

Advanced Academic Services
1111 West 6th Street
Austin, Texas 78703

Social & Emotional Needs

by Dr. Jim Granada, Director of Advanced Academic Services

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Focus on
social and emotional
needs of the gifted

ADVANCED ACADEMIC SERVICES
1111 WEST 6TH STREET
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78703

GT Express
A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS

Gifted programs have a tendency to be designed around the academic and intellectual needs of the students served in the programs. Even The Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students has a heavy academic slant. However, if we are keeping in mind how to best meet the unique needs of gifted students, we must also plan for supporting the complex social and emotional needs that present a challenge to children, parents, and educators every day.

All children have special needs in the social and emotional arenas, but the nature of giftedness makes the needs of gifted students more complex. Intellectually gifted students may feel socially isolated from peers due to the maturity of their thinking. Academically gifted students may feel the need to underachieve to escape the social stigma of being labeled a bookworm or nerd. Gifted students may be drawn towards perfectionism based on self-expectations of performance or the expectations of others, or towards underachievement if school lacks purpose or relevance to them.

Children gifted in multiple areas may be overwhelmed by their capabilities. This multi-potentiality may draw them into a wide range of learning experiences beyond the classroom to the point that their lives become dictated by the schedules of others who want to capitalize on the talent. The gifted child that is a strong student, a leader, artistic, and an athlete may be pulled apart by well-meaning adults that want to nurture the different areas of strength and the child may not want to give up any of the commitments they have undertaken.

Gifted children, from a very young age, begin to recognize that they are different in one or more ways than their age-level peers. Gifted children need a support system to deal with these feelings of being different. They also need a system that will help them deal with the stress brought on by the nature of being gifted, stress generated by challenges mentioned earlier as well as their tendencies to worry about the state of the world and their own futures.

Parents and educators must work together to first understand, then support, the social and emotional needs of the gifted. This support rests on the establishment of strong lines of communication between home and school. The needs of gifted children are constant and prevalent during their waking hours, and may even impact their dreams. We must constantly remind ourselves to support the whole child as we work with students that wear this label.

Achieving Balance in the Lives of the Gifted by Debi Torres

Ask any parent of a gifted child if life is “easy” with their child at home, and most responses would be, “No”! Many parents say their gifted child is a combination of many “different” children all formed into one being. It would not be out of the ordinary for a parent to say their six year old child reads like a fifteen year old, solves math problems like a twelve year old, plays chess like a seventeen year old, plays soccer like a six year old, and cries like a two year old when he can’t have pizza for dinner. Does this sound familiar to you? Often, parents say they wish their gifted child was “normal” in every way except for the ability to achieve at high intellectual levels.

Society tends to place people into certain peg-holes for what is “normal” or acceptable according to a person’s chronological age. What is chronological age? According to Meriam-Webster, *chronological* means “of, relating to, or arranged in or according to the order of time,

also : reckoned in units of time <chronological age>.” As parents of gifted children you know that most gifted children don’t fit perfectly into “the normal peg-holes of life.”



What makes gifted children different?

Many highly gifted children reach milestones at different times than other children of the same chronological age. This is the basis for asynchronous development. Basically, their emotional, social, and cognitive development is out of sync, or uneven, with their peers. The gap between the cognitive and social/emotional development phases tends to widen with higher intellectual ability. Asynchronous development is usually more obvious among young children, when their developmental differences seem to be more obvious to parents and teachers.

It is vital to remember that each child is unique and that in order to help

them to develop into a happy adult, your child needs to learn the importance of balancing all areas of their life.

As parents, don’t only focus on the academic achievements of your child. Reward them for social and emotional growth as well; all areas are equally important to the growth of your child. Remember that in order to develop into a happy adult, your child needs to learn the importance of balancing all areas of their life. “When we focus only on what gifted children can do rather than on who they are, we ignore vital aspects of their developing selves and risk stunting their growth and muddying or distorting their sense of themselves and their worth.” (Tolan, 2000)

Merriam-Webster Online. (2005). <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?va=chronological>.

Addressing Motivation by Rhonda Boyer

Motivation is a factor that contributes to the overall success or failure of individuals. When we sense a lack of motivation in our gifted children, we should take a moment to ask, “What will it take to move him/her forward? What will it look like when he/she is motivated again? How should I intervene?” Although the answers are not always clear-cut, there are some factors we can consider and address when attempting to meet the needs of gifted children.

Gifted children are quite able to

dialogue with adults they trust.

Below are dialogue entry points for exploring what factors might be limiting motivation. Once the “road block” is discovered, a plan of action for removing it may be developed.

- **Security.** Is there structure, order, and stability in the environment that the child is experiencing a lack of motivation? Is the structure, order, and stability consistent? Do rules, “fairness,” and expectations exist? What is the child’s comfort and safety level in the particular environment?

- **Affiliation.** Does the child belong to formal and informal groups—such as friendships, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and clubs? Does the child experience and feel a sense of acceptance by peers beyond the “membership” aspect of the group?
- **Self-Esteem.** Does the child have self-respect and respect from others? Does he/she receive and acknowledge recognition, praise, and rewards? Does the child find

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Tips for Parents: Perfectionism by J. Rasmussen

The following information was gathered during a facilitated discussion on perfectionism that included parents of profoundly gifted children.

While preparing for the discussion, one key point consistently surfaced in regards to perfectionism: the fact that it is a characteristic trait that will never go away, but instead can only become fine tuned. Once one is able to accept this, it is just a matter of finding a way to approach perfectionism in a more healthy and productive manner. The parents who attended my facilitated discussion shared many wonderful ideas and successful experiences that have helped them gradually help their children combat against the "disabling perfectionism" and move more toward fostering the "enabling perfectionism" instead.

- **Practice losing.** Start with small games that emphasize chance and are not dependant on skill (rock, paper, scissors and war), then gradually move to more ability based games. This can also help teach children how to be gracious losers.
- **Practice practicing.** Find something that your child will have to work at. This may even be something that you know your child will be the worst at (an art class, an organized sports team, swimming, etc.). Music can work well for those who are not musically inclined since any mistakes that are played do not stick around like a drawing or a sculpture.
- **Emphasize process, not outcome.** How did they get to that conclusion or that next step? What made you decide to use that color? What did you learn from the entire experience?
- **Be specific with expectations.** Gifted children are very literal, so make sure to define and be specific. Explain to them exactly what you mean by 'finishing' the project. Be very clear with your expectations. What do you expect your child to get out of writing the English paper? Have your child work in small increments of study time and try and get the most out of it. One great idea, although it does not work well for every child, is to use a stopwatch and have a time restraint.
- **Have a sense of humor.** Gifted children are already so hard on themselves, it is great if you can all laugh together when mistakes are made. Watching *America's Funniest Home Videos* could be a great homework assignment!
- **Discuss how mistakes can be good.** Penicillin, chocolate chip cookies, banana bread, etc. Read books together on accidental discoveries.
- **Model.** Show your children the ways you are a perfectionist and how you cope with it. Point out any mistakes that you make and tell stories of mistakes you made when you were younger.
- **Priorities and perspective.** Stop and discuss how important the outcome is/isn't of a particular project or activity. What will happen if you don't draw it just right the first time?
- **Goal setting.** Start by practicing with small goals and gradually up the ante. Make sure all goals are realistic and attainable.
- **"Full tank" & "down-time".** Make sure that all family members are well rested and have a full tummy. Set aside quiet time to allow everyone to re-group and unwind. This can cut down on the number of meltdowns and the heightened sense of irritability.
- **Pursuit of Excellence vs. Perfectionism.** Perfect is not possible. Explain to them the difference between excellence and perfectionism. A great resource that can help you do this is *Perfectionism and the Highly Gifted Child* by Shaun Hately.

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Research and Resources by Rhonda Boyer

Explore more on the social and emotional needs of gifted:

Organizations:

Davidson Institute for Talent Development -
<http://www.ditd.org/public/>

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) -
<http://www.sengifted.org/>

Books:

Benson, P., Galbraith, J., & Espeland, P. (1998). What teens need to succeed: Proven, practical ways to shape your own future. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Covey, S. (1998). The 7 habits of highly effective teens. New York, NY: Fireside.

Galbraith, J., & Delise, J. (1996). The gifted kids' survival guide: A teen handbook. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Kerr, B. (1994). Smart girls: A new psychology of girls, women, & giftedness. Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology.

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

Olenchak, F. R. (1998). They say my kid's gifted: Now what? Waco, TX: Prufrock.

Perry, S. (1990). Playing smart: A parent's guide to enriching, offbeat learning activities for ages 4-14. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Saunders, J., & Espeland, P. (1991). Bringing out the best: A guide for parents of young gifted children. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Strip, C. (2000). Helping gifted children soar: A practical guide for parents and teachers. Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology.

Webb, J., Meckstroth, E., & Tolan, S. (1994). Guiding the gifted child: A practical source for parents and teachers. Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology.

Publishers:

Free Spirit
(612) 338-2068
help4kids@freespirit.com
www.freespirit.com

Great Potential
(formerly Gifted Psychology)
www.giftedbooks.com

Prufrock Press
(800) 998-2208
prufrock@prufrock.com
www.prufrock.com



“Far away there in the sunshine
are my highest aspirations.
I may not reach them, but I can
look up and see their beauty,
believe in them, and try to
follow where they lead.”
~ Louisa May Alcott

Addressing Motivation

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pride in being part of “insider”
groups that value his/her
knowledge or contributions?

- **Autonomy.** Does the child feel in control of his/her environment? Does the child have influence on and participate in decision-making? Does he/she have authority to use resources in the environment?

- **GOAL: Self-Actualization.** Is the child working at full potential, feeling successful, and achieving goals viewed as significant? If not, why not? If so, how can this be maximized?

In the ideal world all of our gifted children would be self-actualizers all of the time. Since this isn't the reality, we can make an effort to nurture the security, affiliation, self-esteem, and autonomy needs of our children in an attempt to increase and sustain motivation.

Helping Gifted Children with Stress Management by Leslie S. Kaplan

Is a Gifted Child More Likely to Feel Stress than Others?

Many gifted youngsters have a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings, to events, to ideas, and to expectations. Some experience their own high expectations for achievement as a relentless pressure to excel. Constant striving to live up to self-expectations--or those of others-- to be first, best, or both can be very stressful. With every new course, new teacher, or new school questions arise about achievement and performance, since every new situation carries with it the frightening risk of being mediocre. Striving becomes even more stressful when unrealistic or unclear expectations are imposed by adults or peers. The pressure to excel, accompanied by other concerns such as feeling different, self-doubt (the "imposter" syndrome), and the need to prove their giftedness can drain the energy of gifted children and result in additional stress.

Stress occurs even when everything is going well. Youngsters get tired from their constant efforts and may secretly fear that next time they will not be as successful.

What Are Some Other Stresses on a Gifted Child?

Many gifted children accept responsibility for a variety of activities such as a demanding course load; leadership in school activities, clubs, or sports; and part-time jobs. Even if it were humanly possible, doing everything well would be physically and emotionally stressful.

Vacations may be stressful if children are comfortable only when achieving and succeeding. Taking time off may make them feel nervous and lacking control.

Gifted children need intellectual challenge. Boring, monotonous busywork is very stressful for individuals who prefer thinking and reasoning activities. Boredom may result in anger, resentment, or, in some cases, setting personal goals for achievement and success that significantly exceed those of parents or school.

Some gifted children value independence and leadership, yet the separation they feel

from their peers results in loneliness and fewer opportunities to relieve stress. Finding a peer group can be difficult, particularly for adolescents. Some experience a conflict between belonging to a group and using their extraordinary abilities.

Gifted children are complex thinkers, persuasively able to argue both sides of any question. This ability, however, may complicate decisions. Children may lack information about and experience with resources, processes, outcomes, or priorities that help tip an argument toward a clear solution. Furthermore, not every problem has one obviously correct answer. Compromise and accommodation are realities in the adult world, but they are not easily perceived from a young person's viewpoint. Thus, decision making may be a very stressful process.

How Can Gifted Children Cope With Stress?

Some healthy ways of handling stress include the following:

- **Change the source of the stress.** Do something else for a while.
- **Confront the source of the stress.** If it is a person, persuade him or her to remove the stress. Sit down with the person driving you crazy and talk about ways you might better work together.
- **Talk about the source of stress.** Rid yourself of frustration. Find a good listener and complain. Talk through possible solutions.
- **Shift your perspective.** Tell yourself that each new situation or problem is a new challenge, and that there is something to be learned from every experience. Try to see the humorous side of the situation.
- **Learn skills and attitudes that make tasks easier and more successful.** Practice effective organization and time-management skills.
- **Take time for enjoyable activities.** Everyone needs a support system. Find friends, teachers, or relatives with whom you have fun. As a reward for your efforts, give yourself work breaks. Listen to your favorite music, shoot baskets, or participate in some other brief activity

that is mentally restful or fun.

- **Get regular exercise and practice sound nutrition.** Physical activity not only provides time out, but also changes your body chemistry as you burn off muscle tension built up from accommodating stress. Exercise also increases resistance to illness. Nutritious food and regular meals help regulate your body chemistry and keep you functioning at your sharpest.

How Can Parents, Teachers, and Counselors Reduce Stress on Gifted Children?

Let children live their own lives. Caring adults support, encourage, and celebrate children's efforts and successes, but they stand back a bit from these efforts and achievements. They let children select and master activities for personal enjoyment. Be available for guidance and advice. Some gifted children appear to be more mature than their chronological age indicates. They have advanced verbal skills and can talk a good line. Nevertheless, they are still children and need realistic, clearly stated guidelines about limits, values, and proper behavior. Gifted children need to hear adults openly state some of their perspectives to understand expectations and acceptable limits. While these children are very perceptive, they cannot read minds.

Gifted children may know more facts about their interest area than do their parents and other adults. However, they have not lived longer; they need loving concern and guidance.

Article excerpted and modified from Kaplan, Leslie S. [Helping Gifted Students with Stress Management](#). ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Council for Exceptional Children. Reston, VA: ERIC, 1990. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 321 493). Available online at: http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/stress_management.html#credits



About Us . . .

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
- Project SOS: Supporting Optimal Scholarship
- Future Problem Solving

Department of Advanced Academic Services

Dr. Jim Granada, Director	414-9986
Antonia Casarez, Secretary	414-9986
Barbara Mayo, Project SOS Director	414-0141
Debi Torres, Gifted Specialist	414-0155
Rhonda Boyer, Gifted Specialist	414-0279
Delaine Canales, Data Clerk	414-0139

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