



## Leadership Opportunities for the Gifted Child

John Quincy Adams once said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

What makes a good leader? Can leadership capabilities be enhanced in students? Do you desire to develop leadership attributes in your gifted child? Leadership is one area designated as a talent area in federal and state definitions of gifted students who should receive differentiated programming. Research shows that parents and educators play a critical role in the guiding of a child into the role of a positive leader. In addition, there is a distinct relationship between early leadership experiences, and the role of leadership in adulthood.

Becoming a leader holds many valuable life lessons. Learning to develop interpersonal skills is necessary in all aspects of life. Thus, the home, school, work and social environment all nurture a child's leadership capabilities. As a child grows and her leadership abilities develop, "it is important that she refines skills in communication, conflict resolution, decision making, and goal achievement" (Karns & Bean, 1997). What are some characteristics of leadership within a gifted child? Some attributes include:

- Above average intelligence
- Persuasive, responsible, and goal oriented
- Takes charge of activities, withstands peer pressure
- Self-confident, exhibits a sense of fairness to others
- Good communication skills (oral, written, non-verbal)
- Strong decision making skills
- Sociable, shows initiative, perseveres

If you see several of these traits, perhaps you have a budding leader in your midst. Furthermore, these characteristics can be strengthened and enhanced. Preparation for leadership begins in the home and school with an enriched environment that offers the child opportunities to acquire broad interests of study, self-esteem, and the insights of leadership.

**How can parents and educators provide leadership opportunities?** Some possibilities include:

- Allow children to be involved in selecting, planning, implementing and evaluating family or school activities, such as a Saturday at the zoo, a class community service project, or field trip.
- Discuss and debate current events and other “hot topics” in order to foster independent thinking and leadership potential.
- Listen openly to the child’s social, political, and economic views while demonstrating respect and empathy towards the child in order to show them their opinions are valued and understood.
- Encourage children to “shadow” a leader for a day, week, or a semester.
- Allow children to join a student government group or extra-curricular program.
- Study great leaders in history by reading and discussing biographies, autobiographies, or by watching documentaries.
- Provide opportunities for decision making at an early age to assist in the development of critical reasoning skills necessary for developing into an effective leader.
- Encourage responsibility at an early age through chores, taking care of pets, and helping plan a budget for a family vacation.
- Responsibility also includes being held accountable for actions. Be cautious about rescuing children from unpleasant circumstances. It is important for children to learn there are consequences for every action and an effective leader accepts and endures whatever consequences may arise.
- Offer opportunities for making choices. Choosing what to wear, the topics of a school project, or which hobbies to pursue teach the child to learn the value of good decision making.
- As local, state, national, or international leaders appear in the media, talk about their leadership styles, the influence they have on others, and their accomplishments as leaders.
- Parents and students should investigate opportunities for leadership development in their schools, communities, and religious affiliations.
- Depending on the child’s interests, encourage them to attend events where local and state leaders speak, such as political rallies, lectures, city council, or other public meetings. Many groups within a community seek students to serve on their boards. Suggest the child identify and volunteer for these learning opportunities in leadership  
*(Adapted from Bean, Suzanne & Karnes, Francis, 2012).*