's Emotional Education

- **Learning to “suffer fools gladly”**
 - *How do I fit into a world where most folks are different from me?*
 - *Coaching in dealing with individuals with narrow perspectives*
- **Avoid habits of extreme chicanery (benign chicanery?)**
 - *Maintain authenticity and use creative problem solving*
 - *Following the rules without compromising integrity*
- **Conforming to rules and expectations**
 - *Time management is essential—deadlines are deadlines*
 - *Helping to determine when rules may need to be changed*
- **Understanding their origin and destiny from an early age**
 - *Career counseling starts early—12-15 careers in a lifetime*
 - *Entelechy or following an inner agenda*
- **Dealing with the special problem of gifted girls**
 - *Career choices; perfectionism; “fitting in”*
 - *Balancing family and career; having it all*

Source: *Emotional Education of the Gifted* by Linda Silverman, Ph.D.
Contemporary Commentary by Michele Kane, Ed.D.

Top Ten Affective Strategies

- Respect the child's inner agenda
- Use conflict resolution and decision-making as occasions for growth
- Use praise sparingly; encouragement fosters achievement
- Learn more about temperament and effect on classroom/family dynamics
- Provide opportunities for struggle, even failure (build resilience)

Top Ten Affective Strategies

- Allow the feelings (you can never be “overly sensitive”)
- Teach child self-soothing techniques (meditation, visualization, deep breathing)
- Teach the difference between excellence and perfectionism
- Provide opportunities for passions to flourish
- Develop service learning projects at the earliest ages

(Kane, 2008)

Mindfulness Training

- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Visualization
- Guided Imagery
- Tai-chi, yoga
- Singing, chanting
- Journaling
- Calligraphy

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