

anything that conceals a child's giftedness

The Masks of Gifted: Behaviors That Hide The Gifted Child

It seems simple to identify students who are gifted - they are good readers, math students, make friends easily, and are teacher pleasers. However, there is a part of the gifted population who do not fit the "gifted" profile who have other, masking behaviors that make it more challenging to see their giftedness. Below are some of the more common masks that might be red flags for giftedness.

1. Asynchronous Development - Gifted children tend to function at varying levels depending upon their gifts identified. An academically gifted student may be in a double accelerated math class but unable to function organizationally or socially as the rest of the students. Functioning on one level academically, another socially, and yet another emotionally can be very overwhelming.

2. Intensity Cubed - Gifted children experience many things with a greater intensity than their peers. They can be more socially sensitive - worrying about a war or news item on the other side of the world. Dabrowski's Theories of Intensities describes many areas and resulting challenges that face people who are more intense in many areas than the general population.

3. Social Isolation - Gifted children often can feel isolated from their peers. Peers may not understand their interests, have trouble following their intricate games, and even have difficulty understanding their advanced vocabulary. Finding true peers can be a challenge as mental mates may be very different from age mates. Some gifted children find it easier to simply do things on their own.

4. Underachievement - According to Jim Delisle, gifted children can simply choose not to perform to expectations of either peers or the adults around them. Disengagement is easier than facing or dissecting that problem that leads to underachieving. Some children may have serious psychological reasons that prevent them from achieving. Proper diagnosis of the type and cause of non-performance is very important.

5. Communication - Age mates find it challenging to understand gifted children. Many times gifted use advanced vocabulary or discuss topics that far out distance abilities of their peers. They have the ability to think more critically or abstractly and feel misunderstood and unappreciated.

6. *Misdiagnosis* - With the lack of knowledge of many gifted children, it can be easy to attribute some of their quirky behaviors with learning disabilities. Over or under focusing, difficulty sitting still, or an over active mind could easily be seen as ADHD. High sensitivity, intense fears, or the inability to relate to peers can even be seen as emotionally disturbed.

7. *Perfectionism* - We try to instill in children the goal of excellence. For some gifted, this goal can become an obsession. Attention to detail can be taken to an extreme with homework or projects taking on monumental proportions in time and energy just to achieve completion. Moving onto another task may be impossible until perfection is achieved on the first task - not an achievable goal on a daily basis.

8. *Multi-Potentiality* - Being good at many things sounds great but can be a real challenge. How do you pick one interest over another? How to schedule time appropriately? Decision making can become overwhelming and stress of outside parties - coaches, parents, teachers - complicates the confusion further. Multi-potentiality can also leave them scattered as they are interested in so many things, making them appear unfocused and unable to stick to one interest at a time.

9. *Disorganized/ Lack of Study Skills* - Learning to prioritize, organize, or clarify information may not occur to a child whose mind is processing information at a speedy rate. In the early school years, these children just file information, not needing study skills in order to be successful at school. When faced with challenging information for the first time - sometimes not until high school honors or advanced placements courses - these students have no idea why they are unable to do well. Their self concept is hammered and many choose to shut down. They do not have the basic skills their peers studiously learned without the complications of difficult content in the lower grades.

10 *Chameleon/Poisonous Frog* - For many gifted, they reach a point in which they realize that it is not cool to be gifted. Some choose to hide (typical of gifted girls) their giftedness and blend in with the crowd. Others embrace it with a vengeance -a sort of 'in your face' attitude. The chameleon effect remains except in situations when the child perceives it alright to let go of the outer skin and reveal the real person in special situation - many times only in groups of other gifted children.

11. *Skewed Self Concept* - Many gifted children have a very skewed concept of themselves. It could be over inflated if their reference point is their peers. It could be very low if their reference point is an expert in a particular area. Children have difficulty in their own self-perception but they have peers as reference points. Gifted students can have a lot of trouble finding reference points.