

The Mind - Heart Connection  
 A Parent's Guide to Understanding The Social and Emotional Issues of Gifted Kids ©

**The Mind - Heart Connection**  
**Connection**  
 A Parent's Guide to Understanding the Social and Emotional Issues of Gifted Kids  
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**Giftedness**  
 Kentucky  
 "Exceptional children" who are identified as possessing demonstrated or potential ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in general intellectual aptitude, specific academic aptitude, creative or divergent thinking, psychosocial or leadership skills, or in the visual or performing arts.

**Giftedness**  
 Columbus Group, 1991  
 Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.

<i>Intellectual Characteristics</i>	<i>Personality Characteristics</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> exceptional reasoning ability	<input type="checkbox"/> insightfulness
<input type="checkbox"/> intellectual curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/> need to understand
<input type="checkbox"/> rapid learning rate	<input type="checkbox"/> need for mental stimulation
<input type="checkbox"/> facility with abstraction	<input type="checkbox"/> perfectionism
<input type="checkbox"/> complex thought processes	<input type="checkbox"/> need for precision/logic
<input type="checkbox"/> vivid imagination	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent sense of humor
<input type="checkbox"/> early moral concern	<input type="checkbox"/> sensitivity/empathy
<input type="checkbox"/> passion for learning	<input type="checkbox"/> intensity
<input type="checkbox"/> powers of concentration	<input type="checkbox"/> perseverance
<input type="checkbox"/> analytical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/> acute self-awareness
<input type="checkbox"/> divergent thinking/creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> nonconformity
<input type="checkbox"/> keen sense of justice	<input type="checkbox"/> questioning of rules/authority
<input type="checkbox"/> capacity for reflection	<input type="checkbox"/> tendency toward introversion

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*Intensity Takes Many Forms*

**Thought**  
 "Her mind is always whirling."

**Purpose**  
 "Once he makes up his mind to do something, he's not satisfied until it's accomplished."

**Emotion**  
 "She internalizes everything anyone says about her."

**Spirit**  
 "He's always looking out for someone less fortunate who needs help."

**Soul**  
 "She asks questions that philosophers have asked for centuries and gets upset when we can't give her definitive answers to them."  
 Delisle, 1999

*Perfectionism & Gifted Adolescents*

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>HEALTHY</u></p> <p><b>THEME</b> Order &amp; organization</p> <p><b>FACTORS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support Systems           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends, teachers, parents</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Personal Effort           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledged abilities</li> <li>• Hard working</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Personal Traits</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>UNHEALTHY</u></p> <p><b>THEME</b> Concern over mistakes</p> <p><b>FACTORS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived Expectations           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, peers, teachers, self</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Perceived Criticism           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family, peers, teachers, self</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Schuler, 1997</i></p>
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*Learning Styles of the Gifted*

**Accelerated:**

- interested in mastering & integrating increasingly complex material
- ability to learn fast
- recall large amounts of information fast
- highly efficient information-processors
- crave new information, harder problems
- sense of fulfillment: mastering higher & higher levels of material & applying it to solve problems of increasing difficulty
- high achievers in well-defined discipline
- succeed in curricular systems-stress knowledge acquisition, linear skill building, logical analysis
- may be indifferent to academic subject areas
- **sources of stress:** lock-step learning, endless drill & practice, fear of failure, socially immature
- **need:** help setting realistic goals, social skills

*(Colangelo & Zaffran)*

**Enriched:**

- wholly involved or immersed in a problem- forms a "relationship" with a problem
- focus on the problem as an end in itself rather than as a means to obtain more knowledge
  - their relationship to problem
  - and the learning process
- highly emotional, imaginative, internally motivated, curious, driven to explore
- reflective and emotionally mature
- passionate about a subject, project, cause
- aren't especially concerned with achievement
- invest great deal of emotional energy

- **require** teachers who are sensitive to intensity
  - feelings: frustration, passion, enthusiasm, idealism, anger, despair
- **need:** adult support to persist and/or harness energies more efficiently

*(Colangelo & Zaffran)*

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#### Learning Styles

- Visual
- Auditory
- Bodily-kinesthetic
  - Individual
  - Group
- Oral Expressive
- Written Expressive
  - Sequential
  - Global

#### Introversion

- territorial-private time/space
  - happy to be alone-lonely in crowd
  - become drained in groups
  - need time alone to recharge
  - prefers to work alone
  - acts cautiously meeting people
  - reserved, quiet, deliberate
  - do not enjoy being center of attention
  - do not share private thoughts with just anyone
  - form a few deep attachments
  - select activities carefully, thoughtfully
  - think carefully before speaking
  - see reflection as very important
  - concentrate well, deeply
  - become absorbed in thoughts and ideas
  - limit their interests but explore deeply
  - communicate best 1:1
  - get agitated, irritated without enough time alone or undisturbed
- Burris & Kaenzig, 1999 SENG

#### Extraversion

- social, need other people
  - demonstrate high energy and noise
  - communicate with excitement, enthusiasm
  - draw energy from people, love parties
  - lonely and restless when not with other people
  - establish multiple fluid relationships
  - engage in lots of activities and have many interest areas
  - have many best friends and talk to them for long periods of time
  - are interested in external events not internal ones
  - prefer face-to-face verbal communication rather than written communication
  - share personal information easily
  - respond quickly
- Burris & Kaenzig, 1999 SENG

#### Strategies to Help Introverts in School


- internal reflective focus-honor need for structure, quiet, small groups
- independent studies, small group instruction, collaborative learning activities, tiered instruction, debate, dramatics or role-playing, journaling, quiet time, book clubs, etc.
- like lectures, expository & deductive modes of instruction
- need wait time, warning about what they are expected to do
- activities with minimal noise and stimulation
- down time built into schedule
- moderate amounts of small group work

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#### Strategies to Help Extraverts in School


- high stimulation, movement and activity throughout classroom
- lots of contact with others
- open spaces for working
- like open discussions and discovery activities



#### Strategies to Help Introverts at Home


- provide private space
- guarantee quiet time
- model "alone" not "lonely" talk
- protect their right to say "enough"
- provide small group activities
- provide coping strategies for those times when they have to act extraverted
- talk about your own personality needs
- discuss books that feature introverts-bibliotherapy

Burris & Kaenzig [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)



#### Framework for understanding Gifted Children/Adolescents

Manaster & Powell  
1983




#### 3 conditions which define adjustment problems


1. Out of Stage
2. Out of Phase
3. Out of Sync

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**Out of Stage**  
Gifted children/adolescents are different from average adolescents in their stage of cognitive and related development and/or in the quality and variety of their talents



**Type of Problem**


- boredom
  - frustrated by traditional instruction
- multi-talented
  - isolated interests & talents
- perfectionism
  - discontent-short of own goals
- pressures for success
  - pressure to achieve
  - unrealistic expectations of being gifted
- success masks student's needs
  - desensitizes us to their needs
- uneven development
  - asynchrony



**External Barriers for Cognitive/Affective Growth of Gifted Students**

- Low expectations-parents, family members; teachers; stereotypic beliefs and myths
- Grouping by age
- Policy-national, state, local
  - (one-size fits all; fear of causing arrogance?)
- Lack of understanding of social/emotional/cognitive needs
- Family conditions: perceived lack of support and nurturance; family problems

(Nevitt, 1999; Roberts, 2001)



**How to Deal with Issue of BOREDOM**

- Examine your child's definition of boredom
- Speak with your child's teacher about the situation
- Speak with other parents. Your child may not be the only one experiencing this problem.
- Explore other alternatives that will "liven up" an otherwise dull assignment.
- Ask your "friendly" librarian for suggestions regarding possible sequels to assigned literature.

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#### Perfectionism

- perfectionism is influenced by environment-  
positive motivator or stressor
- recognize your own & others' perfectionistic tendencies
- set priorities, help your child to set them as well
- model acceptance of mistakes
- set high but realistic standards
  - time, effort, not giving up
  - see themselves as problem-solver, hard worker, healthy
- negative emotions are normal-expressed in healthy ways
- help child improve self-evaluation skills-emphasize process & improvement
- show child inherent dignity & self-worth-avoid comparisons

- recognize, support, nurture interests, passions
- use humor, have fun
- teach that health is important-encourage relaxation
- seek professional counseling if child is unable to act or becomes fearful of rejection

#### Statements:

- Yard by yard it's hard. Inch by inch it's a cinch.
- Teach courage: I know you can try
- You kept on trying even when you didn't know how it would turn out.
- What did you learn while you were doing this?
- What part did you enjoy the most?
- What might you try next time?
- How might you do it differently next time?
- Call work "practice"

#### Out of Phase

Gifted children/adolescents,  
Possibly because they are  
Out of Stage, have abilities &  
Interests at variance from their  
average peers & are themselves  
unable or unwilling to fit in  
Socially due to these apparent  
differences

#### Socialization

the ability to adapt to the needs of the group

#### Social Development

a deep, comfortable level of self-acceptance that

leads to true friendships with others

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#### Type of Problem

- *alienation*
  - distance from/without peer groups
  - divergent thinking/creativity
  - especially early adolescence
  - versus wish to be accepted
- *sensitivity*
  - mixed blessing: asset, liability (manipulating others)
  - to issues not relevant to peers
  - to interpersonal relationships
- *deficit social skills*
  - higher IQ-sometimes more difficult to become socially adjusted

#### Social Coping among Gifted Adolescents/Preadolescents

##### Six Factors

- denying giftedness
- focus on popularity
- social interaction
- humor
- conformity
- denying effect of giftedness on peer acceptance

- *Males*: more likely to use humor
- *Females*: social interaction greater, denial of giftedness at older ages
- *Issues of popularity*: rises in middle school, levels off in high school

Swiatek, 2002

#### When your child feels left out...

- Are your child's perceptions accurate?
- Restate the problem & try to get your child to think through what happened & what his or her options were
- Ask:
  - Why do you think he or she left you out?
  - What else could you have done?
  - Could you have played with someone else?

#### Out of Sync

Gifted children/adolescents, either because they are *Out of Stage* or *Out of Phase*, or *both*, *feel* that they are different, whether in positive or negative, self-enhancing or self-deflating ways, and feel they do not, should not or cannot fit in.

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*Type of Problem*

- self-concept problems
- self-image problems
- excessive self-criticism
- poor self-concept
- insecurity and anxiety
  - due to perceived: physical deficits, different interests, self-direction
- too much, too cognitive
  - attention given to cognitive development than to emotional needs- "burn out"-tired of extra work
- severe psychological problems
  - caused by accumulated environmental insensitivity
  - maladjustment increases with age

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*Irrational Beliefs of Some Gifted Children*


1. Everyone must like me.
2. I must like everyone.
3. There's nothing left to learn and no one around who can teach me anything.
4. If I'm not popular than I'm a social outcast.
5. The majority is always right.
6. The majority is always wrong.
7. If I'm so smart I should be able to make friends easily.
8. No one will find me physically attractive enough to want to date me.
9. Friendship doesn't matter as long as you like yourself.
10. Boys are supposed to be smart, girls are supposed to be popular.

<i>Adolescents</i>	<i>Gifted Adolescents</i>
<i>Needs</i>	<i>Issues</i>
Independence	Ownership
Self-directions	Dissonance
Models	Risk-taking
Defining oneself	Others' expectations
Taken seriously	Impatience
Acceptance, rejection	Identity
Process of adolescence	Sexuality

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*Predictable Crises of Gifted Adolescents*

- underachievement and pressure to conform
- fear of success by adolescent females because of conflicting social messages
- developmental immaturity, especially by boys with visual/motor developmental lags
- multipotentiality (overchoice dilemma)
- nonsuccess or “paralyzed perfectionism” due to stronger competition & higher goals


Blackburn & Erickson, 1986



*Mistakes Gifted Young People Too Often Make*

- Misunderstand what giftedness actually means in their lives
- Hold unrealistically high expectations for their own achievement
- Confuse the means and the ends of their accomplishments
- Overvalue their cognitive dimensions at the expense of their affective natures
- View giftedness as an entitlement


Kaplan, 1983



*Symptoms of undesirable levels of anxiety in gifted children*

- decreased performance
- reluctance to work on team
- excessive sadness/rebellion
- extremes of activity/inactivity
- repetition of rules & directions to make sure they can be followed
- avoidance of new ventures unless certain of the outcome
- deep concern with personal powerlessness
- expression of low self-esteem
- reluctance to make choices or suggestions
- a change in noise or quietude
- other marked changes in personality

Dirkes, 1983



*Three kinds of depression associated with gifted children/adolescents*

- perfectionism: desire to live up to standards of morality, responsibility & achievement they may have set Impossibly high
- alienation: feeling cut off from other people
- existential: intense concerns about the basic problems of human existence; personal worry about the meaning of the child's own life

Webb, Meckstroth, Tolan, 1983

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#### Signs that Individual Counseling is Needed

- intense competitiveness
- social isolation
- alienation within the family
- inability to control anger
- excessive manipulateness
- chronic underachievement
- depression or continual boredom
- sexual acting out
- evidence of abuse of any kind
- recent traumatic experiences/ loss of a loved one

#### How adults can help gifted children/adolescents be good at some things that are unpopular with their friends

- connect child with others-near peers-who recently lived through the same fears of social ostracism
- encourage young artists, activists, & chess champs to surround themselves with others like themselves
- remind them that life changes, that things do get better
- remind them to be on guard against their own half-buried stereotypes

Delisle, 1992

#### Suggestions for Educators, Parents, Counselors

1. Encourage controlled risk-taking
2. Provide myriad social experiences for gifted students
3. Inventory family similarities and differences as compared to schoolmates
4. Encourage reading of biographies of eminent people
5. Provide mentorship opportunities for gifted students
6. Love and respect gifted students for who they are
7. Encourage a self-concept that extends far beyond the academic self-concept

Cross, 1998


#### The most important task a gifted child/adolescent faces:

Building a  
"Comfortable Alliance"  
with their  
abilities and talents

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*Successful Gifted Adults Recall*

- a parent or relative who took personal interest in their talent area
- parent(s) who valued their talents
- parent(s) who assumed they wanted to develop their special talents
- parent(s) who encouraged and rewarded development of the talent through home activities


Bloom & Sosniak ( 1981)



*Three Critical Family Dynamics*

- interacting cooperatively (as democratically as possible)
- minimizing conflict (don't hide it, work things out respectfully)
- maximizing freedom of personal expression


( Bloom & Sosniak, 1981; Cornell & Grossberg, 1987; Goertzel & Goertzel, 1987)



*Model Families*

- place high value on learning (not just schooling)
- cultivate the joy of learning and support the need to create
- recognize and respect their gifted child's talents
- maintain strong social values and convictions
- are intolerant of excessive childhood rebellion
- have stable family environments

Seeley, 1989



*Families of the Gifted Can:*

- monitor the family context
- allow broad freedom
- establish clear rules and expectations
- emphasize and model inner control & reward
- offer challenging opportunities
- invest time and effort toward excellence
- separate the act from the person
- avoid letting giftedness become central focus of relationships
- express love & care openly

Cskiszentmihalyi, 1987

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ADVOCACY: PARENTS AS PARTNERS

FIVE "KNOWS" For Parent Advocates:

- Know yourself and where you stand
- Know what you are facing
- Know the law and how to make it work for you
- Know who's who in the school system
- Know when, where, and how to contact people in education

Humphreys, GCT, 1987

BUILDING BLOCKS:

- Be a welcome person in your child's school
- Consider how you can enhance the system's needs, control, prestige
- Invest in your personal relationship with school personnel
- Ask your child how you can help & what you can discuss with the teacher
- Express appreciation for the teacher for a specific behavior
- Talk with the teacher about your child's strengths, interests, & sensitivities as perceived at school & at home
- Monitor & document
- Subscribe to gifted periodicals & pass them on to teachers
- If you are angry, stay home. Go to school when you are ready to support & negotiate

Meckstroth, *Understanding Our Gifted*, 1989

ADVOCATING FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

- Obtain an accurate assessment of your child's abilities
- Work hard to establish a good relationship with your child's school
- Provide school, church or synagogue, and other community agencies, with information about gifted children
- Remember - you are paving the way for other families
- Gradually teach your child to advocate for himself or herself
- Work with others to establish state & federal mandate guaranteeing the rights of gifted children to a free & appropriate public education
- Finally, take care of yourself.

Kearney, *Understanding Our Gifted*, 1993

*Self-Advocacy for Gifted Children !!!*

- Understand your rights and responsibilities
- Assess your learner profile
  - Educational data
  - Student interest
  - Personality
  - Learning styles
  - Just for fun
- Consider available options
- Connect with advocates

Douglas, *Parenting for High Potential*, Dec.'04

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