

## Managing the Rainbow!

### *Gifted Children and the “Big 5” Overexcitabilities*

*The Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children (2007)* explains that:

“Kazimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychiatrist, developed a theory that has enormously affected our understanding of gifted children and adults. His theory includes the concept of “**overexcitabilities**”, referring to a person’s heightened response to stimuli. This concept has shed light on the intensity and sensitivity so often displayed by persons with unusually high mental abilities. “

“...excitability seemed to occur in five different areas (intellectual, imaginational, emotional, sensual, and psychomotor). Some individuals showed their excitable passion and intensity in all areas; others in fewer areas, perhaps only one or two.”

“The idea is that gifted children’s passion and intensity lead them to be so reactive that their feelings and experiences far exceed what one would typically expect.”

“These overexcitabilities are both a major source of strength to gifted children and also often a cause of substantial stress, a source of personal frustration, or a basis for criticism.”

- Webb, Gore, Amend & DeVries, 2007

The accompanying table illustrates the five OEs and explains how they might appear to parents or educators.

Using color-coding to represent the different OEs, you can see how they cover a spectrum of behaviors, and you can begin to think of them as a “rainbow” of traits.

Understanding the colors of a child’s unique rainbow can help both parents and educators make sense of their often perplexing, or even exasperating behavior.



*The group “Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted” or SENG (sengifted.org) published a 2001 article on the OEs by Sharon Lind who said the following:*

“One outcome of the pursuit of educational and societal equity has been a diminishing of the celebration of diversity and individual differences. Highly gifted individuals, because of their uniqueness, can fall prey to the public and personal belief that they are not OK.”

“It is vital when discussing OEs that individuals realize that overexcitability is just one more description of who they are, as is being tall, or Asian, or left-handed. Since OEs are inborn traits, **they cannot be unlearned!**”

“It is therefore exceedingly important that we accept our overexcitable selves, children, and friends. Another way to show acceptance is to provide opportunities for people to pursue their passions. This shows respect for their abilities and intensities and allows time for them to “wallow” in what they love, to be validated for who they are.”

“Removing passions as consequences for inappropriate behavior has a negative effect by giving the message that your passions, the essence of who you are, are not valuable or worthy of respect.”

*See James T. Webb et al. 2007 – A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children*

## Dabrowski's Overexcitabilities (OEs)

 Emotional	 Psychomotor	 Imaginational	 Sensual	 Intellectual
<b>Emotional</b>	<p><b>What it is...</b>extreme and complex emotions and intense positive/negative feelings; development of deep relationships and attachment to people, places and things; concern over the well-being of others or the environment</p> <p><b>What it may look like...</b>highly sensitive, moody, overly dramatic, over-reacting, temper tantrums; but also compassionate, caring, empathetic, able to form strong attachments</p> <p><b>When upset...</b>depressed, anxious, or angry; highly self-critical; may suffer physical illness; may lash out or withdraw; feels responsible for things beyond their control</p>			
<b>Psychomotor</b>	<p><b>What it is...</b>heightened capacity for being active &amp; energetic</p> <p><b>What it may look like...</b>rapid speech, surplus of energy, twiddling hair, tapping feet or pencils, fidgeting, compulsive organizing, very competitive, boundless physical and verbal enthusiasm/activity (that may be mis-diagnosed as hyperactivity or ADHD)</p> <p><b>When upset...</b>hyperactive, frustrated, competitive, compulsive, nervous tics</p>			
<b>Imaginational</b>	<p><b>What it is...</b>heightened imaginative &amp; creative ability; drawn to fantasy</p> <p><b>What it may look like...</b>daydreaming, imaginary friends, animistic thinking, fantasy play, belief in magic; artistic, dramatic, highly visual; drawn to complex imaginative schemes and use of metaphor</p> <p><b>When upset...</b>may tune out/withdraw into fantasy world, or have fear of the unknown</p>			
<b>Sensual</b>	<p><b>What it is...</b>heightened senses (seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing); unusual sensitivity to music, language, and foods</p> <p><b>What it may look like...</b>delight in artistic pleasures, cooking/eating, soothing textures/fabrics; or negative physical reaction to over-stimulation from sensual input i.e., very sensitive to noise, lighting, perfumes, tags/seams in clothing; or may be picky eaters</p> <p><b>When upset...</b>may over-indulge or seek comfort/luxury; may console oneself with a favorite cozy baby blanket or stuffed animal</p>			
<b>Intellectual</b>	<p><b>What it is...</b>highly intelligent; a thirst for knowledge, understanding &amp; truth</p> <p><b>What it may look like...</b>a love of logic, brain-teasers &amp; puzzles; intense curiosity, problem-solving &amp; theoretical thinking skills; avid reading, asking probing questions; very concerned with moral issues &amp; fairness; independent thinkers &amp; keen observers; but can be perfectionists and have overly intense focus (to exclusion of all else)</p> <p><b>When upset...</b>can be critical or impatient with others; may over-analyze situations; may be overly perfectionistic &amp; self-critical</p>			