

FIVE STEPS TOWARD BETTER PARENTING OF GIFTED CHILDREN

By Audra Nelson: edited

1. Talk about how talent develops. Don't let giftedness be the elephant in the room with your kids. Too often, gifted students believe every challenging task is a test of their giftedness, and they live in fear that people will find out they aren't as smart as everyone thinks they are. Remind children that they have a role to play. It's not about *being* gifted; it's about using your gifts and developing your talent, achieving and learning more each day.

2. Teach kids that mistakes make us smarter. Too often, children buy into the belief that smart kids do well without working hard. We need kids to realize that working hard makes you smart! As you stretch yourself and overcome challenges, you create new pathways in your brain. Every mistake leads you closer to success. As parents, we can help kids build their brains by providing them with enrichment opportunities.

3. Avoid -EST words. As adults, we know it's rarely, if ever, true that we are the best, brightest, fastest or any other -est. At some point, our kids will learn this lesson, too. If they grow up thinking they are the -EST, the reality will come as a shocker. As parents, we can help build kids' confidence and give them a realistic view of the world by avoiding "-est" words and exposing them to other kids of equal or greater ability. The earlier that students "swim in a bigger pool of talent," the easier it is for them to develop a mindset centered on learning and growth rather than a performance mindset in which ability is a fixed entity.

4. Give specific, developmental compliments. John Hattie did a meta-analysis of the education research to find out what makes the most impact on a child's education, and this was it: individual feedback. The next time my daughter asks if I like her drawing, I'm going to stop and really look at it. And instead of saying, "That's the best portrait you've ever drawn," I will take note of something specific. Maybe I will say, "I really like the realistic colors you've chosen," or "You spent a long time working on that. You must be learning to pay attention to detail." I will make the time to respond to her in a way that will influence her learning, not just allow me to get back to my agenda.

5. Document and recognize growth. Showing kids how much they've learned year to year gives them a visual of growth and an understanding that growth is not fixed, but malleable. When my son moans and groans about handwriting practice, I can encourage him by showing him the improvement he made from preschool to kindergarten.

Listening For What Gifted Children Don't Say

Sylvia Rimm, PhD, Child Psychologist

Gifted children often talk a lot. Their early vocabulary astounds their audiences and attracts amazed praise. The frequent and extraordinary approval reinforces their verbal skills and, by classical conditioning, causes them to feel intelligent while they're talking. It's no wonder they're often so willing to share their knowledge—sometimes nonstop—with parents, classmates, teachers, and almost anyone who is willing to listen. The confident verbosity of gifted children convinces parents that their children will speak up and ask for guidance when they need it, but too often that is not the case. Sometimes gifted children think they know what their parents do and do not want to hear; therefore, these children will tell parents only certain information and avoid telling them other things, such as their fears.

Gifted children may not always understand themselves as much as their advanced vocabulary suggests. Furthermore, when the pressures of adolescence begin, they may hold back secrets that could astound parents. Because characteristic behaviors of adolescence begin much earlier in our society today, parents may not be prepared and may parent differently than they should. They could assume their children are open with them, when in fact dividing walls are already being erected between children and their parents.

As a psychologist who specializes in the social and emotional needs of gifted children, I often have to listen to what gifted children “are not” saying, so I can determine what they are feeling and how to guide them. As parents, you, too, can tune in to what your gifted children's words aren't telling you, if you listen frequently and carefully. The examples below from research and clinical work will sensitize you to what your children aren't saying directly but may be feeling.

Insecurity

Television news anchor, Donna Draves, remembers telling her mother she wanted to quit dance lessons because they were becoming boring. She revealed to the research interviewer that she had never before shared with anyone that her reason for quitting was actually that she was no longer the best dancer in the class.

Parent Pointers for Listening for What Your Gifted Child is Not Saying

1. Sit and listen to your children, daily if possible. A glass of milk can loosen adolescent tongues. Pre-bedtime chats are effective for children who wish to stay awake as late as possible.
2. Really listen. If parents talk too much, children stop talking.
3. Continued negative criticism paralyzes communication. Reserve evaluations for your most important messages.

4. When children describe their friends' thoughts or feelings, they're often testing their parents response to their own acts or worries. Answer with caution.
5. Small tears tell you there's more to what they've said than what they're sharing.
6. When children don't make eye contact, they may be lying.
7. When children protest that something doesn't bother them, it could be the thing that is hurting them; for example, what others think, lower than typical grades, not winning a competition, or not being selected for a team or activity.
8. When children refer to something or someone frequently, that something or someone is more important than they're letting on.
9. When children say they don't know why they've done something, they really might not know or prefer not to tell you.
10. The word "boring" can be a descriptor of a variety of problems, including lack of challenge, fear of challenge, insecurity that others are doing better, thoughts that their teacher doesn't likes them, or half a dozen other problems.

Children continuously compare themselves to other children in their families, schools, and neighborhoods. They also compare their present feelings about achievements to their past experiences. When they feel more or at least equally successful in their comparisons, they're likely to feel good about themselves and share their feelings with parents. If they fear being less successful, they may or may not report their worries. Instead, they may use defense mechanisms and bend the truth to protect their fragile self-concepts. In order for gifted children to build the resilience required for leading fulfilling adult lives, they will have to learn to cope with some less successful experiences. Because they have often been extraordinarily successful, coping will not always be easy for them. Parents and teachers who listen to what children say, as well as to what they give clues about but avoid saying, are better able to guide and support them as they develop confidence and resilience.

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Perfectionism and Emotional Sensitivities in Gifted Children

1. Perfectionism is the fear of making a mistake which in turn causes a gifted child to avoid failure by refusing to try something they might not be good at (including doing a homework assignment!)
2. Keen observation, imagination, and ability to see beyond the obvious can cause a gifted child to appear shy, holding back in new situations in order to consider all the implications.

3. A gifted child may require full details before answering questions or offering help, making him or her appear socially shy.

4. Intense sensitivity can cause gifted children to take criticism, or even general anger, very personally. Childhood slights do not roll off their backs.

5. Sensitivity and well-developed sense of right and wrong can lead to concern over wars, starving children, pollution and other injustice and violence. If they are overloaded with images and discussions of these issues, they can become introverted and withdrawn or even suffer from "existential depression."

Stress and the Gifted Child

Edited from the article by Michele Kane, EdD, SENGifted.org

Characteristics often found in Gifted Children

- Unusual emotional depth and intensity- need to have philosophical discussions; guidance
- Idealism and sense of justice, which appear at an early age - need to transcend negative reactions by finding values to which s/he can be committed
- Advance level of moral judgment - need to receive validation for non-average morality
- Strongly motivated by self-actualization needs - need to be given opportunities to follow divergent paths and pursue strong interests

These characteristics can lead to stress because

- Gifted kids can dwell on things that create internal dissonance (e.g. Global issues, natural disasters)
- Existential angst appears earlier in the developmental process for many gifted kids
- Executive functions of the brain (planning, organizing, self-regulation) may lag behind cognitive development; education and/or training helps
- Intensity and sensitivity may create significant emotional turmoil for gifted kids

Signs of Stress Overload

- Sleep difficulties
- Loss of appetite
- Chronic fatigue
- Vague stomach upset
- Low grade infection
- Rashes
- Frequent colds
- Headaches
- Nightmares
- Anxiety
- Apathy
- Panic
- Inappropriate laughter
- Feelings of failure
- Feelings of unworthiness
- Fighting
- Stealing
- Refusing to do school work
- Loss of interest in appearance
- Yelling(significant) & frequent tantrums

- Running away from school or truancy
- Attention-seeking behaviors (significant)
- Loss of meaning and purpose
- Confusion about feeling connected to self and others
- Feeling rudderless; without a moral compass
- Loss of compassionate nature
- No sense of belonging

Practical Tips to help Gifted Kids with Stress

Interpersonal

- Limit violence : TV/news/games
- Role play social situations
- Connect with other kids: structured or unstructured
- Have them learn about and accept their unique personality type. Introvert vs Extrovert, etc
- assertiveness
- Learn time management skills
- Teach decision making
- Use journals for listing frustrations
- Teach goal setting.
- Hold family meetings regularly
- Probe personal beliefs and concerns; help kids identify issues/stressors

Intrapersonal

- Model how to deal with mistakes
- Learn about world events
- Volunteer as a family
- Connect with other gifted kids, online etc..
- Watch movies about various world topics
- Learn about great world leaders
- Explore activities such as Peace Jam/Future Problem Solving.

Contemplative Practices to Help Reduce Stress

- Practice deep, slow breathing while progressively relaxing muscles starting with the toes
- Meditation (shown to increase neural development)
- Go for walks noticing things as if you have never heard/seen them before
- Mindfulness practices (many online for kids)
- Guided visualization (many great podcasts and You Tube videos for kids)
- Imagine their “Happy Place”, using as many senses as possible.

- Tai-chi; yoga; brain gym
- Have a regular journal practice
- Time with a pet or nature
- Paint, draw, sculpt, cook

8 Gripes of Gifted Kids

By Jim Delisle

Gifted kids commonly list these gripes as the things that bothered them about being gifted. Do they bother you too?

Circle the Gripes that affect you. Put a #1 by the one that affects you the most. Cross out the ones that are not a problem for you.

1. No one explains what being gifted is all about – it's kept a big secret.
2. School is too easy and too boring.
3. Parents, teachers and/or friends expect me to be perfect all the time.
4. Friends who really understand me are few and far between.
5. Kids often tease me about being smart.
6. I feel overwhelmed by the number of things I can do in life.
7. I feel different and alienated.
8. I worry about world problems and feel helpless to do anything about them.

Adapted from: When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers

Pages 155 & 156

The Top 10 Friendship Tips from Gifted Kids Like You

The Gifted Kids Survival Guide, by Judy Galbraith, M.A.

1. Don't be a show-off. That's wrong and it won't get you any friends.
2. Help people see that you have other interests besides school work. Let them know you're more than just a super speller or a math whiz. Fine out about their interests, too. You may have a lot in common.

3. Get into a gifted class if you can. You'll find other kids who think and learn the way you do.
4. Be respectful. Think about how other kids feel when you do things well. Compliment them when they do things well.
5. Don't always try to have things your way. Be willing to compromise.
6. Get involved in things outside of school-groups, activities, classes, and clubs where you'll meet new people who share your interests.
7. Be patient. When you're trying to teach or explain something to other kids and they don't get it right away
8. Don't feel weird about having friends who are older or younger than you.
9. Be a friend. Be kind, caring, honest, trustworthy, and a good listener.
10. When other kids ask you for help, don't feel bad about saying no. Sometimes you don't have time. Sometimes you just don't feel like helping. True friends will understand.

Stress and Me

Read this list of possible stressors and decide, on a scale of 1 to 5 how concerned you are about each one. Circle 1 on the scale if you never experience this kind of stress. Circle 5 on the scale if you experience this kind of stress frequently and in large doses.

I am concerned about my grades	1	2	3	4	5	
I am concerned about my appearance	1	2	3	4	5	
I am concerned about being lonely		1	2	3	4	5
I am concerned about not fitting in at school		1	2	3	4	5
I am concerned about making friends	1	2	3	4	5	
I am concerned about losing a friend	1	2	3	4	5	
I am concerned about being shy	1	2	3	4	5	
I am concerned about my health	1	2	3	4	5	
I am concerned about the health of a family member	1	2	3	4	5	

I am concerned about money	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about my parents divorcing	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about my weight	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about disappointing my parents	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about dying	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about a specific subject	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about a specific friend	1 2 3 4 5
I am concerned about my safety	1 2 3 4 5

Creative Emotion-Reducing Strategies

----Chill Out Plan -----

Put a check by the activities that would help you get a grip on your stress or frustration. Develop your own “chill out” plan. Choose three to five activities that can easily be put to good use.

- Talk to someone you trust
- Count to ten or higher
- Hit a pillow or punching bag
- Talk yourself through the situation (self-talk)
- Take a personal time out
- Find a private place where you can tgo to calm down
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Read a good book
- Listen to your favorite music
- Exercise vigorously
- Get alone and scream into a pillow
- Take 3 slow and deep breaths
- Use a journal to write down thoughts and feelings
- Take a one-minute vacation. Imagine going to your favorite spot or doing a favorite activity
- Spend time with a pet
- Draw or paint your feelings
- Write a letter (even if you don't send it).
- Clean or organize your room
- Play a sport

- Play with clay or Play Doh
- Enjoy a hobby or special interest such as working on a collection or play a computer game.

Goal Setting

My goal is: _____

Steps I need to do to get there:

Who or what I need to help me:

I will try to make my goal by: _____

Web resources:

www.anxietybc.com

<http://www.sengifted.org/>

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>