

Preparing for Today, Tomorrow, and the Future

Transitions: Supporting Your Gifted Child's Constantly Changing World

by Dr. Jim Granada, Director

Think of a time in which your gifted child experienced a challenging transition. What did you do to help with the transition? In retrospect, what might you have done differently? From early childhood to young adulthood, gifted children journey through a variety of transitions for which they need a parent's understanding and support. Whether it's the first day in a structured pre-school or kindergarten setting or heading off to college for the first time, children need to know that their primary advocates, the individuals that understand their complexity the most, will be there to help cross the transitional bridge.

What makes these transitions particularly challenging for parents are the many variables that can impact both the transition and the support provided by parents. Parents may have anxieties about the unknown as their children explore pathways of which parents have no reference points. These anxieties can be particularly acute when taking a journey with the firstborn, or when the child chooses a pathway very different than the pathways that were taken by parents when growing up.

Parents may also complicate the transitions if they have issues regarding their own journey through childhood. What may have been a particularly troublesome transition for a parent when they were a child may be smooth sailing for a son or daughter. We all want our children to learn from our mistakes and not make the same ones we made, but we must keep in mind that the pathways of the past may be very different than those that our children are trekking.

One additional challenge in supporting a child's transitions may come from a resistance to giving a child more independence as they get older. While parents innately have the urge to be protective, gifted children often will have a strong sense of independence and want to break free of the protective nature of their parents. Combine the need for independence with a willingness of a child to take risks, a parent may resort to becoming more controlling rather than supportive, creating conflict in the parent-child relationship.

When gifted children enter school for the first time, their behaviors must change to fit the new setting. Once they step into an environment populated by other children, they no longer operate as the center of the universe.

Structures and routines must be adapted to, and parents may struggle with the changes, while at the same time wondering if they are doing enough as a parent now that responsibilities for their child are now being shared with at least one adult outside of the family. At this point of transition, parents need to support their child by balancing the structures and routines of school with the freedom to ask unlimited questions, the freedom to dabble in areas of interest, and the freedom to discover that the home can continue to support and foster.

Another critical transition is when children move from the inclusive, nurturing elementary school environment to the more fast-paced and complex world of middle school, where many adults (with many different personalities and teaching styles) share the responsibility of educating children. Unfortunately, this complex educational transition parallels the even more complex physical, social and emotional transition into adolescence. As the need for independence grows, and as other adults and peers grow in their influence over one's child, a parent will need to be extremely creative and flexible in determining ways in which to support their child while simultaneously giving the child the space they need during this transition.

Communication becomes pivotal at this transitional stage, and may be the primary means of parental support during these challenging years.

While transitions will continue throughout a young person's life, the support system expands and the parent's role, while still important, becomes less critical in young adulthood. And for most of you, those transitional bridges remain to be built. Good luck on your journey!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

In this issue we take a look at factors that impact gifted individuals: transitions, gender, and preparing for the future. We hope you find some useful information to guide you on your journey through gifted education.

College Planning for Gifted by Sandra Berger

There are more than 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Choosing among them is a complex task. Recruiting procedures and a wide variety of publications offer idyllic scenes of campus life but do little to clarify decision making. The increasing number and variety of books on how to get accepted by the college of your choice adds to the anxiety and expectations. Unless the match between institutions and students is truly a good one, both are likely to be disappointed.

Gifted and talented students often have problems beyond those of most other students who consider college and career choices. A systematic, collaborative approach is needed whereby students learn that college planning is part of life career development; it need not be a finite event that begins and ends mysteriously or arbitrarily.

Learning about colleges is a two-step process. Step 1 involves collecting general information by reading, talking with people (asking questions), and visiting colleges. By the end of 11th grade, the student should be able to develop a list of 10 to 20 colleges based on personal criteria. Step 2 involves analyzing and evaluating information. Students should be attuned to their needs and be creative researchers. By the middle of 12th grade, the student should be able to narrow his or her list to five or six colleges, taking into consideration (a) personal values, interests, and needs; (b) the variety and range of available college opportunities; (c) realistic constraints such as cost and distance; and (d) the method used by the colleges to select a freshman class (selectivity factor). The final list should include a safety school (one that will definitely accept the student), a long shot (admissions criteria are slightly beyond the student's credentials), and three or four colleges having admissions criteria that match the student's credentials.

Students should understand that the way they address the application process may be the critical factor determining acceptance or rejection.

The application requires the following two kinds of information:

1. Objective information including biographical data, information on academic performance, standardized test scores, advanced placement (AP) examination grades, and additional numerical information.
2. Subjective information including extracurricular activities, recommendations, essay and/or personal statement, and a personal interview.

WHAT COLLEGES LOOK FOR

- **Academic performance:** Grade point average and class rank.
- **Academic rigor:** Evidence of superior ability in the form of honors, GT, or AP courses. Depth of study in areas such as foreign languages and mathematics.
- **Quality:** Four or five academic subjects each year.
- **Balance:** Evidence that the student took a broad curriculum (mathematics and science, history, and English courses).
- **Trends:** Evidence as to whether the student's grades are improving each year. Recent performance is the most important indicator.
- **Consistency:** The parts of the application should fit together to provide a common theme and make the student "come alive" on paper.
- **Standardized tests:** PSATs, SATs, ACTs, and Achievement Tests are the only objective way a college can compare students from all parts of the country. Selective schools may emphasize achievement test scores.
- **Extracurricular activities and other supporting material:** When highly selective colleges decide between two students who are academically equal, the creative presentation of extracurricular activities, the quality of recommendations, the essay or personal statement, the interview, and other supporting material make a difference.
- **Community service:** Admissions officers know that an altruistic student, one who contributes to community life without regard for compensation, is likely to contribute to college life.
- **Recommendations:** Recommendations should present a positive picture and distinguish between the applicant and others who are equally qualified.
- **The application essay:** The essay can reassure the admissions committee that the student is capable of college-level work.

College and career planning may be particularly difficult for some gifted students. However, it can be a growth-promoting experience for all participants when the ultimate goal--student decisions based on realistic criteria that result in a satisfying life--is kept at the forefront of all decision-making activity.

Berger, S. (1989). *College planning for gifted students*. Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children. ERIC EC Digest #E490, ED321495 (1990).

Supporting Girls in Early Adolescence by Rhonda Boyer

Puberty is a trying time for parents and their children; however, it isn't a permanent state of being. Often gifted girls during early adolescence need a little extra support. The very nature of being female and being gifted presents a quandary. By age 11, many gifted girls do not know they have talents. Others, who know, guard it as a well-kept secret. This means the abilities they could use to develop their potential are instead wasted on adjusting others' expectations (Eby & Smutny, 1990).

Girls in general continue to receive mixed messages about their value. Gender expectations expressed by the media and society praise boys for being athletic, smart, and competitive; girls for being pretty, pleasant, and nurturing. Gifted girls tread into the stereotypical waters of male value where they do not belong. Often they go underground and hide their academic and intellectual strengths, particularly in math and science, because boys may perceive the gifted girl as competing against them with her skill in a field traditionally male-dominated.

Early adolescence is a time when boys and girls vie for approval from each other. Unfortunately approval means behaving the way everyone else does, thinking along the lines of "*even if it means not being me, even if it means pretending like I am not gifted.*" According to a recent national report (2000), 6th and 7th grade girls rate being popular and well-liked as more important than being perceived as competent or independent.

Denial of self and denial of skills can have long-term consequences beyond adolescence. Although women earn more college degrees than men and are the majority of professional employees, they are still more likely to be overrepresented in lower paying occupations. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2006):

- 92% of registered nurses, 82% of all elementary and middle school teachers, and 98% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers are women.
- Women accounted for 30% of all lawyers, 32% of all physicians and surgeons, and 67% of all psychologists.
- In comparison, only 13% of all civil engineers, 7% of electrical and electronics engineers, and 3% of all aircraft pilots and flight engineers were female.

Self-esteem often suffers because the gifted girl knows and understands why she is doing what she is doing and internalizes feelings of inadequacy, being misunderstood, and unaccepted for who she is. She compounds her drop in self-esteem when she makes excuses for her successes as being attributed to luck rather than skill.

Adults in the gifted girl's life need to provide a safety net to help her through these challenging years. There are a number of strategies that support gifted girls:

- Listen, listen, listen. Provide validation and reassurance. She needs to know that she has not been silenced or lost her voice.
- Empower autonomy and assertiveness.
- Provide role models and mentors that illustrate a variety of possible satisfying lifestyles.
- Encourage advanced courses that include math, science, engineering, and technology. Increased exposure and grasp of content leads to increased opportunities.
- Encourage career planning that takes into account possible interruptions and delays as a result of education and child-raising.
- Counteract media and societal images and stereotypes of girls and women by discussing them and interact with print and viewing materials with strong female characters.

Last but perhaps most important, some solid advice for the gifted girl (Torrance, 1983):

- Don't be afraid to fall in love with something and pursue it with intensity and depth.
- Know, understand, take pride in, practice, develop, use exploit, and enjoy your greatest strengths.
- Learn to free yourself from the expectations of others and to walk away from the games that others try to impose upon you. Free yourself to "play your own game" in such a way as to make good use of your gifts. Search out and cultivate great teachers or mentors who will help you accomplish these things.
- Don't waste a lot of expensive energy trying to do things for which you have little ability or love. Do what you can do well and what you love, giving freely of the infinity of your greatest strengths and most intense loves.



National Mathematics and Science Commission (2000). [Before it's too late: A report to the nation.](#)

Eby & Smutny (1993). [An overview of gifted education.](#) NY: Longman.

Torrance (1983). The importance of falling in love with something. [Creative Child and Adult Quarterly](#), 8 (2), 72-78.

Austin ISD Gifted Students Show Well In State Conference

Our department coordinated the Student Showcase for the Texas Association of Gifted and Talented. We had 73 projects and close to 200 participants from Austin Independent school district and surrounding districts. A round of applause is in order to the following campuses: **Davis Elementary School, Williams Elementary School, Garza High School, and LASA at LBJ High School.**

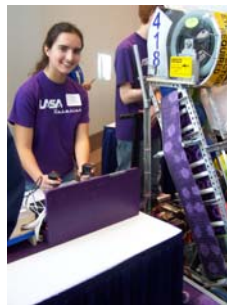
Our Students, Our Future

Garza High School



Entry: Garza CSI – Team Charlie
 Sponsors: Coila Morrow, Vaughn Camacho
 Principal: Vicki Baldwin
 Students: Sasha Fitzgerald-Lan, Jena Keale-Kruger, Alexander Nelson, Ian Irvin, Jennifer Farmer

LASA at LBJ High School



Entry: Robotics
 Sponsor: Tony Bertulli
 LASA Director: Renee Sanchez
 Principal: Patrick Patterson
 Students: Omneya Nassar, Natalie Bixler, Ryan Newton, Johnathan Vetter

Williams Elementary



Entry: Original Artwork
 Sponsor: Susie Dudley
 Principal: Lisa Mock
 Student: Marcos Flores

Davis Elementary



Entry: Expressive Composition Art
 Sponsor: B. Simmons
 Principal: Doug Hall
 Student: Sai Sameer Pusapaty

Garza High School



Entry: Garza Gardens
 Sponsors: Martha Cason
 Principal: Vicki Baldwin
 Students: Sarah Wendell, Ben Bomer, Sophie Burns, Jake Harrell, Samantha Ivy, Ariel Kay, Jenna Heal-Krueger, Chelsea Knezvich, Raffinne McCorkle, Zane Raymond Hinshaw, Paula Rideau, Kyle Schroeder, Roserma Simmons, Eddie Urnann, Andrew Young

Beyond the Boy Code by Rhonda Boyer

Gifted boys have many of the same struggles with gender issues as average boys, but their high intellectual ability, intensity, and heightened sensitivity give these issues a different spin. Boys who are gifted carry a special burden to develop and prove their masculinity while at the same time developing their intellectual gift.

William Pollack's *Real Boys* discusses the unspoken rules that stereotype what boys must learn to assert their masculinity, called "The Boy Code:"

The Sturdy Oak. Being male means being strong, silent, and self-reliant. As a result, boys are taught to deny pain, tough things out, and avoid seeking help. Showing emotions and being kind are seen as breaking this rule.

Give 'em Hell. This ideal promotes engaging in risky, daring behavior and the need to act tough and macho. The world of competitive sports, action video games, and the on-screen glamorization of hypermasculine role models like Sylvester Stallone and Jean-Claude Van Damme promote aggression and "over-the-top" attitudes and behaviors in boys.

The Big Wheel. The need to achieve leadership, status, dominance and power ties in here. Pushing beyond reasonable limits for academic, physical, and career success becomes a coping mechanism to avoid feelings of failure or unhappiness.

No Sissy Stuff. Expressing emotion is perceived as feminine and in turn weak. The credo is to never show dependence, warmth, sympathy, or demonstrate emotional reactions.

While all boys may be subjected to "The Boy Code" as they grow up, it becomes particularly problematic for gifted boys who may suffer from internal turmoil when they attempt to live by the "Boy Code" while at the same time being full of emotional sensitivity and intellectual intensity. They may grow to resent the fact that their intensity cannot be directed toward intellectual or creative activities if they are to prove they are "real boys."

Fortunately, there are some easy ways for people who care to support gifted boys in an effort to expose the "Boy Code" as a stereotypical, not typical, value system of masculinity.

1. Create a "safety/shame free zone." This may be a physical place or time, but it should definitely include a relationship with someone the boy trusts and has an emotional bond.
2. Share your own experience. Everyone has a reference point to a time when things have not felt right or events were not what we expected. Sharing how we work through challenges teaches coping skills.
3. Be quiet and listen while you engage in some activity with your son. This is called "action talk." It could be Legos or chess, playing baseball or going for a walk. Do not bombard him with questions, just let him know that you are there, and you will genuinely listen. Using action first, without pushing to words, allows boys to open up. As long as your son feels safe to share without the risk of embarrassment or judgment, he will.
4. Convey how much you care about, admire, and love your son. This offers validation as well as models appropriate expression of feelings.
5. Mentors and advanced training are very important in leading gifted boys to explore and excel in their chosen professions. Mentors can be either male or female. Of interest, Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso were both mentored by Gertrude Stein, and eminent psychotherapist Carl Rogers was mentored by Leta Stetter Hollingworth, considered the "mother of gifted education." Help boys discover topics and areas of interest and model achievement.

Research shows that if a boy has one adult he can open up to in a shame-free way, one adult who cares about him, that boy is going to be healthier, happier, less likely to be depressed, less likely to be violent, more likely to succeed in school, more likely to be open and caring, to have friendships, to succeed in life. The most important thing is for the boy to know that one adult understands him and will listen -- someone who will keep an eye out for him and will provide the time.

Kerr, B. & S. J. Cohn. (2001). Smart boys: Talent, manhood & the search for meaning. Scottsdale, Arizona: Great Potential Press.

Langille, Jane. (2004). Gifted boys and gender issues. Association for Bright Children of Ontario.

Pollack, William (1998). Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood. New York: Holt.

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The Department of Advanced Academic Services in Austin ISD provides support and services for numerous programs and events, including the following:

- Gifted and Talented Program
- Advanced Placement
- Pre-Advanced Placement
- International Baccalaureate Diploma Program
- International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program
- Academic Magnets
- Future Problem Solving