

**What is “Gifted”?** "Giftedness is not something you do. Giftedness is something you are." - Delisle

**Formal Definitions:** **There is no universally agreed upon answer.** The concept of giftedness, intelligence, and talent are constantly changing and can look different in different cultures and context.

Although interpretations of the word "gifted" seem limitless, there are a handful of foundational definitions that may be categorized from conservative (related to demonstrated high IQ) to liberal (a broadened conception that includes multiple criteria that might not be measured through an IQ test).

### **National Association For Gifted Children (NAGC)**

*Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports).*

### **Federal Definition**

This definition is taken from the Javits Act, which provides grants for education programs serving bright children from low-income families:

*"The term gifted and talented student means children and youths who give evidence of higher performance capability in such areas as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools in order to develop such capabilities fully."*

### **State Definition**

“Gifted and talented student” means a child or youth who performs at or shows the potential for performing at a remarkably high level of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment and who:

- (1) exhibits high performance capability in an intellectual, creative, or artistic area;
- (2) possesses an unusual capacity for leadership; or
- (3) excels in a specific academic field.

Each state has their own definition ... you can find these definitions on the NAGC website.

### **Informal Indicators - TAGT**

- Walks and talks at an early age
- Has a large and advanced vocabulary
- Learns rapidly and easily
- Reads at an early age
- Demonstrates a great appetite for books and reading
- Entertains self for large blocks of time
- Has a long attention span
- Readily retains a large amount of information
- Consistently organizes, sorts, classifies and groups things, and names them
- Has a heightened curiosity (asks ‘why’ often)
- Fantasizes often
- Is self-motivated, self-sufficient, and independent
- Shows sensitivity to other people’s feelings and empathy in response to their troubles
- Demonstrates leadership abilities
- Exhibits perfectionism
- Likes to discuss abstract concepts (such as love, justice, etc.)
- Has a high energy, needing less sleep than age-mates
- Learns new material rapidly
- Loves puzzles, mazes, building blocks, and toys that challenge
- Has an advanced sense of humor

- Prefers the company of older children or adults
- Is highly creative, imaginative
- Is a keen observer
- Expresses unusual sensitivity to what they see, hear, touch, smell or feel
- Is widely informed, especially in areas of personal interest
- Expresses concern for the world's problems

### Identifying The Gifted

- Einstein was four years old before he could speak and seven before he could read.
- Isaac Newton did poorly in grade school.
- When Thomas Edison was a boy, his teachers told him he was too stupid to learn anything.
- F.W.Woolworth got a job in a dry goods store when he was 21. But his employers would not let him wait on a customer because he "Didn't have enough sense."
- A newspaper editor fired Walt Disney because he had "No good ideas"
- Caruso's music teacher told him "You can't sing, you have no voice at all."
- Admiral Richard E. Byrd had been retired from the navy, as, "Unfit for service" Until he flew over both poles.
- Louis Pasteur was rated as mediocre in chemistry when he attended the Royal College
- Abraham Lincoln entered The Black Hawk War as a captain and came out a private
- Fred Waring was once rejected from high school chorus.
- Winston Churchill failed the sixth grade.

AS YOU CAN SEE, GIFTED COMES IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES..... THERE IS NOT A ONE SIZE FITS ALL DEFINITION.

# Social and Emotional Dynamics of Gifted Children

## Heightened Sensitivities – Dabrowski’s Theory of Overexcitabilities (OE)

The Polish psychiatrist and psychologist, Kazimierz Dabrowski, developed a theory of overexcitabilities (OEs), which is applicable to some gifted children. Dabrowski categorized the OEs into 5 areas: Psychomotor, Sensual, Intellectual, Imaginational, and Emotional. He recognized that some people absorb life's experiences in a more intense way, as if they have no filter. This keen awareness can lead to strong reactions, along with a sense of instability. Helping OE children recognize and then build a base of strategies to deal with their overexcitabilities can relieve some of the pressure.

- **Intellectual intensity** is intense curiosity and keen observation, wanting to understand how things work and why they are the way they are, and contemplating philosophical questions, such as “What is the meaning of life?” Intellectual intensity is different from intellectual ability. It’s the mental energy that fuels a person’s intellectual passions, the need to know, and the search for truth. Intellectual intensity is about the drive to understand.

Can be impatient and frustrated when others can’t keep up with your train of thought or don’t “get it” as quickly. May need to look for different settings to find intellectual peers.

- **Psychomotor intensity** is a surplus of bodily energy, the need to move, the physical expression of emotional tension, rapid speech, internal drive, and a great capacity for being active and energetic. This physical energy interacts with the activity of the mind, too. (May exhibit in various ways, such as intense physical activity, nail biting, pencil drumming, inability to sit still in seat. This can be misdiagnosed as ADHD.)

Might get their best ideas while doing something physical. Sitting still can be stressful.

- **Sensual intensity** includes enhanced sensory and aesthetic pleasure; intensified seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, and hearing; delight in beautiful objects, sounds of words, music, form, color, and balance.

Sensually aware individuals feel constantly bombarded by stimuli. They experience both positive and negative stimuli in a heightened way, and may be bothered by clothing labels, smells, or noises.

- **Imaginational intensity** involves a rich imagination; vividness of mental imagery; a great capacity for vivid dreams, fantasies, and invention; poetic and dramatic perception; and a need for novelty and variety.
- **Emotional intensity** is an important part of Dabrowski’s work. He said that gifted people often experience intense emotions; a wide range of positive and negative feelings – from great joy to deep despair; complex emotions – sometimes feeling many emotions at one time; and a sensitivity to and awareness of the feelings of others as well. Sometimes these strong emotions bring with them strong physical sensations, such as a tense stomach, sweating palms, blushing, flushing, and a pounding heart.

Can be seen as both a blessing and a curse. Emotionally intense people don’t just feel more emotions; the quality of the emotions is different. Emotions, both positive and negative, can seem to permeate one’s entire being. This can be elating and also overwhelming. Being aware that this is normal for a person can be helpful.

## Uneven Development – Asynchronous Development

Howard Gardner of Harvard has identified seven distinct intelligences.

**Visual-Spatial** - think in terms of physical space, as do architects and sailors. Very aware of their environments. They like to draw, do jigsaw puzzles, read maps, daydream.

**Bodily-kinesthetic** - use the body effectively, like a dancer or a surgeon. Keen sense of body awareness. They like movement, making things, touching.

**Musical** - show sensitivity to rhythm and sound. They love music, but they are also sensitive to sounds in their environments. They may study better with music in the background.

**Interpersonal** - understanding, interacting with others. These students learn through interaction. They have many friends, empathy for others, street smarts.

**Intrapersonal** - understanding one's own interests, goals. These learners tend to shy away from others. They're in tune with their inner feelings; they have wisdom, intuition and motivation, as well as a strong will, confidence and opinions.

**Linguistic** - using words effectively. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words. They like reading, playing word games, making up poetry or stories.

**Logical -Mathematical** - reasoning, calculating. Think conceptually, abstractly and are able to see and explore patterns and relationships. They like to experiment, solve puzzles, ask cosmic questions.

This quote, from the article, "Giftedness as Asynchronous Development" by Stephanie Tolan, puts the issue in a helpful perspective:

"The young gifted child may appear to be many ages at once. He may be eight (his chronological age) when riding a bicycle, twelve when playing chess, fifteen when studying algebra, ten when collecting fossils and two when asked to share his chocolate chip cookie with his sister. This variability in behavior and perception is difficult for parents and schools to handle and difficult for the child as well. It is hard to "fit in" consistently when so much of the child's environment is structured by chronological age, an age which may be for the gifted child the least relevant aspect of his development.

"Understanding giftedness as a stable aspect of the self, an issue of differential development, helps us to understand and support the whole gifted child, rather than only her accomplishments. Understanding and support makes it possible for a child to develop not only her ability to get good grades, win awards, and move ahead on the career path she chooses, but to feel comfortable with herself and valuable as a person."

**Help kids find intellectual peers**

**Help them find kids that have the same interest/passion**

**Be accepting of the whole child...teach them that it's ok not to be good at everything. Some things they will still have to work on.**

### **Peer Relations/Social Skills**

Included in points about "How Not to Make Friends" are a number of bullets that may be ascribed to gifted children, who are already set apart from regular learners by their pace and abilities:

- being bossy
- telling others how to play
- telling others they are doing things wrong
- being too intense or serious most of the time
- talking about themselves a lot
- being negative, using ridicule or sarcasm
- bragging

It takes a sensitive, careful, and well-informed observer to sort through the dynamics of peer relationship problems. Reading social cues is more an art than a science, which makes it difficult to explain in terms that can be clearly understood by a child who really doesn't understand. It is a real challenge to clearly illustrate when it is okay to be different and when it is best to melt into a group.

## Depression

## Perfectionism

- **A desire to please others:** Our children need to know we value who they are, not what they do.
- **Easy successes at a young age:** Children who haven't had a challenge don't learn how to bounce back.
- **Difficulty setting realistic goals:** Multiple abilities mixed with multiple interests plus curiosity and enthusiasm for life can equal overload.

## Needs of the Gifted

Gifted and talented children often have vastly different characteristics, and are sometimes grouped accordingly. For example, although a violin prodigy has a great deal in common with a math whiz, their needs are quite different. It must be remembered that all gifted children share a common need for a strong, supportive person to help them develop their gifts and talents to full potential.

### Needs of Academically Gifted Individuals

- Varied outlets for intellectual curiosity
- Opportunity to work with challenging situations and people
- Expectations appropriate to ability
- Opportunities to make wide application of knowledge
- To study, discuss, and develop ideas within a responsive environment
- To be valued as a unique individual, not stereotyped as “gifted” only
- Training in constructive, responsible leadership
- Thorough training in all facets of thinking
- Assistance with reasonable, high standards of performance
- Emotional support and peer acceptance
- Help in dealing with frustration and inactivity

### Needs of Creative Individuals

- Opportunity to respond constructively to new situations
- Freedom to question and examine the unusual, unknown, and puzzling
- Opportunity to meet challenge and attempt difficult tasks
- Preference for complexity
- Willingness to take risks
- To submerge oneself completely in a task
- To be honest and search for truth
- Urge to be different, unique, individual

### Needs of Talented Individuals

- Access to models in the area of talent
- Development of skills to a high level
- Feedback on success
- Specific help in overcoming obstacles
- Opportunity to progress at one's own rate
- Systematic teaching of techniques for changing oneself
- Someone to study performance carefully and critique thoroughly
- Assistance in setting a reasonable, high standard of achievement
- Assistance with knowledge of how to tolerate frustration

## **The Challenges of Giftedness** *Adapted from Clark (1992) and Seago (1972)*

### **Strengths**

1. Acquires/retains information quickly
2. Inquisitive; searches for significance
3. Intrinsic motivation
4. Enjoys problem solving; able to use abstract reasoning
5. Seeks cause-effect relations
6. Emphasizes truth, equity, and fair play
7. Seeks to organize things and people
8. Large vocabulary; advanced, broad information
9. High expectations of self and others
10. Creative/inventive; likes new ways of doing things
11. Intense concentration; long attention span; persistence in areas of interest
12. Sensitivity, empathy, desire to be accepted
13. High energy, alertness, eagerness
14. Independent; prefers working solo
15. Diverse interests and abilities; versatility

### **Possible Problems**

1. Impatient with others; dislikes routine
2. Asks embarrassing questions
3. Strong-willed; resists direction
4. Resists routine practice; questions use abstract reasoning procedures
5. Dislikes unclear/illogical areas (such as traditions or feelings)
6. Worries about humanitarian concerns
7. Constructs complicated rules; often seen as bossy
8. May use words to manipulate; bored with school and age-peers
9. Intolerant, perfectionist; may become depressed
10. May be seen as disruptive and out of step
11. Neglects duties/people during periods of focus; seen as stubborn
12. Sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection
13. Frustration with inactivity, may be seen as hyperactive
14. May reject parent or peer input; nonconformity
15. May appear disorganized or scattered; frustrated over lack of time

**It must be remembered that all gifted children share a common need for a strong, supportive person to help them develop their gifts and talents to full potential.**

## Impact on Family Dynamics

Of course, many times giftedness does impact the family dynamic. One or more gifted children, particularly if they are highly or profoundly gifted, greatly impacts family dynamics. What you've probably found is that gifted children often react strongly to events in the family that upset the family equilibrium. Gifted children often react strongly to these events with worry, anger, guilt and a variety of other emotions. That's not to say that other children don't react. But because of a gifted child's inclination towards overexcitability in one or more of the areas we've noted, their response to the situation often may seem far more extreme and even disruptive to the family as a whole

## Keeping the Balance

There are five important points to keeping balance in the family.

1. **Communicate.** Actively listen to your children. Listen to their feelings, wants, needs, dreams and desires.
2. **Discipline.** Establish discipline by teaching self-regulation and self-determination. Set limits for your children but provide choices within those limits.
3. **Encourage Excellence.** Encourage striving for excellence rather than perfection. Teach frustration tolerance and stress management. Be a good role model.
4. **Value each child.** Avoid comparisons and highlight each child's unique traits, aptitudes and behaviors.
5. **Take care of yourself.** Work with your spouse or other parents to support one another. Give time to yourself to renew, replenish and recreate.

- See more at: <http://www.sengifted.org/archives/articles/keeping-the-family-balance#sthash.KFXyl4n3.dpuf>

## Be Proactive about raising your gifted child

### Educate yourself, family members, and educators

CASE for Gifted Children [www.casegiftedchildren.org](http://www.casegiftedchildren.org)

TAGT - Tx Association for Gifted and Talented [www.txgifted.org](http://www.txgifted.org)

NAGC - Nat'l Assoc for Gifted Children [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

SENG – Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)

HOAGIES - Hoagies Gifted Education Page [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)

Many resources from articles to books to blogs to online presentations can be found through the above organizations.

Attend the TAGT conference in Houston Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>

### Help your child understand themselves

Books, discussions, counseling

Specific problems can be addressed non confrontational via role models in books and movies (google bibliotherapy and check out Hoagies website for books)