

香港資優教育學院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education
Information Sheet

NURTURING THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GIFTED CHILDREN

To a large degree, the social and emotional needs of gifted children are the same as those of all children. Gifted children will go through the same developmental stages as other children, though often at a younger age and in an asynchronous manner. It is this unevenness of development combined with the intensity of feelings and emotions that can cause problems for the child, his/her parents, his/her peers and the teacher if they are not properly understood and appropriate reactions and coping strategies identified.

A lack of understanding of, and support for, gifted children is unhelpful. Sometimes ambivalence or even hostility towards the outward characteristics of gifted children can create long-lasting difficulties for the child and those around them. Some common problem patterns are:

- **School Culture.** Gifted children, by definition, are "different" when compared with same-age children--at least in cognitive abilities--and require different educational experiences. Schools, however, generally group children by age. The child often has a dilemma—to conform to the expectations for the average age cohort or be seen as nonconformist.
- **Expectations by Others.** Gifted children--particularly the more creative--do not conform. Nonconformists violate or challenge traditions, rituals, roles, or expectations. Such behaviours often prompt discomfort in others. The gifted child, sensitive to others' discomfort, may then try to hide their abilities.
- **Peer Relations.** Who is a peer for a gifted child? Gifted children need several peer groups because their interests are so varied. Their advanced levels of ability may steer them toward older children or adults. Such children are often thought of as "loners." The conflict between fitting in and being an individual may be quite stressful.
- **Family Relations.** Families particularly influence the development of social and emotional maturity. When problems occur, it is not because parents consciously decide to create difficulties for gifted children, it is because parents lack information about the needs of gifted children, or they lack support for appropriate parenting skills, or they are attempting to cope with their own unresolved problems (which may stem from their experiences with being gifted). The challenge is to find solutions which work for the individual child and those solutions may differ from strategies generally considered appropriate for a gifted child. It is not always an easy task; there are sometimes no "quick fixes".
- **Depression.** Depression can develop if a child is angry at themselves about a situation which is beyond their control. Any natural tendency to self-evaluate will be inflated and depression together with academic underachievement may be increased. Sometimes educational misplacement causes the gifted youngster to feel caught in a slow motion world. Depression may result because the child feels caught in an unchangeable situation.

Here is a checklist of some of the more common social and emotional characteristics of gifted children, the problems often associated with them and some suggestions for dealing with them. Please note:

- the list is not necessarily exhaustive and
- the presentation of issues often occurs in groups so the suggestions/coping strategies often need to have more than one dimension also

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Strengths	Possible Problems	Helpful Suggestions
Acquires/retains information quickly	Impatient with others; dislikes basic routine	Help the child to learn to wait for things; life isn't always instant. Consider activities which involve patience like gardening, modelling and fishing
Inquisitive; searches for significance	Asks embarrassing questions; obsessive in interests	Encourage own research to answer questions using books and the internet. Older children might direct questions to professionals e.g. asking BP about carbon footprints or ministers about God
Intrinsic motivation	Strong-willed; resists direction	Allow child to organise own time so menial tasks (homework, chores) are done allowing time for their own independence/free time. Reward chores with fun activities
Enjoys problem-solving; able to conceptualise	Resists routine ; questions teaching procedures	Ensure child is informed of the reason for particular teaching styles in school, and the necessity for routines. Encourage an awareness of others, and explain the need for working together to achieve the best possible results
Seeks cause- effect relations	Dislikes unclear/illogical thinking	Help child explore the complexity of causal relations and understand the multi-faceted nature of explanations if they are ready for this. Science, ecology and geography provide many examples
Emphasizes truth, equity, and fair play	Worries about humanitarian concerns	Try to steer the worries/concerns into practical help e.g. fund raising for disasters, creating a project to show class about a particular issue. Encourage a "worry book" where the (young) child writes down concerns in a book, which is then removed by parent, taking the worry away
Seeks to organize things and people	Constructs complicated rules ; often seen as bossy	Allow child to assist in some organisational planning and highlight need to consider others e.g. writing lists for shopping, arranging what to do on holiday, planning a classroom project. Encourage seeing the other person's view by playing 'devil's advocate'
Creative/inventive; likes new ways of doing things	May be seen as disruptive and out of step	Channel creativity into positive ventures such as art/music/film/theatre. Encourage child by adopting some of their new ideas within the home, and also to understand sometimes things have to be done a certain way particularly at school
Intense concentration, attention span and persistence	Neglects duties or people during focus; dislikes interruption; stubbornness	Create workable timetable in collaboration with child. Remind when time is nearly finished on particular activities and when its time to do other work. Encourage choice, and awareness of time "I'll do this for half an hour and then I'll"

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Sensitivity, empathy; desire to be accepted by others.	Sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection	Encourage child to explore own feelings using social/emotional story books which help (young) children to understand emotions. Role play in drama can encourage empathetic feelings. Help child to develop friendships with other children, and that constructive criticism in a safe friendship is good
High energy, alertness, eagerness	Frustration with inactivity; May be seen as hyperactive	Investigate groups/clubs the child might be interested in joining e.g. football, gymnastics, swimming, scouts, guides. Or encourage hobbies/interests at school/home. But encourage proper rest and sleep
Independent; reliant on self	May reject parent or peer Input; nonconformity	Show child it is alright to have support and guidance by modeling this between parents and with child. Show acknowledgement and praise whenever child works co-operatively, and value the child's self reliance
Strong sense of humour	Peers may not understand humour; may be "class clown"	Encourage child into appropriate uses of humour e.g. working on school play, creating a stand-up routine. Celebrate the creativity at appropriate times

Further Guidance

The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children by Maureen Neihart	Useful book detailing different areas of development looking specifically at gifted children
How Rude!: The Teenagers Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behaviour by Alex Packer	Informative book for teenagers
Good Friends Are Hard to Find: Help Your Child Find, Make and Keep Friends By Fred Frankel	Book to help with friendship issues
Just Because I Am: A Child's Book of Affirmation By Lauren Murphy Pane	Book to encourage self esteem and value emotions
Hot Stuff to Help Kids Chill – The Anger Management Book By Jeremy Wilde	Book to help deal with emotions
I feel Jealous/I feel Scared Brian Moses & Mike Gordon	Range of books issued on different emotions
www.understandingchildhood.net	Has information and downloadable leaflets on child development
www.cfchildren.org.uk	Organisation working towards helping children in their social and emotional development
www.youngminds.org.uk	Charity concerned with mental health of young people. Has free parent helpline

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