

Living with Your Gifted Child: Advice from the Experts



Presented by Rebecca Moe
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Common Terms Used in Gifted Education and What They Mean to You

Ability grouping: Grouping students of like ability to work together on a short-or long-term basis

Acceleration: Allowing students to move to a higher level of schoolwork than their age would ordinarily dictate. This can be in the form of early entry to school, placement in a self-contained gifted classroom, earning credit by passing an examination, skipping grades, completing two grades in a single year, or dual-enrollment in both high school and college. Students can also be accelerated in specific subject areas for single classes (i.e., taking seventh-grade level math when the student is in the sixth grade).

Assessment: The process of evaluating student learning with standardized testing and a clearly defined portfolio of individual work samples. Gifted education teachers often attempt to evaluate student work or performance in order to tailor their teaching to student needs and interests.

Bloom's Taxonomy: Created by Benjamin Bloom in 1956, it is the classification of thinking into six levels of increasing complexity: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Cluster grouping: Small instructional groups consisting of students of the same grade level who have been identified as gifted, but who have been placed in a classroom of otherwise heterogeneously grouped students.

Curriculum compacting: Compacting is an adaptation to the curriculum that shortens or eliminates work that students have already mastered quicker than their classmates. It allows students the additional time and opportunity they need for enrichment or acceleration options. This process is sometime called telescoping.

Differentiation: Adapting the pace, level, or kind of instructional curriculum to meet each student's individual learning needs, styles, or interests.

Enrichment: Generic term for a range of challenging student learning opportunities outside of the regular curriculum. Enrichment can also take place outside of the school system.

Flexible grouping: Grouping students based on their interests and abilities on an assignment-by assignment basis.

Heterogeneous grouping: Also referred to as mixed-ability grouping, this is when students with differing abilities, achievements, interests, perspectives, and backgrounds are grouped together.

Homogeneous grouping: Also referred to as like-ability grouping, this is when students of similar ability are grouped together, regardless of their age.

Identification: Various methods used to determine which students are best suited for gifted services and programs.

IQ (intelligence quotient): Measure of a child's cognitive ability that compares his/her mental age and actual age.

Learning style: A student's preferred mode of learning, such as auditory, tactile, visual, or kinesthetic.

Least restrictive environment (LRE): The educational setting where a child with disabilities can receive a free, appropriate public education designed to meet his/her needs. LRE also requires that these students be educated with peers without disabilities in the regular classroom environment.

Multiple intelligences: Originally identified by psychologist Howard Gardner in his theory of multiple intelligences, this encompasses different ways of learning and processing information. The eight intelligences (as identified by Gardner) are linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Each individual has relative strengths and weaknesses within these domains.

Multipotentiality: Concept that gifted children have the ability to succeed in several areas of work or study, making career selection difficult.

Pull-out program: This is a part-time program where gifted children leave their regular classrooms to attend specialized classes with a resource teacher. It may also be referred to as a resource-room or send-out program.

Self-contained program: When students are grouped on a full-time basis with intellectual peers, often for consecutive years. Its aim is to promote high achievement and reduce the social and emotional issues that gifted children may face.

Standardized testing: Testing of students under identical conditions that allows for results to be statistically compared to a standard.

Tracking: Permanently grouping students by ability, such as in the "low", "middle", or "high" math group.

Twice-exceptional: Quality of being both gifted and having a physical, emotional, or learning disability.

Underachievement: School performance that falls short of a student's ability.

From Parenting Gifted Kids: Tips for Raising Happy and Successful Children by James R. Delisle, Prufrock Press, Inc., 2006

The Eight Great Gripes of Parents with Gifted Kids
From The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids by Sally Yahnke Walker

1. No one explains what having a gifted child is all about.
2. I don't like having my child labeled.
3. Relatives, other parents, and teachers don't recognize that we have unique problems. They assume it's a snap to raise a gifted child.
4. All parents like to think their kids are extra special. Some people think we're on an ego trip, or just plain pushy.
5. The school assumes that "the cream always rises to the top", or that gifted kids will make it on their own, so special programs for the gifted aren't needed. If that's true, they why is my child bored and unhappy with the school?
6. Other people expect my child to be gifted in everything, or to act like an adult.
7. Parents get no support for this challenging job. Once you give birth, you're supposed to know it all.
8. It's exhausting to raise a gifted child! I wish there were ways to make it easier.

GT KIDS AND BEHAVIOR: SEVEN STRATEGIES TO HELP KIDS (and PARENTS) COPE

By Christine Fonseca, Online, SENG Community, July 2012

Gifted kids are a unique and challenging group—for teachers and for parents. They view the world through an entirely unique lens, one that is best summed up in one word: *intense*. This intensity refers to how gifted individuals approach life. At its best, intensity is the driving passion that enables some people to achieve amazing things—in any domain. But at its worst, it is the turmoil that has the power to consume these same individuals from time to time as they learn how to manage that aspect of their personality.

Intensity comes in the form of cognitive intensity—those aspects of thinking and processing information that all gifted individuals use to problem solve. It relates to the attributes of focus, sustained attention, creative problem solving, and advanced reasoning skills. Most people think of cognitive intensity as intellect, or “being smart”—all good things.

But a gifted child’s intensity does not stop there. The emotional aspects of a gifted individual are also intense. Emotional intensity refers to the passion gifted people feel daily. It also refers to the extreme highs and lows many gifted people experience throughout their lifetime, causing them to question their own mental stability from time to time. This type of intensity is a natural aspect of giftedness. However, in my experience, it is also one of the most misunderstood attributes—and it is the reason gifted kids sometimes struggle.

Typically, emotional intensity results in a range of behavioral outbursts that can be internal (including moodiness, anxiety, and depression) or external (yelling or crying, temper tantrums, and physical expressions of anger or frustration). Regardless of how a gifted child chooses to demonstrate his or her intensities, there are a lot of things parents and educators can do to help lessen the outburst and help teach their children and students coping strategies.

1. Start early by helping the child talk about his or her emotions. Trust me, they may not want to—but taking the emotions from some raw feeling to a tangible thing that can be defined is an important first step in learning to control the behavior. Further, the development of an emotional vocabulary can assist in providing a common language with which to discuss emotions and behavior.
2. Help the child discover his or her unique escalation cycle. Likewise, know your own. Gifted kids have considerable talent for pushing a teacher’s or parent’s buttons. Knowing the things that push you over the edge will enable you to remain calm during emotional outbursts, whatever form they may take. Further, helping children discover their escalation pattern will give them a chance to learn to manage and redirect their feelings and emotions before they become too overwhelming.
3. Once the child can identify his or her pattern of escalation, work with him/her to make a plan for what to do when he/she is overwhelmed—when life becomes too intense. This plan should include a way to relax and redirect his/her energy away from the emotional throngs of intensity.
4. Should the explosion happen anyway, it is important to remain calm and create a distance between your emotions and the child’s. Anger and frustration always beget more anger and frustration, so it is really important for the adults working with the child to stay emotionally neutral.
5. Take a breather. This goes for the child and the adults. The best way to create the distance I talked about above is to remember to take a break and calm down.

6. Remember to focus on the good behavior you want to see. All too often, we get into a pattern of responding to the negative behaviors strongly (because these behaviors emotionally hook us) and not responding enough to the positive behaviors. The result is more negative behavior. So, do a mental inventory and make sure to focus your time and energy on the positive behaviors.
7. Behavioral outbursts, whether internal or external, are teachable moments. Yes, they are frustrating and annoying, maybe even infuriating. But they are still teachable moments. Take the time to redirect the behavior, focusing on teaching the GT child how to understand and redirect the behavior.

The bottom line to all of this: Intensity is not a bad thing in and of itself. Intensity is passion, the kind of passion we use to create. But the way in which the GT child copes with his/her intensity can be a problem. Utilizing some of the strategies above can go a long way to helping both kids and adults embrace the intensity and recognize it for what it is—a wonderful aspect of what it means to be gifted in the first place!

Tips for Parents

From Jean Peterson, Ph.D., Purdue University, author of Gifted at Risk: Profiles in Poetry and the Essential Guide to Talking with Gifted Teens

- 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.
- Be a parent, but also a human being—imperfect, vulnerable, sometimes insecure, sometimes strong, sometimes weak. They need permission to be human as well.
- Value them as sons and daughters, not just as fulfillers-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 accomplishment.
- Support effort. Give extended, not terminal, feedback.
- Encourage activities that aren't “graded.” Beware of over scheduling. Help them learn to conquer boredom themselves.
- Model play. Model balance. Model appropriate risk-taking—i.e., in areas where you are not sure you can be “excellent.”
- Model kindness to yourself when you make mistakes.
- Model clear expression of feelings. They need to know that feelings don't have to be feared, denied, or displaced.
- Be a parent-friend, not a peer-friend. Above all, be a parent. Let them be kids.
- Encourage them to talk with someone when they feel they can't talk with you.
- Model a good level of assertiveness. Know where you “begin” and where you “end.” Be clear about what is their responsibility and what is yours. That will help them to take care of themselves when you are not available.
- Model good coping—with stress, challenge, competition, “mountains.” You are an important teacher of coping skills.
- 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.
- Take note of your negative, critical messages. They are heard and have impact.
- Know that it is normal for them to be angry with you at times, especially during adolescence. It helps them become “separate—but connected” eventually.
- Model respect for others, other kinds of intelligence, other views.
- Model support for the system. Help them to understand the system. Teach them how to advocate for themselves. Be wise advocates when you feel the need to intercede.
- Encourage them to be “selfish” regarding the system. They need to have it work for them. You had to learn how to deal with your world, and they also can use their intelligence to figure out how to deal with theirs.

FROM 10 Things NOT to Say to Your Gifted Child: One Family's Perspective by
Nancy Heilbronner: Great Potential Press, 2011

- **Parenting Strategies to Develop Mastery Learning in Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Recognize and discuss perfectionism with your child, including your own.
 - ✓ Help your child set reasonable goals.
 - ✓ Emphasize process more and product less.
 - ✓ Discuss how learning is a continual, long-term process.
 - ✓ Discuss how abilities may be improved with effort.
 - ✓ Use targeted, specific (rather than general) praise.
 - ✓ Discuss the role of failure and how failure may be used to learn how to overcome obstacles.
 - ✓ Expose your child to biographies of prominent individuals who have built a lifetime of achievement.
 - ✓ Expose your child to biographies of prominent individuals who have dealt with failure.
- **Parenting Strategies to Deal with Underachievement in Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Determine whether underachievement is present. Consider the results of a variety of assessments.
 - ✓ Diagnose causes of underachievement: student, family, or school-related.
 - ✓ Develop a course of action that addresses the root cause(s) of the specific case.
 - ✓ Communicate with your child's school about issues of concern. Involve the child in the discussions.
 - ✓ Ensure that the child's classroom is an environment that is supportive and friendly.
 - ✓ Communicate to your child that learning is enjoyable and useful.
 - ✓ Communicate to your child your belief in his abilities.
- **Parenting Strategies to Deal with Fears and Anxieties in Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Determine if your child's fears and anxieties are too frequent and/or debilitating. If they are, seek professional counseling.
 - ✓ When dealing with your child's fear or anxiety, listen and observe carefully.
 - ✓ Acknowledge the fear or anxiety, and set yourself up as an ally to your child.
 - ✓ Help your child understand the fear or anxiety, emphasizing the positive.
 - ✓ Reassure your child, and help her to decompress.
 - ✓ Divert your child's attention to something else.
- **Parenting Strategies for Communicating with Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Offer young children limited choices.
 - ✓ Gain buy-in from the child, if possible.
 - ✓ Develop a problem-solving solution that:
 - Describes the problem.
 - Focuses on objectives.
 - Develops and evaluates one or more specific solutions, with consequences and rewards.
 - ✓ Spend time with the child outside of the difficult situation.
- **Parenting Strategies to Help Gifted Children with Socialization**
 - ✓ Understand your child's need for socialization, and keep it apart from your own need for popularity.

- ✓ Understand where your child is on the introversion-extroversion continuum and the implications of this placement.
 - ✓ Ensure that your child has at least one good friend.
 - ✓ If your child is unhappy socially, arrange for get-togethers with one or two other children of his choosing.
 - ✓ Make sure your child is involved with one or two clubs or other social groups of his choosing.
 - ✓ Keep a harmonious family environment that can be a safe haven for your child during difficult times.
 - ✓ Reassure your child that social relationships become easier as children grow older.
 - ✓ Avoid pressuring your child to make more friends; let it happen naturally.
 - ✓ Describe a bright future to your child that involves wonderful experiences.
- **Parenting Strategies to Deal with Gifted Children's Constant Questioning**
 - ✓ Understand your child's need for information, and try to view it as a positive trait.
 - ✓ Establish a system, such as a "parking lot", in which questions are placed until you can deal with them.
 - ✓ Take your child to the library occasionally.
 - ✓ Let your child know that you value her questions by sitting down at an appointed time to discuss them.
 - ✓ Teach your child about online safety.
 - ✓ Show your child how to use some age-appropriate search engines.
 - ✓ Help your child learn how to evaluate websites for accuracy.
- **Parenting Strategies to Deal with Selective Achievement in Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Evaluate your desire to have your child "succeed". Is it: (1) within the realm of possibility? (2) reasonable?
 - ✓ Question your child on his interests. What classes and activities would he find most interesting?
 - ✓ Insist that your child become involved with one or two classes or activities that he really likes.
 - ✓ Insist that your child see the activity through for a predetermined period.
 - ✓ If the first activity doesn't do the job, keep trying!
 - ✓ Once your child has found an activity he likes, support it.
 - ✓ Discuss with your child:
 - Why he likes the activity (be specific)
 - How he feels when he does the activity
 - The benefits of the activity
 - How he's improving in the activity
 - How the improvement is linked to effort
- **Parenting Strategies to Provide Career Guidance to Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Avoid steering your child toward one career.
 - ✓ Expose your child to a variety of clubs and extracurricular opportunities that may help her explore her strengths and interests.
 - ✓ Actively discuss your child's strengths and interests with her.
 - ✓ Help your child think about her values. What does she value when envisioning a career? Working with people? Making the world a better place? Working to stimulate her intellectual curiosity? Assess these periodically over time as she matures.

- ✓ Help your child think about her goals. What does she want to do in a career? Make more money? Have more time? Be flexible in her working hours? Gain prestige? Assess these periodically over time as she matures.
 - ✓ As your child matures, help her consider the compromises involved with specific careers. For example, if she becomes a doctor, she may make more money, but she may have less flexibility in her personal time.
- **Parenting Strategies to Develop Persistence in Gifted Children**
 - ✓ Discuss the importance of persistence with your child. Provide examples of admired individuals who persisted through difficulties.
 - ✓ Set and agree upon a milestone—an event that must take place before your child may withdraw from an activity.
 - ✓ Support your child through struggles. Discuss the task or activity with him. Brainstorm solutions to problems that may arise. Let your child know that you're there to help him.
 - ✓ Encourage a task mastery approach in your child. Remind him to measure his own progress and not to compare himself to others.
 - ✓ Exhaust all solutions before allowing your child to withdraw from an activity, and only do so if it is vital to his physical or psychological health. Talk with your child about how quitting is a "last resort".
 - ✓ If your child must withdraw from an activity, encourage him to replace it with a healthier alternative.
 - **Parenting Strategies to Identify and Develop Your Gifted Children's Creativity**
 - ✓ For children who exhibit creative abilities:
 - Realistically assess your child's creativity. Is it big "C" or little "c"?
 - If you cannot realistically assess your child's abilities, take him to an expert who can (e.g., an art or music or dance teacher).
 - Find a teacher/mentor who will take your child's abilities to the next level.
 - Be alert for the possibility that your child may outgrow the teacher's abilities. Be prepared to take him to another teacher who can help him reach an even higher level.
 - Be aware of your child's special social-emotional needs, which may accompany his creative abilities.
 - Involve your child in extracurricular groups that will help him find others who are interested in the same area(s).
 - ✓ For all children:
 - Understand types of creative abilities that may be developed in your child (e.g., flexibility, fluency, originality, elaboration).
 - Play creativity games with your child to develop those abilities.
 - Develop problem-solving abilities in your child by practicing the **Creative Problem Solving method (CPS)** with her. (**Fact finding**-Explore information surrounding the problem, **Problem finding**-Determine the nature of the real problem, **Idea finding**-Generate ideas to solve the problem, **Solution finding**-Evaluate the ideas to come up with one or more viable solution, **Acceptance finding**-Publicize and develop support for the solutions.
 - Point out when your child is creative, and encourage this type of behavior.

Quotes

Compiled by James R. Delisle, Parenting Gifted Kids: Tips for Raising Happy and Successful Children

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose."—Dr. Seuss (With so many paths to take as a smart kid, how do you know which one is best for you?)

"You miss 100% of the shots you never take."—Wayne Gretsky (It is difficult to attempt something your might not do well but are the consequences of *not* trying even bigger?)

"No person is your friend who demands your silence or denies your right to grow."—Alice Walker (If it is not cool to be smart in your school, what price do you pay by acting average?)

"When I was growing up, I always wanted to be somebody, but now I see that I should have been more specific."—Lily Tomlin (How do you know when you reach your goal if you haven't specified what that goal looks like once it's achieved?)

"Birds sing after a storm; why shouldn't we?"—Rose Kennedy (How do you handle life's inevitable setbacks and convince yourself to move forward?)

"The respect of others' rights, is peace."—Benito Juarez (How do you defend to others your right to be educated at your level?)

"The forest is magnificent, yet it contains no perfect trees."—Gye Fram (What role does perfection play in your life, and can perfectionism ever be justified as a healthy trait to have?)

"The way in which my own life touches those of so many others, those I know and thousands of those I don't, has strengthened my belief that each human has his or her unique place in the ocean of existence."—Jane Goodall (What are the essential elements to a well-lived life?)

RESOURCES for PARENTS

Websites:

- www.hoagiesgifted.org A web site for gifted kids and their parents
- www.texaspsp.org All you need to know about the Texas Performance Standards Project
- www.txgifted.org State gifted association web site; information about publications, public policy, upcoming events
- www.nagc.org The National Gifted Association web site
- www.prufrock.com Articles, blogs, resources
- www.ericec.org A resource for parents, offering hundreds of digests on a wide variety of topics related to gifted children
- www.gifted-children.com A newsletter, blogs, and help for parents of gifted children
- www.gtworld.org An online support network for parents of gifted and talented children

Books:

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