

Characteristics of Gifted Children

Learning and behavioral characteristics that may be exhibited:

The gifted child:

- Is extremely precocious, when compared to his age peers, in any area of learning and/or performance. Learns at a much earlier age than is typical and makes much more rapid progress in certain areas of learning.
- Exhibits asynchronous development. May be highly precocious in some areas while demonstrating age-appropriate or delayed behaviors in other areas.
- Has an advanced vocabulary and verbal ability for his chronological age.
- Has an outstanding memory. Possesses lots of information and can process it in sophisticated ways.
- Learns some things very easily with little help from others. May display a “rage to master” what he studies.
- Operates on higher levels of thinking than his age peers. Is comfortable with abstract and complex thinking tasks.
- Demonstrates ability to work with abstract ideas. Needs a minimum of concrete experiences for complete understanding.
- Perceives subtle cause-and-effect relationships.
- Sees patterns, relationships, and connections that others don’t
- Comes up with “better ways” for doing things. Suggests them to peers, teachers, and other adults-not always in positive, helpful ways.
- Prefers complex and challenging tasks to “basic” work. May change simple tasks or directions to more complex ones to keep himself interested.
- Transfers concepts and learning to new situations. Sees connections between apparently unconnected ideas and activities. Makes intuitive leaps toward understanding without necessarily being able to explain how he got there.
- Wants to share all he knows. Loves to know and give reasons for everything
- Is curious about many things and asks endless questions. Each answer leads to another question.
- Is a keen and alert observer. Doesn’t miss a thing.
- Is very intense. May be extremely emotional and excitable. Gets totally absorbed in activities and thought; may be reluctant to move from one subject area to another; may insist on mastering one thing before starting another.
- Has many, and sometimes unusual, interests, hobbies, and collections.
- Is strongly motivated to do things that interest him in his own way. Loves working independently; may prefer to work alone.
- Has a very high energy level.
- Is sensitive to beauty and other people’s feelings, emotions, and expectations.
- Has an advanced sense of justice, morality, and fairness.
- Has a sophisticated sense of humor.
- Likes to be in charge. May be a natural leader.

The gifted child may:

- Resist doing the work, or works in a sloppy, careless manner.
- Get frustrated with the pace of the class and what he perceives as inactivity or lack of noticeable progress.
- Rebel against routine and predictability.
- Ask embarrassing questions; demand good reasons for why things are done a certain way.
- Resist taking direction or orders.
- Daydream.
- Monopolize class discussions.
- Become bossy with his peers and teachers.
- Become intolerant of imperfection in himself and in others.
- Become super-sensitive to any form of criticism; cry easily.
- Refuse to conform.
- Resist cooperative learning.
- Act out or disturbs others.
- Become the “class clown.”
- Become impatient when he’s not called on to recite or respond; blurt out answers without raising his hand.



What should I tell my child about receiving gifted identification?

- Explain that he or she did very well on the tests.
- Show that you are happy or pleased, but limit your expectations to current learning.

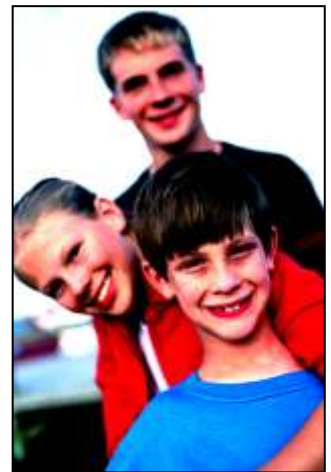
Say: “It sounds like a good opportunity for you. I hope you like it.”

Not: “You should really be able to make something of yourself now.”

- Tell her or him that the program (or class) is designed for kids who learn particularly well and that you are proud of them.
- Tell your child that the school was finding kids that need extra enrichment to think about subjects deeply and explore subjects in different ways. Your child may find more students with similar interests in the program.
- Go ahead and talk about it with your child. Ignoring the identification, or avoiding the subject when it comes up, will make them think it is an embarrassment, or they are.
- Although your child has been identified for our cluster classroom program, remember that not all aspects of a gifted child are necessarily advanced. They may excel in one content area, but struggle in others. Your child’s emotional, social or physical development may or may not be similar to children the same age.

What about siblings?

- Focus on the individual differences and achievements of all children.
- Show each child that he or she is valued – that many different qualities are extremely desirable and valued (such as humor, spirit, honesty, loyalty, effort, caring). Acknowledge the feelings of brothers and sisters. The feelings are real, whether they be jealousy, anger, rejection, admiration, confusion, or inferiority. Talking it out is better than suppressing or ignoring it.
- Discuss what “gifted” means – it is an educational term, not a value judgment. Remember this is not a competition where a child “wins” being identified for the Gifted Program and “loses” if not identified. A child is the same child as before identification.
- Save some of your praise to deliver to the gifted child in private. Reinforce all children in public.
- Make sure you give each child as much one-to-one time as possible; don’t let the gifted child’s talent take up all your time.



Based on the work and writing of Judy Galbraith, proficient author of various works on the social and emotional needs of the gifted.

What Can Parents Do At Home?

Providing a Nurturing Environment

The Elementary School Years

- Reassure your child that it's okay to be different. Tell her that she'll meet many people in life who will appreciate and value her differences. She may feel intense pressure to conform, and how she reacts may determine her achievement motivation for years to come.
- Understand her need to spend time with older kids, especially those who share one or more of her passionate interests. If her mental age exceeds her chronological age by 2 or more years, her interests will more closely parallel those of older kids.
- Try not to expect consistently high grades. Let your child know that even when she's struggling to learn, you still think she's smart. These are the years when your child needs to learn how to learn, not how to get high grades with little or no effort. You want her to welcome hard work, not avoid it.
- Model lifelong learning. Show by example that learning is something people can and should do throughout their lives, not just in school.
- Have many books and magazines available in your home. Spend time reading and communicate to your child that reading is important and enjoyable. Read aloud to your child every day if you can, and don't stop just because she reaches a certain age.
- Create a home library of reference books. Include a current dictionary, thesaurus, world almanac, book of world records, book of facts, book of quotations, and one-volume encyclopedia, for starters. Add reference books on topics that interest your child. If you have a home computer, you might purchase an encyclopedia on CD-ROM. If you have an Internet connection, you have access to many online encyclopedias.
- Make your home a fun-filled and creative place to be. Listen to music. Hang prints and posters on the walls. Put on family skits and plays. Encourage and affirm each other's talents.
- Introduce your child to other people who share her passions.
- Ask your child about her school experiences. Really listen to what she says. Stay in touch with your child's teacher, and attend as many parent-teacher conferences and school events as you possibly can. Consider bringing your child to parent-teacher conferences. (Why not, if the conferences are about her?) Check with the teacher first to make sure it's okay.
- Model the importance of a balanced life. (I know first-hand how hard this is, but do your best.) Avoid over scheduling your child. Make sure she has time to just be a kid.
- Whenever possible, let your child solve her own problems. Help her brainstorm solutions, but don't insist that she choose the one you think is best. You'll avoid power struggles and build self-reliance and responsibility in your child.



Adolescence

- This is a high-pressure time for conformity, especially for gifted girls. Adolescents struggle to find a balance between the need to be accepted and the need to be themselves. Give your child all of the support, encouragement, love, and understanding you possible can. Sometimes that means just listening.
- Your child may need help organizing his busy life and meeting his many commitments. Teach him how to prioritize, schedule, follow through-and let go.
- Watch for signs of the "imposter syndrome." Especially during adolescence, a time of intense self-awareness and self-criticism, many gifted kids wonder, "Am I really that smart?" They may deny or bury their talents because they're afraid of being "found out" and they're desperate to fit in.



- Think of the many things you like and admire about your child, then tell him.
- Reinforce his self-esteem with sincere and specific comments.
- If you observe signs of depression in your child—such as changes in behavior, sleeping, or eating habits, falling grades, withdrawal from normal activities, or giving away personal belongings—seek professional help immediately. Also stay alert for signs of eating disorders, which may be more common in gifted children and are not limited to girls.
- Your child isn't really a child any longer, so don't treat him like one. You can avoid many power struggles by letting him make many of his own choices. Tell him that if he wants your opinion or advice, he can ask for it. It's amazing how often children will ask if we give them that option instead of a lecture.
- During the summer before your child starts high school, help him obtain college catalogs from schools he might want to attend. Ask him to pay special attention to the entrance requirements and keep them in mind as he plans his high-school experience.
- Help your child discover the possibilities offered by your school or state for completing high school in less than the required time. Don't worry about sending him away to college at a very young age; perhaps he can take several semesters worth of introductory courses at local community colleges and postpone entrance to a university program until he is a bit older. He can also wait to formally graduate with his friends and go to college when they do.

Susan Winebrenner, *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, pp. 209 & 210, Free Spirit Publishing, 2001

Ten Strategies for Parenting Gifted Children



1. **Listening.** Listen attentively and actively to your child. Respect your child's feelings.
2. **Perspective.** A sense of humor goes a long way in parenting, as in life. It is very important to maintain a healthy perspective on the ups and downs of daily life and our children's experiences, as well as our own.
3. **Attunement.** Stay attuned to your child's world. Pay attention to the various factors that might be affecting his emotional, social, behavioral and/or academic functioning.
4. **Clarification.** Clarify everyone's expectations—your own, your child's, the school's, and others', such as extended family members'. Are the various demands being placed on the child well-defined, fair, and flexible? If not, think together about ways to improve matters.
5. **Information.** Seek information about high-level development. Pay close attention to sources that provide insight into the particular kinds of support that your child requires.
6. **Exploration.** Expose your child to a wide range of extracurricular opportunities for play, exploration, and learning in response to his individual abilities, interests, and needs.
7. **Consultation.** Consult with professionals and other parents to explore possibilities such as alternative learning opportunities in your child's school, within the community, and beyond.
8. **Advocacy.** When necessary, advocate for appropriate learning options that will suit your child's individual needs and levels of advancement in different areas.
9. **Co-operation.** Work with educators, other parents, and members of the community to create as rich and engaging a learning environment as possible for your child and others.
10. **Awareness of Special Needs.** Be aware of your child's special needs, whether these relate to gender, ethnicity, disability, or specific talents or abilities, and be prepared to offer support.

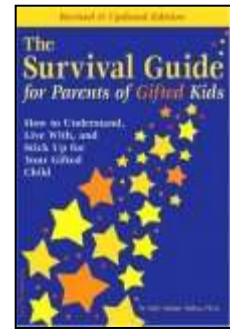
While all of these perspectives are important, parents should also realize that they can best strengthen a child's learning spirit and help sustain her drive to mastery by respecting her choices, nurturing her independence, and allowing that sometimes the most valuable learning of all is that which happens serendipitously through the many experiences of daily life with friends, neighbors, classmates, and family members.

Matthew, Dona J., Ph.D. & Foster, Joanne F., Ed.D, *Being Smart about Gifted Children*, pp. 318 & 319, Great Potential Press, Inc, 2005.

Should You Be Worried About Your Child's Mental Health?

How can you tell when something beyond the regular and routine is happening in your child's life-something that may cause real problems, now or later? If your child is experiencing any of the following, it may be time to consult with a professional.

- Self-imposed isolation
- Extreme perfectionism
- Deep concern with personal powerlessness
- Unusual fascination with violence
- Eating Disorders
- Substance abuse
- Preoccupation with self
- Withdrawal into a fantasy world
- Rigid, compulsive behavior
- Preoccupation with death



Revised from, Sally Yahnke Walker, Ph.D., *The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids.*, free spirit publishing, 2002.

What about Perfectionism in Your Child?

Use this quick inventory to help you recognize signs of perfectionism. Does your child usually or often:

- Avoid trying new things for fear of failure?
- Procrastinate, fret over details, and leave work unfinished (or never start it) out of fear it won't be good enough?
- Focus on mistakes, rather than on what was done well?
- Set unrealistic goals and then condemn herself when she doesn't achieve them?
- Have trouble accepting criticism?
- Find it hard to laugh at herself?
- Focus on end products, rather than on the process of learning?
- Avoid learning situations that may involve risk and the possibility of low grades?
- Judge herself severely whenever she gets anything below an A?
- Underachieve in preference to attempting and possibly failing?
- Appear to love learning less and less because she's convinced she'll never reach some impossibly high standard?

If you answered yes to several of these questions, perfectionism may be a problem for your child.

Be aware of the expectations you may have created for your gifted child. Ask yourself: Are my expectations reasonable? Am I allowing my child the freedom to be herself, express herself, have fun, fool around, make mistakes, be a child? With patience and understanding, you can guide your son or daughter away from perfectionism. Here are some ways to get started:

- **Show your child that you love and accept her for who she is**, that your love is independent of what she does or achieves. Express at least as much appreciation of her interest and individuality (what makes her special) as of her achievements (high grades and awards).

- **Help your child set realistic goals.** Show her how to break large projects into small, manageable steps. Reassure her that learning gaps can be addressed, and help her recognize when she's expecting too much of herself.
- **Let your child know that mistakes are okay,** that everyone makes them, and that they're part of the learning process. Acknowledge your own mistakes.
- **Teach your child the value of patience** – with herself and with the process of learning. Convey to her that it's safe to make mistakes and be imperfect in the relaxed environment of home.
- **Remind your child that nobody's perfect** and nobody's good at everything – not her and not you.
- **Applaud your child's efforts.** Encourage *process* over product – what she *learns* rather than what she accomplishes or produces.
- **Celebrate creativity** – the unusual or innovative response to an assignment or question – rather than the “right” answer.
- **Use praise discerningly.** Don't lavish praise on your child for excelling or dwell on her achievements, especially in her presence. You can express joy in her successes without making her feel that these accomplishments alone are what make her special or define her identity. Don't praise every little thing your child says or does. Children who are praised all the time start believing that what they do is more important than who they are. Believing this, they may be unable to accept any praise, since nothing they do meets their own impossible standards.
- **Point out positive actions that have nothing to do with ability.** Commend your child for taking risks, even when things don't turn out the way she planned. Focus on efforts as well as successes. Notice appropriate ways of handling failure and thoughtful interactions with other people.
- **Involve your child in activities that aren't graded or judged.** Invite her to try things “just for fun.” Encourage her to spend more time doing what she loves to do – taking walks, reading mysteries or science fiction, playing with the dog, or playing board games with friends or siblings.
- **Help your child plan for challenges.** When your child is about to start something new, talk with her about what might go wrong and what she'll do if that happens.
- **Help you child choose what does and doesn't call for her best effort.** Which things require the greatest investment of time and energy? Which things simply need to be finished – to be “good enough”?
- **Encourage your child's sense of humor.** Help her lighten up about things that don't go her way.
- **If your child doesn't like what she did, help her see why.** Don't dismiss her feelings (“What do you mean you don't like your poster? It's wonderful!”). Listen to what she says and help her explore how she might do things differently in the future. (“Do you think you could do more sketching in pencil next time, before you paint?”)
- **Turn your child's attention away from flaws in her work** and toward what she has learned and accomplished. You might say, “You've told me you're disappointed with some parts of your project. Now tell me what's good about what you've done.”
- **Take a look at your own perfectionist qualities.** Are you too hard on yourself? Are you setting for your child the example you want to set – of someone who enjoys his own achievements and doesn't criticize himself all the time for not doing better?

There's a big difference between wanting your child to develop her potential and wanting her to be tops at everything she tries. When you're clear that inner achievement – the development of high-level thinking skills, the extension of creative imagination, the ability to take risks, the joy of discovery – is far more important than high grades and awards, you'll be able to help your child combat perfectionism.

Thomas S. Greenspon, Ph.D., *Freeing Our Families from Perfectionism*, Free Spirit Publishing, 2002.



Advocating for Your Child at School

It's important to realize that the education gifted children is a team effort. Here are some tips on working with your child's school educators.

- Never disparage your child's teacher in front of your child.
- Be careful of what you say and how you say it. Try not to use any language that states or implies that your child is better, more important, or more deserving than other children.
- Don't ask teachers to give your gifted child more work. Instead ask for opportunities for you child to work on activities that are personally challenging.
- Before approaching your child's teacher with a request, send some positive messages ahead. Tell the teacher about activities your child has enjoyed. Offer to help by volunteering in the classroom or working at home on materials the teacher can use in the classroom.
- Get a copy of the school's or district's mission statement (see page 1) , which describes the goals set for all children. Your advocacy efforts should center around the promises made for all students.
- Understand that gifted students are as far removed from "average" inability and performance as students who qualify for special education services. Your advocacy should be based on the expectation of equal treatment for all atypical learners. Be careful not to misinterpret standardized test scores. If a fourth-grade student gets a Grade Equivalent score of 6.5 (sixth grade, fifth month), this doesn't mean that she could handle sixth-grade, fifth-month learning materials. It only means that, in comparison with other kids her age, she scored in the higher ranges.
- Familiarize yourself with the latest research on grouping practices. Find out which ones are considered most beneficial for highly capable learners.
- Unless you feel you have no alternative, don't request specific teachers by name. Instead, request teachers who:
 - Have had some training in how to teach gifted kids.
 - Regularly allow students to demonstrate what they already know.
 - Give students class time to work on alternate activities.
 - Allow gifted students to work together on a regular basis.
- Join and support the efforts of your local and state advocacy groups.

Susan Winebrenner, *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, pp. 207 & 208, Free Spirit Publishing, 2001



Terms Related to Giftedness

ability grouping

Putting together students (either on a temporary or permanent basis) with similar skills for instruction in a particular subject area such as math or reading.

acceleration

A strategy used when a student demonstrates competencies, knowledge, abilities, and/or skills which exceed that which is outlined in the planned course or grade placement level. This can be determined by advance work demonstrated in the classroom as well as diagnostic test or pretests in the skill area.

achievement tests

Tests that measure what students have learned or have been taught, measured against the expected achievement of average students.

Advance Placement Program (AP)

A College Board program of college level courses taught by high school teachers in grades 11 and 12; some colleges give credit for these courses upon successful completion of the AP exam.

cluster grouping

Grouping students of the same grade level who have been identified as gifted in the same class and heterogeneously mixing the other students.

cooperative learning

An instructional method in which students work cooperatively in similar or mixed-ability groups.

critical thinking skills and attitudes related to critical thinking

This includes the development of analytical thinking for purposes of decision making, analyzing arguments carefully, seeing other points of view, and reaching sound conclusions.

curriculum compacting

An instructional method in which material is compressed into a shortened time frame and a student is allowed to demonstrate mastery of content already known, often through pretests.

differentiation

A process of adapting the regular classroom curriculum to meet each student's individual learning needs.

flexible grouping

Varying the way students are grouped for instruction and learning based on interests and abilities on an assignment-by-assignment basis.

gifted

Having advanced intellectual ability, a high degree of creativity, or heightened sensibilities with outstanding capability or potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of similar age, experience, or environment.

G/T

An abbreviation used in some schools, meaning gifted and talented.

heterogeneous grouping

Grouping students of all levels and abilities together.

high achieving

Students who consistently achieve at a high academic level. Not all gifted students are high achieving and not all high achieving students meet the criteria to be identified as gifted. Higher level thinking includes tasks and activities that involve analysis, synthesis and evaluation from Bloom's Taxonomy. It also includes creative thinking skills of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration.

homogeneous grouping

A group or class of students at one ability or achievement level.

inclusion

Creating a regular classroom environment that meets the needs of all levels of students.

independent study

A self-directed style of learning. Independent study is usually done with the help of a teacher; however the role of the teacher is limited. Student and teacher identify problems or topics of interest to the student. They develop a plan for investigation and identify the type of product the project will produce.

instructional level

Determined by diagnostic testing and full assessment of a child's rate of acquisition and rate of retention of skills. Diagnostic testing may include curriculum based assessment in reading and math and/or standardized normed tests.

intelligence tests

Tests, like the Stanford-Binet, that measure children's potential to do well in intellectual pursuits.

IQ (intelligence quotient)

A measure of how well a child can complete intellectual tasks that compare the child's mental age to the child's actual age. A high IQ score represents potential and does not reflect creativity or motivation to achieve.

learning contract

An agreement made between a teacher and a student that includes a description of a project or activity a child will do, what the child is expected to accomplish, goals to meet along the way, a timeline, and rules of behavior.

learning styles

A term used to describe personality, psychological traits, social behaviors, developmental differences, communication styles and environmental preferences. There are several learning styles theories that try to match traits of the learner with teaching methods.

mastery learning

A teaching method in which students advance through the curriculum according to ability rather than grade level; this option allows students to move through material at their own pace.

mentorship

A learning relationship with an adult (a mentor) who specializes in a particular subject, discipline, or career. The mentor helps guide and develop the student's skills and interests.

multiple criteria

Several methods schools use to identify gifted children, such as creativity tests, parent input, and portfolio reviews.

multiple intelligences

Different ways of taking in information and thinking about it. Identified by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, the eight intelligences are linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Each individual has relative strengths and weaknesses among these intelligences.

open-ended questioning

A strategy which allows opportunities for more than one right solution or answer. It is appropriate for divergent thinkers, which is a trait gifted students often possess.

rubric

A tool for assessment made by the teacher. This tool explains what is expected in the assignment and how each component of the assignment will be assessed or graded.

standardized tests

Tests developed and carefully monitored for validity with students of a particular grade, age, region of the country, gender, or other characteristics. A child's score reflects how he/she compares to other students like him/her in various ways at the national, state, or local level. Also called norm-referenced tests.

tiered assignments

Placing students together, usually based on ability or learning style, to work on a particular topic or project, enabling the teacher to target the learning needs of each group of students in relation to a specific assignment. Tiered assignments allow the teacher to assign gifted students an especially challenging topic. This practice avoids permanent grouping arrangements; students change groups as their abilities improve.

tracking

Grouping students permanently by ability. A typical example of tracking is placing students in "low," "middle," and "advanced" reading groups.

twice exceptional

Both gifted and having a physical, an emotional, or a learning disability.

underachievement

A student's abilities significantly exceed performance. An underachieving student is not necessarily a gifted child, but underachievement has become a major concern among advocates for the gifted.