



Raising Your Gifted Child – Practically

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Parenting is just more difficult now because of:

- Fractured families
- Lack of extended family and neighborhood support
- Increased mobility and lack of community
- Fast pace that is seemingly more urgent
- Information explosion handicaps relationships
- Disturbing role models
- “Unthinkable” acts are no longer unthinkable
- Peers and society are stronger influences than parents



What is the current social and education climate?

- Much ignorance, misinformation, and bias still exists about talented, able learners.
- Parent of gifted children are often criticized as exaggerating or being pushy.
- Parents of gifted children have very few resources for information.
- The research indicates that parents are extremely important, but seldom are included by schools.

Myths about Gifted Children

- If they have high ability in one area, they are likely to have equally high abilities in other areas
- The “regular” educational system typically meets their needs
- They can succeed without special help because they already have so much talent
- They are not aware of being different unless someone point it out to them
- They always will show their abilities in school and will want to emphasize them
- They enjoy serving as “models” and “examples” for other children
- They only live up to their potential if adults constantly push them
- Their emotional maturity is at the same level as their intellectual ability
- They are easy to parent, and families always value their special ability
- They are no different from other children because all children are gifted



Issues for Parents and Teachers of Gifted Children

- Lack of information about characteristics
- Understanding the level of giftedness
- Selecting appropriate educational placements
- Peer relation issues
- Understanding the intensity and sensitivity



Issues for Parents and Teachers of Gifted Children

- Sibling issues
- Underachievement
- Perfectionism
- Communication issues
- Discipline and self-discipline




Issues for Parents and Teachers of Gifted Children

- Asynchronous development
- Twice-exceptional gifted issues
- Misdiagnosis of gifted children
- Finding professional help

Although High Ability Is a Benefit Overall, Some Problems Are More Frequent

- Boredom and anger
- Asynchronous development
- Underachievement
- Peer issues
- Sibling rivalry
- Feelings of loneliness
- Power struggles with parents and teachers
- Stress and perfectionism
- Misdiagnosis
- Health and behavioral problems
 - Learning disabilities (“twice-exceptional”)
 - Asthma
 - Allergies
 - Reactive Hypoglycemia
- Existential depression
- Others have unrealistic expectations about them
- Their judgment lags behind their intellectual abilities




Frequent Characteristics of High Potential/Gifted/Talented Children

- Unusually large vocabularies
- Complex sentence structures
- Greater comprehension of language nuances
- Longer attention span, persistence
- Intensity of feelings and actions

DABROWSKI OVEREXCITABILITIES

- **Intellectual** (Avid Reading, Curiosity, Asking Probing Questions, Concentration, Problem Solving, Theoretical Thinking)
- **Imaginational** (Fantasy Play, Animistic and Imaginative Thinking, Daydreaming, Dramatic Perception, Use of Metaphor)
- **Emotional** (Concern for Others, Timidity and Shyness, Fear and Anxiety, Difficulty Adjusting to New Environments, Intensity of Feeling)
- **Psychomotor** (Marked Enthusiasm, Rapid Speech, Surplus of Energy, Nervous Habits, Impulsive Actions)
- **Sensual** (Sensory Pleasures, Appreciation of Sensory Aspects of Experiences, Avoidance of Overstimulation)



Frequent Characteristics of High Potential/Gifted/Talented Children

- Unusually large vocabularies
- Complex sentence structures
- Greater comprehension of language nuances
- Longer attention span, persistence
- Wide range of interests
- Strong curiosity; limitless questions
- Like to experiment; puts ideas or things together in unusual ways

Frequent Characteristics of High Potential/Gifted/Talented Children

(continued)

- Learn basic skills quickly and with less practice than peers
- Largely self-taught reading and writing skills as pre-schoolers
- Unusually good memory; retain information
- Unusual sense of humor; may use puns
- Like to organize people and things, and typically devise complex games
- Imaginary playmates (as preschoolers)



Guiding Gifted Children Successfully is Just More Difficult Now because of

- Fractured families
- Lack of extended family and neighborhood support
- Increased mobility and lack of community
- Faster pace that is seemingly more urgent
- Information explosion handicaps relationships
- Disturbing role models
- “Unthinkable” acts are no longer unthinkable
- Lack of consistent consequences for behaviors
- Depression is now ten times the rate of the 1950s



Support for Gifted Education is Lacking

- Today's education system contains a widespread bias against programs for talented children
- The last comprehensive nationwide survey of gifted education programs in U.S. public schools was in 1985
- Over one-half of the superintendents believed that they had no gifted children in their districts
- Schools select services that are visible to parents rather than programs that are more educationally substantive but less apparent. Only about half the states currently have a legislative mandate to serve the special needs of gifted and talented children
- Less than half the states require special training of teachers of gifted and talented students
- Of each Federal dollar spent for education, less than two cents goes to fund programs for gifted children



What Is the Social and Educational Climate?

- Parents of gifted children have very few resources for information
- Much ignorance and misinformation still exists about talented, able learners
- The curriculum generally is lock-step where every child is expected to learn the same material at approximately the same age
- Educational system increasingly focus on basic minimal levels of competence and achievement
- Our society is perilously drifting into an anti-intellectual mode with emphasis on mediocrity and conformity
- Socialization is viewed as more important than academic achievement
- The most eminent and successful adults received educational programs very different than those currently offered in most schools

Lessons From People Who Became Eminent

From *Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More Than 700 Famous Men and Women* (Goertzel, Goertzel, Goertzel, & Hanson, 2003)

- Homes usually were full of books and stimulating conversation
- Their families valued learning, and the children loved learning
- As children, most of them disliked school and school teachers



People Who Became Eminent

Findings from *Cradles of Eminence* (continued)

- These children learned to think and express themselves clearly
- All had learned to be persistent in pursuing their own visions and goals
- Many had difficult childhoods
 - Poverty
 - Broken homes
 - Physical handicaps
 - Parental dissatisfaction
 - Controlling or rejecting parents

People Who Became Eminent

Findings from *Cradles of Eminence* (continued)

- Their parents held strong opinions about controversial subjects
- Their parents, particularly mothers, were highly involved in the lives of their children, even dominating
- The parents often were pressured by others to have their children conform to mediocrity



Key Tasks for Guiding Gifted Children

- Develop the relationship and belongingness particularly within the family
- Nurture resilience and the development of values
- Accept and appreciate the child's uniqueness
- Help the child to like himself
- Teach the child self-motivation, self-management, and self-discipline

Six Practical Guidelines

- Create an environment that promotes achievement and motivation
- Avoid power struggles
- Develop a positive relationship
- Provide stimulation, interest, and challenge
- Establish appropriate goals and subgoals
- Build on gradual success

(from Whitney & Hirsch, *A Love for Learning*, 2007)

- Challenge
- Control
- Commitment
- Compassion



Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

➤ Be aware of what you model

- We openly compare gifted kids with others
- We say things we would not say to another adult (“killer statements”)
- We often model yelling, lack of acceptance of others, poor problem-solving
- Avoid referential speaking, sarcasm; ridicule; gossip

Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

- Value the relationship; avoid barriers to communication
 - Barrier say, “This TV show is more important than you” and “I’m not available”
 - Use special time; special place; special events (Quiet vs. Noise)
 - Trips
 - Treehouse, walks, bike rides
 - Fishing or camping
 - Going out for breakfast



Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

- Set limits, but avoid power struggles
- Give choices wherever possible (Freedom within limits; the “V” of love)
- Avoid “shooing flies” or getting “sucked into” issues

Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

- Set the fewest limits needed, but enforce those you set
 - Be realistic and consistent (difficult in blended families)
 - Check signals with your teammate (family huddles)
 - Try not to overreact (“doomsday limits”)
 - Particularly avoid inconsistent punishment

- Use “natural consequences” wherever possible
 - It can be difficult to do, but...
 - Allows you to be sympathetic & supportive
 - “The school of experience is a hard one, but...”

Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

- “Take the wind out of the sail” (It’s better than the alternative!)
- Remember that discipline is not the same as punishment
 - Punishment only tells you what not to do
 - Punishment harms the relationship
- Don’t over-control and don’t get over-involved (confluence and enmeshment)
 - When do you push? How do you know when to step back?
 - Don’t value the child only for achieving and producing results.

Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

- Expect competence and focus on success
 - Children live up, or down, to our expectations
 - Create success experiences, but be like a good coach
 - Use “I admire”
 - Catch them doing something right (*One Minute Manager*)
 - Avoid the “7 A’s, 1 B” phenomenon
 - Start with their areas of interest; then branch to yours
 - Use anticipatory praise



Strategies for Guiding Gifted Children

- Model tradition-breaking and how one can resist peer pressures
- Model and reinforce self-management, independence, and resilience



Overview – Guiding Gifted Children

- Separate your desires from those of your children; they must live their own lives.
- But *Cradles of Eminence* suggests that you should be quite involved in their lives.



Overview – Guiding Gifted Children

The goals for your child (see *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children*; *Smart Girls*; *Smart Boys*; and *The Shelter of Each Other*) should be that they will have:

- The capacity to work and to love
- An ability to set their own priorities, goals, and directions
- A tolerance for frustration; tolerance of ambiguity; future mindedness
- Achieved a sense of values for humankind, including honesty and courage
- Resilience and the ability to relate to others in a give and take way
- Discovered their learning passion and have a commitment to explore them



Overview – Guiding Gifted Children

- Remember the importance of your relationship
- Remember that there is a long time between when the seed is planted and the tree bears fruit.
- Remember that you must take care of yourself. When your battery is run down, you have nothing left to give.

Recommended Readings

A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007)

Children: The Challenge (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1991)

Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More than 700 Famous Men and Women (Goertzel, Goertzel, Goertzel, & Hansen, 2003)

Dr. Sylvia Rimm's Smart Parenting: How to Raise a Happy, Achieving Child (Rimm, 1996)

Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers
(Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan 1982)

How to Behave So Your Children Will Too (Severe, 2003)



Recommended Readings

The Optimistic Child (Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995)

The Resilience Factor (Reivich & Shatté, 2002)

The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families (Pipher, 1995)

Siblings without Rivalry (Fabert & Mazlish, 1998)

Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood, and the Search for Meaning (Kerr & Cohn, 2001)

Smart Girls: A New Psychology of Girls, Women, and Giftedness.
(Kerr, 1997)