

Supporting Your Child through Social and Emotional Changes

SENG = Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted

“Many schools, communities, and organizations focus on the intellectual needs of gifted individuals. SENNG brings attention to the unique social and emotional needs of gifted individuals, which are often misunderstood or ignored.”

www.sengifted.org contains many resources, including articles, lists of books, etc.

- Click on **New to SENNG? START HERE** to point you towards some of what’s available.
- Newsletter (sign-up on main page)
- **SENGinars** (i.e. SENNG webinars): There’s a SENNGinar on Oct. 17 is called **Gifted 101**, presented by Carolyn Kottmeyer, founder and director of **Hoagies’ Gifted Education Page** (www.hoagiesgifted.org).
- **SENG Model Parent Groups**: Julie Wilcox is beginning a new class on Oct. 3. Class size is limited; contact jwilcox@ccisd.net.

Books:

1. Daniels, Susan and Michael M. Piechowski. *Living With Intensity*. Tucson, AZ: Great Potential Press, 2009.
2. Delisle, James. *Parenting Gifted Kids: Tips for Raising Happy and Successful Children*. Waco: Prufrock Press Inc., 2006.
3. Delisle, Jim and Judy Galbraith. *When Gifted Kids Don’t Have All the Answers*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2002.
4. Galbraith, Judy. *The Gifted Kids’ Survival Guide*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2009.
5. Galbraith, Judy and Jim Delisle. *The Gifted Teen Survival Guide: Smart, Sharp, and Ready for (Almost) Anything*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2011.
6. Walker, Sally. *The Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1991.
7. Webb, James, et. Al. *A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press, 2007.

There is more to being gifted than “being smart.” Gifted children (and adults!) tend to think and feel qualitatively differently than others, and tend to experience the world more intensely. Examples (taken from *Delisle, 2006*):

- Your son’s teacher sent you a note that reads, “Although I love Joey’s enthusiasm, he must stop shouting out his answers in class. Also, please talk to him about the incessant tapping of his pencil, and his need to sit down when he is doing worksheets.”
- You take your teenage daughter to an art museum and split up so each family member can visit his or her favorite galleries. An hour later, you find your daughter just where you left her, and there are tears in her eyes. “This single painting carries the essence of what it means to be human,” she says. It’s then that you realize she has spent her whole time gazing at this one piece of artwork.
- You are packing the last of the boxes on the moving van when you spy your 10-year-old carefully tearing a bit of wallpaper from the living room. Upon closer examination, you see that he has pieces of wallpaper from every room tucked away in a shoebox. “These will help me remember every room in the most special house in the world,” he explains to you.
- After your 4-year-old falls in the driveway, scraping her knee, you take her in your arms to comfort her tears. Once soothed, she looks you straight in the eye and says, “Mommy, it’s never going to get better than this.”

How do we respond? Often, we complain about how “messy” these intensities make life.

- Instead of talking with Joey’s teacher about ways to channel his intellectual excitement, we come up with behavior charts and fake awards Joey earns if he sits for 20 minutes without leaving his seat.
- We chastise our daughter for missing out on the new Abyssinian exhibit because she just sat and stared at “a picture, a single, stupid picture” for an hour.
- We roll our eyes at the wallpaper incident, lecturing about the need not to damage property or take things that no longer belong to us.
- We tell our sensitive 4-year-old that she needs to be more careful in the driveway, effectively ignoring the power of her sentiment.

We (individually and as a society) ask them to “quiet down” their brains, and transform unique perception into more “standard”, “acceptable” behaviors.

Overexcitabilities (OEs) or Intensities:

Dabrowski/Piechowski (descriptions taken largely from an essay by Susan Daniel, from Galbraith and Delisle, 2011)

- **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.

Asynchronous development refers to the situation where a child's mind is developing at one rate while his or her body and emotions are developing at another. The Columbus Group, led by Dr. Linda Kreger Silverman, coined the term "asynchronous development" in 1991 and came up with this definition:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gift renders [children] particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.

Children (and their parents) need to accept that this is normal for them, even though it can be frustrating. (Delisle and Galbraith, 2002)

100 Words of Wisdom: James T. Webb, Ph.D.

“When intensity and sensitivity are combined with idealism, as so often happens with bright children and adults, good things can happen because they can keenly see how things might be. But this can also lead to frustration, disillusionment, and unhappiness. Sometimes this prompts perfectionism; other times it results in existential depression. Through our relationships, we must provide understanding and nurturance so that they do not feel alone and helpless in a world that seems so paradoxical, arbitrary, and even absurd. We can help nurture their idealism, and indeed we must if the world is to become a better place.”

Some General Characteristics of Gifted Children and problems that may be related to them. (*Delisle and Galbraith, 2002*)

The child who...

shows superior reasoning powers and marked ability to handle ideas

can solve problems quickly and easily

shows persistent intellectual curiosity and asks searching questions

shows exceptional interest in the nature of humankind and the universe

has a wide range of interests; develops one or more interests to considerable depth

has an advanced vocabulary

is an avid reader

learns quickly; comprehends readily

may also be the child who...

is impatient; seems stuck-up or arrogant; challenges your authority; has difficulty getting along with less able peers

wants to move on quickly to more challenging problems, despite what the rest of the class is doing; hates to “wait for the group”; gets bored and frustrated

drives you crazy with questions; asks inappropriate or embarrassing questions; is perceived as “nosy”

has difficulty focusing on ideas that are less grand and sweeping; feels that everyday class work is trivial and meaningless; can’t “connect” with interests of age peers

seems scattered and disorganized; takes on too many projects at once; gets obsessed with a particular interest; resist direction or interruption; rebels against conforming to group tasks; disrupts class routines; is perceived as stubborn or uncooperative

talks too much; finds it hard to communicate with age peers; seems pompous or conceited – a “show-off”; dominates discussions; has trouble listening

busies himself or herself in books and avoids social interaction

gets bored with the regular curriculum; gets impatient with peers for being “slow”; resists assignments that don’t present opportunities for new learning; dislikes drill and practice; does inaccurate or sloppy work

grasps mathematical concepts readily	has little or no patience for regular math lessons or homework
is creative and imaginative	goes too far; seems disruptive; lacks interest in mundane assignments or details; wanders off the subject
sustains concentration for lengthy periods of time	has tunnel vision; hates to be interrupted; neglects regular assignments or responsibilities; is stubborn
shows outstanding responsibility and independence	has difficulty working with others; resists following directions; seems bossy and disrespectful; is unable to accept help; is a nonconformist
sets high standards for self; is self-critical	sets unrealistically high goals; is perfectionistic; lacks tolerance for others' mistakes; fears failure; avoids taking risks or trying new things; becomes depressed
shows initiative and originality	resists going along with the crowd (or the class); is a loner
shows flexibility in thinking; considers problems from a number of viewpoints	has difficulty focusing on or finishing assignments; has trouble making decisions
observes keenly; is responsive to new ideas	sees too much; becomes impatient
communicates easily with adults	has difficulty communicating with age peers
gets excitement and pleasure from intellectual challenge	expects or demands intellectual challenge; resists sameness and routine tasks
has a keen sense of humor	uses humor inappropriately to gain attention or attack others; becomes the "class clown"; is disruptive
is sensitive, empathetic, and emotional	takes things personally; is easily hurt or upset; feels powerless to solve the world's problems; becomes fearful, anxious, and sad; has trouble handling criticism or rejection; is "too emotional," laughing one moment and crying the next; may seem immature

Maddening Myths about giftedness (Galbraith and Delisle, 2011):

MYTH: Gifted kids have it made and will succeed in life no matter what. They don't need any special help in school or anywhere else.

FACT: Everyone needs encouragement – and help – to make the most of their abilities and succeed in life. In fact, many gifted teens experience intense emotions, perfectionism, and other traits that can sometimes make success a struggle.

MYTH: Gifted kids should love school, get high grades, and greet each new school day with enthusiasm.

FACT: Most schools are geared for average learners, not gifted learners, which makes it hard for gifted students to get excited about going.

MYTH: Gifted kids are good at everything they do.

FACT: Some gifted students are good at many things; others are exceptionally able at only a few things. In some areas, they may struggle just like everyone else.

MYTH: Teachers love to have gifted students in their classes.

FACT: Some do, some don't.

MYTH: Gifted students don't know they're "different" unless someone tells them.

FACT: Most gifted kids don't need to be identified or labeled before they know that they're not quite like their age peers.

MYTH: Gifted kids are equally mature in all areas – academic, physical, social, and emotional.

FACT: That would be convenient, but it's not a reasonable expectation.

The Eight Great Gripes of Parents with Gifted Kids (*Walker, 1991*)

1. No one explains what having a “gifted child” is all about.
2. I don’t like having my child labeled.
3. Relatives, other parents, and teachers don’t recognize that we have unique problems. They assume it’s a snap to raise a gifted child.
4. All parents like to think their kids are extra special. Some people think we’re on an ego trip, or just plain pushy.
5. The school assumes that “the cream always rises to the top,” so special programs for the gifted aren’t needed. If that’s true, then why is my child bored and unhappy with school?
6. Other people expect my child to be gifted in everything, or to act like an adult.
7. Parents get no support for this challenging job. Once you give birth, you’re supposed to know it all.
8. It’s exhausting to raise a gifted child! I wish there were ways to make it easier.