



SEL Needs of High Ability Students

The Facts

Social and emotional development provides a foundation for learning and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life. Gifted children experience the same social and emotional needs as other children, AND some also have some unique SEL and psychological needs. Consider the following:

Overexcitabilities or "intensities" in high ability students may manifest themselves as

- Intellectual intentness and focus on a particular topic
- Great sensitivity to environment (appreciation for music or art, sensitivity to loud noises or bright lights, more allergies, etc.)
- Surplus of physical energy
- Vivid imagination and creativity
- Heightened emotional sensitivity (reaction to criticism, perfectionism, empathy, attachment)

Asynchronous development: Physical, cognitive, and emotional development may be at different places within the same child, which presents a number of problems for the child with exceptional abilities.

- Adults, accustomed to advanced verbal reasoning from the child, may fail to understand emotional outbursts more typical of their chronological age.
- The child may find it difficult to communicate with age mate peers who are considerably below their intellectual level, even if they are at the same level emotionally.
- In general, the greater the level of ability, the greater the discrepancies.

Perfectionism: High ability students may

- Place unrealistically high standards for performance on themselves, which may result in anxiety, frustration, or self-blame for less-than-perfect performance.
- Feel as though others (parents or teachers) have unrealistically high expectations. This may result in fear of failure, avoidance of challenges, depression, and connection of self-worth to performance.
- Develop unrealistically high standards for the performance of others.

Self-esteem/identity issues: High ability students may experience difficulty constructing their identities, which may lead to lowered self-esteem. Difficulty with identity development may result from any of the following:

- Lack of understanding of higher abilities and their implications
- Feeling different from one's same-age peers
- Behaviors inconsistent with gender role expectations (e.g. sensitivity in gifted boys, assertiveness in gifted girls)
- Being identified as learning disabled as well as having high abilities
- Differences resulting from cultural, linguistic, or SES

- Indiana ranks second of 34 states in the percentage of students who made a suicide plan and third out of 36 states in the percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide.
- The majority of children and adolescents who attempt suicide have a significant mental health disorder, usually depression.

Tips for Parents of High Ability Students

- Allow increasing control in areas they are able to make decisions. This fosters independence and self-confidence.
- Allow choice when possible.
- Listen without offering criticism or solutions. Just listen.
- Provide opportunities for community service or action; this allows a sense of contribution.
- Promote social contact that is positive. Allow friends according to interests.
- Praise for personal values you are trying to promote: hard work, kindness, responsibility. Criticize privately.
- Promote the value of challenging work and appreciation of school and learning.
- Teach good time management and organizational skills.
- Be alert to conflicts experienced between high achievement and belonging to a particular group.
- Encourage positive relationships with other adults, e.g. teachers, coaches, Scout leaders, other relatives, mentors.
- Model acceptance of mistakes.
- Pick battles carefully. Think about what is important in the long run.
- Model healthy habits of good eating, exercise, down time, and relaxing pursuits.
- Stand together with the child's other parent in promoting the importance of school, work, effort, responsibility, and kindness; regardless of marital issues, divorce, etc.

Avoid

- Unrealistic expectations.
- Praise for being the best, for being perfect, for being brilliant.
- Control or criticism over eating or weight.
- Criticizing teachers and school in front of the child; seek solutions.
- Praising for attractiveness, appeal to opposite gender, etc.
- Stereotyping by gender.
- Criticism in front of others; comparison with other children.
- "Fixing" him or her. S/he is not wrong, just different.
- Rescuing from consequences or shielding from difficulties.

Tips to Share with High Ability Students

- When you have a concern, share it with a trusted friend, relative, or other adult. Thinking out loud helps define the issue; others may offer support and ideas.
- Focus on problem solving. Find out all you can, consider different views, consider whether the issue needs to be reframed, develop a strategy.
- Work hard. Sometimes more effort is spent on worrying about assignments, grades, or other concerns than is spent on actual work related to the concerns.
- Develop social skills. Be genuinely interested in others and what they are doing; be kind to everyone; invite someone else to share an activity you both will enjoy.
- Keep a journal or write songs or poetry. Regular writing about your thoughts and feelings helps you to clarify and allows you to see the progress you are making in growth and maturity.
- Engage in regular physical activity. Burning of energy in sports or physical exercise releases tension and promotes good health and positive self-concept.
- Do something for others. Engage in some sort of community service or regular assistance to someone less fortunate; it puts your own problems in perspective and boosts your self-esteem.
- Engage in relaxing activities for enjoyment. Read, sing, play an instrument, watch movies, cook, build things, follow a team, listen to music, go to a play, etc.

Avoid

- Worry without developing a positive plan for a solution.
- Wishful thinking without developing goals and plans.
- Neglect of work or problems.
- Withdrawing from others.
- Excessive self-blame and self-criticism.
- Expecting yourself and/or others to be perfect.

"Tips for Parents" and "Tips to Share with High Ability Students" are adapted from Burney, Virginia and Kristie Speirs Neumeister. *Guiding Students with High Abilities: Social and Emotional Considerations*, 2nd ed. Indiana Department of Education, 2010.

Warning Signs of Possible Mental Health Issues in a High Ability Student

Talk to the school counselor if you notice these behaviors:

- avoidance of crowds or groups
- absences or claims of illness on days of tests or presentations
- avoidance of challenging situations because of a fear of failure
- unhealthy perfectionism or disproportionate reaction to perceived failures
- changes in eating habits, grades, friendships, or sleeping patterns

What do school counselors, school social workers, and administrators do when students express or are suspected of suicidal ideation?

The Columbia Protocol, or Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS), supports suicide risk assessment with simple, plain-language questions that anyone can ask. The answers help to identify whether someone is at risk for suicide, assess the severity and immediacy of the risk, and gauge the level of support that the person needs by asking

- whether and when they have thought about suicide (ideation)
- what actions they have taken — and when — to prepare for suicide
- whether and when they attempted suicide or began a suicide attempt that was either interrupted by another person or stopped of their own volition

Social Emotional Needs Tip Sheets

<https://www.nagc.org/resources-publications/resources-parents/parent-tip-sheets>

[Asynchronous Development](#)

[Bullying](#)

[Cyberbullying and Gifted Children](#)

[Finding a Mental Health Professional](#)

[Making Friends](#)

[Perfectionism](#)

For More Information

<http://www.iag-online.org/>

<http://sengifted.org/>

https://www.hoagiesgifted.org/social_emotional.htm

Pushing Back on Perfectionism: How to be Happily Imperfect <https://counseling.northwestern.edu/blog/maladaptive-perfectionism-coping-strategies>

10 Social & Emotional Needs of the Gifted <http://www.byrdseed.com/10-facts-about-social-emotional-needs-of-the-gifted/>

The Social-Emotional Needs of Gifted Learners <http://www.greatpotentialpress.com/authors/author-articles/the-social-emotional-needs-of-gifted-learners>

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