



Gifted Children

by **Brenda Casey, Early Years Advisor**

- Children can be gifted in different ways - it is important to remember that children who are gifted in one area may show average ability in other areas.
- Let your child take the lead. Simply observing a child closely at play will offer the most telling clues as to where talents lie.
- Children who are gifted with language enjoy demanding conversation and the use of rich vocabulary. They will sustain quite demanding stories from an early age and store new words for later use.
- Mathematically gifted children show an early interest in counting and number recognition, and have an advanced spatial awareness.
- Young, gifted scientists show an advance interest and understanding of the world.
- Ensure that musically gifted children can listen to a wide range by providing a child's tape or CD player.
- Give your artistically gifted child a box of tricks containing a variety of drawing and painting materials.
- Physically gifted children are confident climbers from an early age - give them frequent opportunities to climb on playground apparatus.

What can a parent do if a child displays such outstanding gifts that they surpass their peers by two years or more? What are the 'dos' and 'don'ts'? What help and guidance is available to parents in nursery, school and local community? Can television, books and online content be used positively for your child?

Some children are good with words, others with numbers. Some may have an excellent memory or have special skills in abstract thinking, whilst others are gifted at music or art.

Some show early signs of leadership, others a talent for gymnastics, dance or sport. So the child who is gifted with words may well be of average ability in maths and music, and a gifted painter may struggle with literacy. It's important to remember this when forming general expectations for your talented child.

Let your child take the lead. Like adults, young children take greatest pleasure in doing what they excel at and will often focus for extended periods. They will certainly be creative and adventurous in their area of particular strength. Simply observing a child closely at play will offer the most telling clues as to where talents lie.

Once having identified a particular gift, it is worth remembering that however great the talent, and your desire to nurture it, early childhood should first and foremost be a time for pleasure and exploration. Gifted children need 'down time' and daydreaming can produce highly original thought. Applying pressure will have a negative and lasting impact.

Gifted in language

Children who are gifted with language enjoy demanding conversation and the use of rich vocabulary. They will sustain quite demanding stories from a very early age and store new words for later use. Beatrix Potter, in making no linguistic concessions to her young readership, was well aware of this. The visual jokes she makes, too, will appeal to the well-developed sense of humour characteristic of the gifted child.

The linguistically gifted child will enjoy talking about her experiences and reflecting upon them. You can encourage and develop this by making photographic records of special outings. Pictures can be pasted into scrapbooks and accompanied by captions you compose together. Ask for explanations and opinions: 'What do you think would happen if...?'

Children who are 'word smart' will demonstrate an early interest in letter identification. Make or buy a name plaque for their bedroom door and encourage them to identify the letters in alphabet books. Look for objects around that begin with the same sound: Word smart toddlers are great at 'I Spy'! They love experimenting with words and sounds and will enjoy repeating Tongue Twisters and inventing new ones of their own. Use your computer to create simple picture/word searches. Give them early access to the CBeebies website and the Stories and Rhymes section, where the many interactive reading experiences will challenge and excite them. Develop an early interest in characterisation by reading series books to your toddler.

Look for books which use a combination of repetition and sound that encourage participation, as well as creating very real characters. Bedtime is a perfect time to share stories. Enjoy reading together and let your child take the lead as much as possible in spotting different words.

Mathematics

Mathematically gifted children show an early interest in counting and number recognition, and have an advanced spatial awareness. Encourage and develop this by playing number games, solving puzzles and inventing new ones of your own. Look for numbers when you are out and about and talk about their function. Spot different prices in the supermarket. Challenge them to make up a shopping basket to the value of, say, £5.00. Involve them in calculating change.

Mathematically gifted children are fascinated by large numbers. Develop a sense of these by asking them to estimate the number of different objects in plastic jars, choosing from a set of number cards you have prepared. Play Guessing games that involve comparing the numbers of large and small objects that will fit in jars of the same size. Order groups of objects from smallest to largest. Challenge them to sort and classify interesting objects into refined categories.

Gifted in Science

Young gifted scientists show an advanced interest and understanding of the world. Encourage close observation of surroundings and make simple pictorial records. Investigate weather patterns, make note of the position of the sun at different times of day. Record how the shape the moon changes during the month.

Investigations into melting, floating and sinking and forming simple circuits provide springboards for further investigation. Challenge your children to make games using magnets. Ask for predictions and explanations; encourage them to devise their own way of recording.

Keep a Growth Diary for seeds you have planted. Plant different seed species at the same time and use the diary to compare different rates of growth. Try to Grow your own tomatoes or find out which will sink or float.

The gifted scientist will enjoy taking things to pieces to see how they work. Boxes, simple cameras,

old telephones (not mobiles) will all fascinate. Look for unusual objects when you're out shopping and discuss what they are and their possible uses.

Gifted in music

Ensure that musically gifted children have the opportunity to listen to a wide range by providing a child's tape or CD player. Build up a personal collection that can be listened to independently. Provide a percussion basket, containing instruments. Encourage experimentation and record the results. Take your child to live performances when possible.

The CBeebies website has a wealth of musical content to stimulate and delight. Try the Music and Songs section, for many of CBeebies' favourite tunes. When watching programmes, encourage children to sing along with their favourite characters, learn the words and enjoy the feel of the music!

Gifted in Art

Give your artistically gifted child a 'box of tricks' containing a variety of drawing and painting materials. Include paper of different colours, size and texture.

Artistically gifted children have excellent hand control and will be able to manipulate fine pencils and brushes with no difficulty. They will also be able to sustain interest in a painting or drawing for extended periods, perhaps returning to it on more than one occasion. Frame and hang some pieces so that the whole family can celebrate them. Gifted children enjoy being taken to galleries from a very early age. Colour, line and pattern are immediately apparent in the work of many contemporary artists and the gifted child will begin to assume such features in their own work. They will also be fascinated by classic cartoon films, such as Pinocchio and Snow White, where the superb drawings will provide inspiration.

Physically gifted

Physically gifted children are very confident climbers from a very early age. Give them frequent opportunities to climb on playground apparatus, but in the case of gymnastics, it is perhaps wise to enrol your preschool child in a baby gym class, where professionals can develop their skills. The physically gifted have high energy levels, excellent fine and gross motor skills and are spatially adept. Give them lots of time in the garden or park to exercise and develop hand skills such as throwing, catching and bouncing, and foot skills such as running, hopping, skipping and kicking and dribbling a ball. Get them involved in football games with older children, so that they can be appropriately challenged; gifted children enjoy exceeding their 'personal best'. Teamwork and competition are key skills that the physically gifted can take into social contexts and these should be emphasised and developed equally.

Starting Nursery or School

Starting nursery or school can present problems for the gifted child. Make a priority of discussing your child's talents with her teacher, perhaps compiling a simple portfolio of achievements. Many nurseries make home visits, where gifts and talents can be observed and discussed. This is important, as gifted children become bored at school if they are not sufficiently challenged. Plans of work are always available to parents. Use these as a basis to build on. Devise extended 'paths of learning' from class topics. Nurseries and schools are always delighted to give advice.

One of the hallmarks of giftedness is creativity, and whatever his or her area of strength, your gifted child will want to go one step further. Maintain a dialogue with your child's teacher. Things learnt at home or school should be given equal value and respect.

More and more schools now appoint Gifted and Talented coordinators and hold registers of gifted pupils. Some schools send referral forms to parents for their input first, while others make the identification themselves and then consult parents. Local Education Authorities have set up programmes for the Gifted and Talented and it is worth asking your child's teacher what provision there is in your area. In some cases there are Saturday schools for developing different areas of excellence in subjects across the curriculum and beyond. Some schools form links with other schools, so that they can offer a wider range of enrichment activities to their gifted pupils. Others have teacher 'experts' on the premises, or give gifted pupils extra time with visitors. Inspiration and challenge are vital for gifted and talented children, but equally important is the need to give their talents a realistic place in the context of their life. Make sure that they keep it in perspective. If you do, then they certainly will.



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