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- Placing a child in an intellectual-level class, but exempting him from part of the output requirements, with alternate provisions for demonstrating knowledge, such as regular conversational check-ins, additional weighting to in-class participation, etc.
- Dramatically reducing repetition, such as exempting a child from homework when she has demonstrated *once* having mastered a concept.
- Providing large-text or spoken-word versions of higher-level reading materials and texts or providing comparable materials in video formats.
- Having an aide facilitate social interaction while an ASD child attends out-of-grade-level classes.
- Using computer-based, distance-learning options, including talent searches.
- Customizing a twice-exceptional child's education entirely, either *in situ* or in a homeschool setting.

These accommodations can and should also be adapted to family use. Allow a child to email a thank-you note or to do it by phone. Permit such educational screen time as documentaries or computer-based learning and creating until a child is satiated, rather than according to a limit geared for typical children. Time snacks of crunchy foods like carrots at schoolwork time, instead of separately; or allow a sensory-defensive child to eat in another room during meals, and have quality family togetherness at a different time.

Different, but familiar

Twice exceptional kids can be remarkably different from other kids, and helping them may require extreme measures. But they are still kids. They deserve the same chance to learn, challenge themselves, and excel as other children do.

Help 2e children find true intellectual peers. Enable and celebrate their strengths. Scaffold their weaknesses. They *will* soar.

Resources for Further Learning are available on the Gifted Homeschoolers Forum website at http://giftedhomeschoolers.org/.

GIFTED HOMESCHOOLERS FORUM
EDUCATION, ADVOCACY, COMMUNITY, AND SUPPORT

1467 Siskiyou Blvd #174, Ashland, OR 97520

Twice Exceptional

SMART KIDS WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES

What is 2e?

Twice exceptional, or "2e," children are intellectually gifted and also have learning differences or disabilities.

Twice exceptional children are doubly different from the norm.

- They have the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical intensity of giftedness, *plus* the challenge of their learning difference or disability.
- The duality of being 2e is not just difficult for others (the child is smart but struggling), but also for the child (*If I'm so smart, why is this so hard?*).
- 2e kids are more likely to be misdiagnosed and have dual or multiple diagnoses.
- Like all gifted kids, 2e kids are many ages at once. A child can be 7 chronologically and 14 intellectually, while writing like a 6-year-old and struggling with meltdowns like a 3-year-old.
- Children at the far end of the IQ spectrum have the potential to take a number of life and career paths or to break new ground because of their innate abilities, but learning differences may severely limit their potential if not remediated, scaffolded and supported.

Twice-exceptional kids may have any disability, including dyslexia, ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, sensory processing disorder, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and visual and auditory processing disorders.

But being twice exceptional also has joys and advantages. These unique children see the world differently than others. They may be exceptionally creative and divergent in their thinking, offer new ways to approach problems and solve challenges, have rich sensory perceptions that lead them to the pinnacles of achievement or artistry, or to form deep and complex interpersonal bonds as rewarding as they are intense.

UNIQUE

What's it like to be 2e?

Being twice exceptional is just like being anything else: You feel like yourself. At the same time, twice-exceptional children struggle with the dual challenge of already knowing much of what adults are trying to teach them, while having to struggle to do what other kids do with ease, either because of asynchrony—being "many ages at once"—or because of their learning difference or disability.

- By definition, the more gifted a child is, the more different she is from the norm. High-IQ kids are often more acutely aware of their differences.
- Those who are 2e, or just gifted, may suffer from "imposter syndrome," the feeling that they will soon be "found out" as an impostor.
- Twice exceptionality causes a child not to perform to full intellectual ability. In fact, the more profoundly gifted a 2e child is, the poorer he is likely to perform in the classroom. A 2e child who does well academically may be putting in twice the effort to reach that point.

All of these challenges put 2e kids at *very* high risk for anxiety and depression, even at *very* young ages.

Misdiagnoses

Asynchrony is part of giftedness, but also may be a symptom of a learning difference or disability, *even if the child is performing at or above grade level*.

This can make it very difficult to diagnose such challenges, and some healthcare providers may be reluctant to do so if the child is performing at age-grade level. But these kids need to be allowed to perform at *intellectual age level*. Holding them back causes both short and long-term harm, and bars them from the benefits and joys of learning to perform to their potential.

Further challenges in diagnosing disabilities come from the fact that some common characteristics of highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted children overlap with symptoms of certain learning differences, especially ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. In teasing out the causes of particular behaviors, and thus correctly diagnosing or ruling out learning differences, the use of very thorough diagnostic checklists can be helpful, particularly when compared against a list of common characteristics of giftedness.

Achievement and IQ testing provide, at best, a minimum estimate of a child's abilities. The IQ of a child who scores near the ceiling of a testing instrument is likely higher than the test can measure. Alternately, learning differences may greatly depress the child's scores, causing a profoundly gifted child to test just above the norm. Some gifted assessment providers have expertise in interpreting test scores to flag possible disabilities based on details like subtest score spreads and individual questions missed.

Remediation

The approach for remediation for a twice exceptional child differs from that of a typical child.

- Teasing out which asynchronies are a result of giftedness and which are a result of a disability or learning difference for which the child is compensating can be challenging.
- Remediation or therapy needs to aim at the child's intellectual level of competence, because that's who the core child is. Imagine asking a teenager to use only one-syllable words for his hearing therapy or an adult-level reader with poor motor skills to practice writing using elementary-level words. For vision therapy, research indicates vision performance can be brought up *much* higher than chronological age.



- Other challenges, even in the same child, should be viewed through the lens of asynchrony. A 2e dyslexic child may need heavy support to come up to age-grade level, or she may have *stealth dyslexia*, in which the child has compensated with her intelligence to be at or above grade level, but is still performing below her intellectual level. Some physical handwriting challenges may be remediated sufficiently to bring a child to or beyond age-level, but the child may never have mechanical writing skills that truly match his intellectual level.
- A maxim for children with disabilities, *least restrictive environment*, applies to 2e children as well—particularly as concerns their intellectual level. Remediation that focuses exclusively on the disability, without enabling the child to work at the level of her intellectual age, will be harmful. In that setting, a child will never have the satisfaction of accomplishing a challenging intellectual task, or learn a solid work ethic.

Let them soar, but scaffold weaknesses

The universal goal to support 2e children is to *meet their intellectual needs* above chronological age level, while *scaffolding their weaknesses.* This may require radical accommodations in educational, healthcare, and even day-to-day social, family, and functional settings.

The range of possible accommodations is broad, and must be tailored to the individual child. They may include:

- Encouraging keyboarding, storytelling and verbal responses, drawing, and other alternative forms of communication to handwriting.
- Allowing for movement while the child is learning. Minor support may include fidgets or chewing gum, while major interventions may include standing desks, stretchy bands on chair legs, or frequent jumping breaks. Conversely, some children benefit from a pressure vest or a weighted lap blanket.

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