

How Can I Support the Emotional Needs of My Child?

All children need to be loved, nurtured, kept safe, shown attention and affection, and taught how to live with other people. Gifted and talented children are no exception. As parents, it is our privilege and responsibility to do our best to provide these things for our children.

Being the parent of a gifted child is a special job, because these children are "special." This is not to say that they are better or worse than any other child, but rather that they present unique challenges as well as opportunities for themselves and to us as parents. Although there is a tendency to see only this child's special attributes, we as parents have the responsibility to always see our child as a child first and second as gifted and talented.

The following are thoughtful suggestions and guidelines for parenting the gifted and talented child:

Expectations

- *Help the child distinguish between needs and wants.
- *Spend time observing and interacting with your child. Personal observation is the foundation for establishing realistic expectations.
- *Remember that your child will not be gifted or talented at everything. Most gifted children really excel in only a few areas.
- *Allow for personal differences between you and your child.
- *Encourage your child to develop and share with you his/her self expectations .
- *Accept that your child will not perform at a consistently high level all the time.
- *Allow the child time to "just do nothing."
- *Allow the home to be a safe haven to express emotions.

Modeling

Remember that...

- *The best method of teaching is through modeling.
- *No other person(s) will be as influential with our children, for better or for worse, than we as parents.
- *Parents have the opportunity and responsibility to model for their children, that is to model how a healthy, whole person deals with stresses and joys in today's world.
- *(Note: given the gifted child's ability to see through flawed reasoning, it is unwise to attempt to raise this child by the "do as I say, not as I do" rule.)

You are your child's model for:

- *Use of personal resources, including time, energy, and money; time for thinking, daydreaming, doing nothing (avoid over-scheduling).
- *Decision making skills including taking responsibility for the decisions that are made.

- *Stress management techniques, including problem solving, talking about problems with others, recreation, and use of humor.
- *Communication skills, not only with family but also with members of the community, including how to respond to those in positions of authority and how to listen to others.
- *Tolerance of differences in others and acceptance of our own failures and shortcomings.
- *Acceptance and expression of feelings, including anger and affection.

Discipline

Every child needs to be taught discipline: to know and understand, given the family, community, and society in which we live, that which is acceptable and desirable from that which is not. The goal of disciplining a child is to have him/her become self-disciplined. Discipline is not synonymous with punishment, but rewards and punishments are two methods of teaching or reinforcing discipline. When teaching discipline, remember:

- *Keep limits/rules to a necessary minimum.
- *Make limits/rules clear and concise. Make sure your child understands what you expect of him/her.
- *Set consequences for following and not following rules/limits. Utilize "natural" consequences whenever possible.
- *Make rewards and punishments appropriate and reasonable.
- *Follow through!!
- *Be consistent!!
- *Avoid nagging, sarcasm, ridicule, or belittling.
- *Avoid power struggles.
- *Give your child genuine choices.
- *Allow your child to help set limits and consequences (contracting).
- *Don't get into arguments with your child. His/her verbal skills may get you into uncomfortable and untenable situations.
- *Respond to your child's unspoken needs and concerns in addition to addressing his/her negative behaviors.
- *Try to determine the cause for inappropriate behavior.
- *When we as parents make mistakes, it is important to acknowledge them to ourselves and to our child.
- *Remember that you are the parent. You have more life experiences and, although possibly not "smarter," you possess greater wisdom than your child.

Peer and Sibling Relationships

It is very common for gifted and talented children to feel isolated and "weird" or different from most of their peers and even siblings. It is important for parents to understand and then communicate to the gifted child that this difference is OK. It is also important to communicate to the child that each of us has special gifts and talents, and that these should be accepted and appreciated in each of us.

Although the gifted child may possess certain traits or areas of interest which tend to set him/her apart from his/her peers/siblings, it is essential that parents keep in mind that however gifted/talented, the child still must live in this society and relate to others. To promote a sense of elitism or superiority will only increase the child's sense of isolation and being an outsider.

To improve your child's peer/sibling relationships:

- *Support his/her sensitivity, but teach appropriate forms of expressing himself/herself.
- *Support your child in asserting himself/herself, but teach the art of sharing, including sharing
- *leadership and responsibility.
- *Unless someone's safety is at risk, refuse to become involved in children's arguments and quarrels. Allow them to solve the problems themselves.
- *Support the gifts in each child, G/T or not. Help each child recognize and appreciate the other's gifts.
- *Don't compare children.
- *Spend quality time with each of your children individually.
- *One of best methods to address many peer relationship needs/concerns is to have them involved with a group of intellectually similar peers on a regular basis. This establishes relationships in which they are not "special" but rather a true peer.
- *Gifted children may have many different sets of "peers" depending on what activity they are engaged in.
- *Gifted children's desire to fit into a group and be like the others may lead to hiding their giftedness and talents.
- *Many gifted children experience difficulty with the label "gifted" because it sets them apart from their friends.
- *Provide a safe place, a haven, for your child where he/she can feel free to be himself/herself, to express negative emotions and insecurities, without being lectured or made to feel guilty or incompetent.
- *Praise the gifted child for his/her non-intellectual attributes.
- *Try to reduce the competitiveness which interferes with cooperation.

Perfectionism

Although it is important to teach our children that setting high goals and having high ideals and expectations is an admirable quality, it is also important to teach them that, by definition, perfection is not a realistic or attainable goal. If perfection is their goal, they will either experience constant failure in the tasks they attempt, or never begin them out of a fear of failing. Rather we must help our children prioritize and realize that we all have limited resources. Having once set their priorities, we can further help them by encouraging them to take the risk of doing something at which they might not succeed.

Dr. Linda Silverman suggests that parents can help the child with perfectionism by:

- *Acknowledging and accepting his/her sense of frustration.
- *Sharing with him/her some of our own failures or shortcomings and how we learned to deal with them.
- *Supporting him/her when the child takes risks and does not succeed.
- *Helping him/her understand that ideals and high standards are good, even if we can't always attain them.
- *Encouraging him/her not to give up; that it takes time and effort to achieve high standards.
- *Asking the child if he/she is willing to accept help from you, to help him simplify the task to achieve success.
- *Teaching relaxation techniques.
- *Giving specific rather than broad praise.
- *Teaching your child that there are no mistakes, but only learning experiences.
- *Teaching your child when to settle for less than perfect.
- *Remembering some "don'ts":
- *Don't try to eradicate perfectionism.
- *Don't tell your child he should not feel the way he does.
- *Don't be too critical of his/her efforts; praise the efforts and risk taking behaviors.
- *Don't attempt to destroy the child's ideals.
- *Don't make the child believe that perfectionism is a bad quality.

The Introverted Child

An introvert is a private person who needs time and space to be alone. He/she becomes exhausted by too much contact with a group of people. The introvert is extremely sensitive and gets his/her feelings hurt easily. He/she is uncomfortable when attention is focused on him. He/she does not like to take risks in public for fear of appearing less than perfect.

Some thoughts on what a parent can do to help the introverted child:

- *Allow your introvert to learn in private and show the world the finished product.
- *Give your introvert a private place and the time to think and reflect.
- *Allow the child to observe activities before trying them.
- *Don't force the child into large group situations. Introverts may prefer just one friend at a time.
- *Correct the child in private and ask the child's teacher to do the same.

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Webb, James T., Meckstroth, Elizabeth A., and Tolan, Stephanie S., Guiding the Gifted Child, Ohio Psychology Publishing Co., 1982.

Beginning Advocacy: How Can I Help?

1. Become informed of the special needs of the gifted through reading, attending conferences or enrolling in classes.
2. Be involved at home in your child's learning.
3. Volunteer to help in the classroom (Share your time).
4. For example, volunteer to share your career, interests, or travel experiences in your child's classroom or school, or act as a resource on children's individual projects. Help locate resource persons to meet with small special interest groups.
5. Share what you know about your child with his/her teacher.
6. Consider joining local or state organizations such as Gifted Education team of Eagle County GET and Colorado Association of Gifted and Talented (CAGT).
7. Form partnerships with teachers for support and assistance.
8. Remember to communicate your appreciation to the teacher who makes extra efforts on behalf of gifted children AND let the principal know that the teacher's work is valued.

Language of Advocacy*
**In talking to school personnel, legislator, or other
parents:**

INSTEAD OF SAYING:

SAY:

My child is bored in school.

All students should be able to learn at their challenge level.

We must pay attention to the educational needs of our future leaders.

To become successful adults, all students must learn the value of struggling to achieve one's goals.

How can we compete globally if we don't accommodate our "best and brightest" students?

We need to assure that all of our students will reach their greatest potential in learning.

Our gifted kids need special programs.

High ability students may need out-of-class opportunities to experience appropriate challenge.

High ability students may need out-of-class opportunities to experience appropriate challenge.

I support all programs that allow students to learn at their own level and pace.

Kids in special education are getting too big a slice of the financial pie in our schools.

Let's study what works for kids in a special education and make similar opportunities available for students learning beyond their grade levels.

Students with high academic ability cannot have their learning needs met in mixed-ability classrooms.

Students with high academic ability need to be with students of similar strengths so they can feel OK about themselves the way they are, rather than feeling they have to hide their abilities to "fit in" with other kids their age.

. *Adapted from the work of Carol Morreale.