



Problem Prevention in the Gifted

Sometimes, the combination of several strong gifted characteristics can pose problems for the gifted child. Listed below are a few of these behavior patterns that can become problematic and some strategies for prevention.

Asynchronous Development is development that is “out-of-sync” or uneven. Motor skills often lag behind cognitive conceptual abilities, especially in younger gifted children. They can visualize what they want to do, construct or draw, however, their motor skills do not allow them to achieve their goal. Intense frustration and emotional outbursts may result.¹

Peer Relations become strained as gifted children, especially younger and highly gifted children, attempt to organize people and things. Their search for consistency emphasizes “rules,” which they attempt to apply to others. They invent complex games and try to organize their playmates, often prompting resentment in their peers.

Perfectionism is the ability to see how one might ideally perform, combined with an emotional intensity to achieve that ideal performance. This leads many gifted children to unrealistic high expectations of themselves. 15-20% may be hindered significantly by Perfectionism at some point in their academic careers, and into adulthood.

Excessive Self-Criticism occurs when gifted youth are able to see possibilities and alternatives from what they are, to what their idealistic self-image might be. They berate themselves because they see themselves as falling short of that ideal.²

Underachievement & Risk Avoidance is like Perfectionism in that the child sees an ideal self, but also sees the potential problems of undertaking the activities to achieve the ideal. This child avoids the potential problems by refusing to take any risks, which then results in underachievement.³

Multipotentiality is a gifted child who has several advanced capabilities and may be involved in activities to an almost frantic degree. Sometimes, this can lead to confusion, anxiety, and frustration when a child feels she is missing something or may make a wrong decision. This can be a significant problem, which can lead to overscheduling, high stress, impulsiveness, conformist choices, feelings of alienation, purposelessness, apathy and depression. Children who are gifted in multiple disciplines are challenged later in life to focus on one career path.⁴

Twice-Exceptionality (gifted children with disabilities, also known as “2E”) can prompt social and emotional difficulties. Intellect may be high, but motor difficulties can prevent the expression of the child’s potential. The same is true if the child has a visual, hearing or learning disability. Twice-Exceptional children tend to evaluate themselves more on what they are *unable* to do and less on their substantial abilities.⁵

Depression. Depression is defined as a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Suppressed anger at oneself or at a situation over which one has little or no control can lead to depression in a gifted child. Continual evaluation and criticism by family members, or others, will increase the natural tendency to self-evaluate. Depression and underachievement may increase.

Problems also arise from outside sources when there is a lack of understanding or support of gifted children. Sometimes this presents itself in the form of ambivalence or even hostility.¹

Family Relations. Families particularly influence the development of social and emotional competence. When problems occur, it is not because parents consciously decide to create difficulties for gifted children. It is because parents lack information about gifted children, lack support for appropriate parenting, or are attempting to cope with their own unresolved problems (which oftentimes stems from their own experiences with being gifted).

School Culture and Norms. Gifted children, by definition, are “different” when compared with same-age children – at least cognitively – and require different educational experiences. Schools generally group children by age. The child is faced with the dilemma of either conforming to the expectations for the average child or be seen as a nonconformist.⁶

Expectations of Others. Gifted children, particularly the more creative, do not conform. Nonconformists violate or challenge traditions, rituals, roles or expectations. Such behaviors often make other uncomfortable. The gifted child, who is extremely sensitive to others’ discomfort, may then try to hide abilities.

Peer Relations. Gifted children need several peer groups because their interests and intellectual strengths are so varied. Their advanced levels of ability may steer them toward older children. They may choose peers by reading books. Such children are often thought of as “loners.” The conflict between fitting in and being an individual may be quite stressful.⁷

Prevention Strategies

Reach Out. Parents are particularly important in preventing social or emotional problems. Supportive family environments can counteract unhappy school environments. Parents need information if they are to nurture well and be wise advocates for their children.

Focus on Parents of Young Children. Problems are best answered and prevented by involving parents when children are young. Parents particularly must understand characteristics that they may make gifted children seem different or difficult.

Educate & Involve Health Professionals. Concentrated efforts should be made to involve health professionals in state and local meetings and in continuing education programs concerning gifted children. Pediatricians, psychologists, and other caregivers such as daycare providers typically have received little to no training about gifted children and will be able to provide little assistance to parents.¹

Educational Flexibility. Gifted children require different and flexible educational experiences. Examples are: Early Entrance, Grade Skipping, Acceleration, Advanced Placement, Compact Courses, Dual Enrollment, and Credit by Examination.⁸

Parent Discussion Groups. Parents typically have few opportunities to talk with other parents. Discussion groups provide a chance to swap “parenting recipes” and child-rearing experiences. This provides perspective, as well as specific information as to “what works” and what does not.⁹

Excerpted from the following professionals and experts in giftedness and Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG):
¹ Webb & Kleine, 1993. ² Adderholdt-Elliott, 1989; Powell & Haden, 1984; Whitmore, 1980. ³ Whitmore, 1980. ⁴ Kerr, 1985, 1991.
⁵ Whitmore & Maker, 1985. ⁶ Kleine & Webb, 1992. ⁷ Halsted, 1994. ⁸ Cox, Daniel & Boston, 1985. ⁹ Webb & DeVries, 1993.

For further assistance with social and emotional aspects, please seek advice from a professional and read more about these issues at the website for SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted): www.SenGifted.org

An important resource for Florida parents considering having their children screened as gifted is the **Florida Department of Education Handbook for Parents of Gifted Children** (free download at: www.FLDOE.org/ESE/pdf/p-gifted.pdf).

Additional important resources for gifted children and parents can be found at: www.QuestGAC.org

If you have questions, please contact the **Director of Exceptional Student Education at 352-797-7022** or contact the **Quest Academy Gifted Advisory Council at Info@QuestGAC.org**.