

GIFTED CHILDREN AND TEENS:

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

What does it mean to be gifted? Aren't all kids gifted? Kids can be gifted athletes, or have exceptional ability in music, art, social skills, and many other areas. Regardless of their particular abilities, all kids are special and valuable. The label "gifted" is used currently in schools to refer to children who have exceptional intellectual ability. There are many definitions of what "gifted" means, and many cut-off points and methods of determining who is gifted. The gifted are a diverse group.

How is it decided if a child is gifted? The process varies depending on the reason for identifying a child as gifted. Each school district has its own method for making this decision. According to California standards, districts should use multiple measures to identify gifted students. Such measures may include achievement tests, intelligence tests, input from parents and teachers, and a portfolio of the student's work. For schools, the purpose of identifying gifted students is to provide programs that meet their special needs; different schools offer different programs. For parents, understanding about their children's giftedness is crucial in order to meet their social and emotional needs, to provide appropriate discipline, enrichment, and educational opportunities, and more.

What are some typical characteristics of giftedness?

- Advanced verbal skills
- Excellent memory, rapid learning rate
- Complex, deep thought processes
- Intense curiosity and passion for learning
- Daydreaming, vivid imagination
- Long attention span, when interested
- Idealism and strong sense of justice
- Questioning of rules and authority
- Intensity
- Sensitivity, especially emotional
- Wide range of interests
- Sophisticated/unusual sense of humor
- Creativity and divergent thinking
- Perfectionism, impatience with self/others
- Humanitarian concerns, compassion
- High degree of energy

What are some potential problems associated with giftedness?

- Asynchronous development: Gifted children may develop their abilities unevenly. For example, they may lack the fine motor skills to write down their advanced thoughts, or the emotional maturity to cope with their knowledge of world events. Adults may expect them to act older than their chronological ages.
- Poor educational fit: Gifted children may become impatient with others and frustrated with routine and drill. They may question teaching procedures. Without appropriate stimulation, some become disillusioned with school, fail to fulfill their potential, or develop other problems.
- Heightened physical and/or emotional sensitivities: Gifted children may be very sensitive to sounds, the feeling of their clothing, fantasies, emotions, etc. Their intense reactions may be extremely difficult for them, and those around them, to understand and to manage.
- Learning Disabilities: Some gifted children also have learning disabilities. Their gifts and disabilities may mask each other, or one of them may be unrecognized. These children have complex educational needs that may not be fully understood and addressed.
- Peer relationships: Some gifted kids have difficulty finding friends with similar interests, abilities, and needs. Some may not have well-developed social skills, or may seem "quirky." Kids their own age may not understand them, and sometimes bully them.
- Perfectionism: Gifted children's high standards and expectations may lead to perfectionism, self-criticism, intolerance of others, extreme sensitivity to criticism, and depression.
- Misdiagnosis: Giftedness can be misdiagnosed as a disorder such as AD/HD, Asperger's, Bipolar Disorder, etc. On the other hand, giftedness can mask such a disorder, or it may not be recognized that a child has both a disorder and giftedness.

What do gifted children and teens need from their parents?

- Give them your time, love, acceptance, support, discipline, and stability; every child needs these.
- Learn all you can about giftedness and the way your child's giftedness affects his or her needs.
- Be a knowledgeable, positive advocate for appropriate educational opportunities.
- Make sure gifted kids have some things to do that they find challenging, in and out of school.
- Encourage original thinking; encourage gifted kids to go outside their comfort zones.
- Provide a wide range of experiences, and encourage them to develop their personal interests.
- Read aloud to gifted kids, even after they have learned to read for themselves.
- Foster opportunities to interact with "peers" of all ages who share similar interests.
- Respect their uniqueness, their ideas, and their dreams. Accept their strengths and limitations.
- Focus on your child as a person, not just his accomplishments. Don't compare him with others.
- Listen and speak to your child with consideration and respect.
- Provide consistent discipline, explaining your reasons but avoiding debates.
- Teach and model stress management and organizational skills.
- Don't over-schedule; gifted kids need "down time."
- Take care of yourself. Gifted kids can be exhausting. Connect with other parents of gifted kids.
- Check out some of the following resources:

WEBSITES

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted www.sengifted.org
Hoagies' Gifted Education Page www.Hoagiesgifted.org
California Association for the Gifted www.cagifted.org
National Association for Gifted Children www.nagc.org
Davidson Institute for Talent Development www.ditd.org

BOOKS

A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children by James Webb PhD et al
The Gifted Kids Survival Guide (For Ages 10 and Under) by Judy Galbraith
The Gifted Kids Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook by Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle
Stand Up for Your Gifted Child: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home
by Joan Franklin Smutny
"Mellow out" They Say. If I Only Could: Intensities and Sensitivities of the Young and Bright
by Michael M. Picchowski
*Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD,
Asperger's, Depression, and Other Disorders* by James Webb, PhD et al
*To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled: Strategies for Helping Bright Students with LD, ADHD, and
More* by Susan M. Baum and Steven V. Owens

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Tri-County GATE Council (tri-countygate.org) is an affiliate of the California Association for the Gifted (CAG). Parents, educators, and community members are welcome to attend the monthly meetings, where information and resources are shared.

SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) Parent Groups offer education and support to parents of gifted children and teens. Contact Judy Wiener (see below).

I hope that this information sheet has been helpful. For more information, you can contact me at:

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