



Social Emotional Aspects of Giftedness

Those who seek out support from the “experts” repeatedly hear the statement, “The child is a child first, and is only gifted secondarily.” However, gifted children are not simply decorated normal children – they are fundamentally different. A child with a 145 IQ is as different from the norm 100 IQ as is the child with a 55 IQ. For children of a high IQ, their intellectual potential – the brain that drives them – is so fundamental to everything about them, that it cannot be separated from the personhood of the child. We must recognize that these children are different. We must help them learn social, interpersonal and self-development skills to better relate to the rest of humanity.¹

Asynchronous Development is development that is “out-of-sync” or uneven.

Emotional-Intellectual Asynchrony is stressful for the child and difficult for adults to understand. For example, a 6-year-old child may have the intellect to fully understand and discuss the ramifications of global warming like a 12-year-old. Unfortunately, the 6-year-old may not have the emotional maturity to deal with the full comprehension of global warming’s potentially tragic consequences and his behavior is then perceived by adults to be immature. In fact, the emotional behavior of the 6-year-old is appropriate.

Ability Asynchrony occurs when a child’s motor skills lag behind her intellectual ability. If a child has the ability to fully visualize how a finished product should look, yet does not have the fine motor skills to execute or create it, then this can cause deep distress for the child.

Interpersonal Asynchrony exists when a child does not feel she fits in with the world around her. Gifted children realize at a very young age that they are different from others. This causes a child to feel at odds with peers, traditions, and society.

Perfectionism occurs in a significant number of gifted children, perhaps as much as 20%. They suffer from it to a degree that creates problems (dysfunctional perfectionism).² Gifted children often see the world in ideal terms. They can clearly see how society falls short. High ideals can often cause them to feel pressured to make a difference in the world. The stress from these high expectations can be problematic if the child is also a perfectionist and expects the world to be their version of “perfect.” These children often find it difficult to tolerate what they consider imperfections in daily life. The child may hold inappropriately high standards for himself – either in an attempt to please others and fit in or because past performance and successes have resulted in high expectations for himself. Anything less may be seen as a failure to the child, leaving the child continually dissatisfied because the work is never perceived as good enough. Perfectionism may also cause a child to feel guilty or selfish if he is not involved in meaningful work at all times and can result in procrastination and/or underachievement.

Multipotentiality means a gifted child may have several advanced capabilities and may be involved in diverse activities to an almost frantic degree. Having multiple and diverse capabilities leads to multiple opportunities and choices. This may 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. Manifestations in early ages may include difficulty making decisions or following through on tasks (even

enjoyable ones). Older children might overschedule activities and therefore have few “free periods,” which gifted children so desperately need.

Overexcitabilities (or Heightened Sensitivities) are extraordinarily high degrees of sensitivity and intensity which can occur in any one, or all, of the following areas:

Psychomotor OE is a heightened excitability of the neuromuscular system. This may result in rapid speech, fervent enthusiasm, intense physical activity, and a need for action. These children are often misdiagnosed as ADHD.

Sensual OE is a heightened sensory capability of the five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, sound). These children experience emotional and physical discomfort from too much sensory stimulation.

Intellectual OE manifests in an intense curiosity with a marked need to seek understanding, gain knowledge, and to analyze. Often this translates into strong concerns about moral and ethical issues, such as fairness on the playground, lack of respect for children, and concern about complex issues. Intellectual intensity seems to cause the greatest difficulty at school and home when children become so excited about learning and thinking that they interrupt or blurt out answers at in appropriate times or are too honest about or critical of others’ ideas.³

Imaginational OE manifests in the children who grow restless in classrooms where literal thinking is favored over imagination. They may mix truth with fiction, create their own private worlds with imaginary companions and dramatizations to escape boredom. They may write stories or draw instead of doing seat work or participating in class discussions. They may have difficulty completing tasks when some incredible idea sends them off on an imaginative tangent.

Emotional OE is an exhibition of intense feelings and complex emotions and are often accused of “overreacting.” These children have compassion, empathy, and sensitivity in relationships. Their concern for others, their focus on relationships, and the intensity of their feelings may interfere with everyday tasks like homework or doing the dishes. Those tasks seem meaningless to them compared to the needs of their loved ones or humanity in general.

Depression can often present in gifted children and adults. Gifted children and adults are more prone to depression and suicide because of their intensity, feelings of alienation and perfectionism.

Excerpted from the following professionals and experts in giftedness and Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG):

¹ Webb, Mecksworth, and Tolan. *Guiding the Gifted Child*. Scottsdale: Great Potential Press, 1994.

² Estimated by various professionals: Adderholdt & Goldberg (1999), Kerr (1991), Silverman (1993), and Parker & Mills (1996).

³ Lind, Sharon. *Overexcitability and the Highly Gifted Child*. California Association for the Gifted. Fall 2000, Vol. 31, No. 4.

If you need help with Social and Emotional Aspects, please seek advice from a professional and read more about these issues at the website for SENEG (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.