



## Asynchronous Development

Just because a gifted child might act and talk like an adult doesn't mean that child is mature. Parents and educators need to remember that gifted children are children first and gifted second. Intelligence does not equal maturity; maturity comes from skills learned through life experiences. Whether a gifted child is 5 or 15 years old, he is still at the beginning of the life experience cycle. "Intelligence and knowledge are simply not the same as emotional maturity, understanding, or wisdom" (Webb, 2007). Emotional maturity, understanding, and wisdom do not come from reading a book or watching a documentary, they come from living and experiencing life.

"Gifted children often have substantial variations in abilities within themselves and develop unevenly across various skill areas... because it is prominent in so many gifted children, some professionals believe asynchronous development, rather than potential or ability, is the defining characteristic of giftedness" (Webb, 2007). The original definition of asynchronous development was developed by The Columbus Group in 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."*

When adults have a better understanding of asynchronous development patterns in gifted children, they are better equipped to provide the support and guidance gifted children may need at school, home, and within the community. Many experts agree there are four areas of child development that should be supported at home and at school. These four areas of development are important for all children, not just considerations for gifted children.

**Intellectual Development:** All children have the ability to learn new information daily. The child's intellectual growth is important and can affect many other areas of child development. All children should be provided with opportunities to learn new information daily. Gifted children may learn new information at a faster rate, many have more intense academic interests, and may need more academic challenge than other children.

**Emotional Development:** Children also have emotional needs that must be met each day. Some days are filled with happiness while others are filled with sadness. Help children understand how to deal with different emotions and use appropriate language to describe each emotion to other people. Gifted children may be more sensitive and have stronger reactions to negativity, criticism, and failure than other children. Adults in their lives should not expect these children to be "gifted" or "perfect" all the time, as this can cause feelings of stress and low self-esteem when these children do not feel they are living up to the unrealistic expectations set by other people.

**Physical Development:** The physical needs of children should also be considered and supported. The obvious physical needs are healthy food, plenty of sleep, and daily exercise. In addition to helping with physical appearance, research has shown that regular exercise supports brain development and memory. There are other physical considerations, such as maintaining good hygiene habits and pride in appearance. Gifted kids may spend so much time and energy on their intellectual interests and accomplishments that they might not think it is important to brush their hair in the morning before going to school or they might ignore the need to get a full night's sleep because they feel it is more important to stay up all night reading.

**Social Development:** While all four areas are equally important and should be supported for proper development, the social area is often misunderstood and ignored. All children have the need (whether they admit it or not) to have friends and feel respected and understood by same age peers. When gifted children struggle with asynchronous development issues, often the social area is strongly affected because of uneven development in the intellectual, emotional, or physical areas when compared to same age peers. For example, when a gifted child uses vocabulary that other children do not understand or makes fun of silly games the other children play, they may experience difficulty making friends. Likewise, if a gifted child is very sensitive and has extreme reactions to emotional struggles, other children may not feel comfortable around the child. Consider the gifted child who refuses to brush their hair, bathe daily, or wear clean clothes; this may also cause a disconnect with other children. When gifted children find a balance with their intellectual, emotional, and physical needs they may improve their social life and have more success in making friends of similar age.

While all children may need support in each area of development, gifted children actually need more support in developing healthy emotional, physical, and social habits than other children because of the asynchronous development issues they experience.