



Gifted and talented children

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All children have unique strengths and talents. However some children have particularly advanced or well developed skills and abilities in one or more areas. Such children may be referred to as gifted and talented. 'Gifted' refers to children with high potential (basically due to their inheritance) while 'talented' means that they display skills which are advanced when compared to other children of their age.

What makes a child gifted and talented?

Giftedness is due to a combination of factors including what the child inherits genetically, the development of the child before birth, and the nurturing of the child.

- Giftedness is hard to define, and not surprisingly, a number of definitions of giftedness exist.
- It is generally accepted that a gifted child would have the potential to perform at a level that is significantly beyond that of the majority of other children of the same age, in one or more skill areas such as language, problem solving, physical or interpersonal skills.
- A gifted child may have the potential to become, for example, a great artist, thinker or athlete.

A gifted and talented child not only has this potential, but is developing the skills to perform at this advanced level.

- Through their interactions with others and with their environment, they are becoming much more able than other children to do some things.
- For example, they may be able to engage in very 'adult' conversation at a very young age, or hit a tennis ball much harder and more accurately than expected.

A child may be gifted with the potential to develop advanced skills in many areas, but will become talented in those areas that are available to him or her. Early identification of a child's giftedness may mean that the child has access to more support to develop skills in many areas, so that the child can find interests that will bring him or her great pleasure.

Is giftedness just intelligence?

The concept of intelligence has generally been narrowly defined.

- Often it seems to refer to only those skills that are needed to succeed within formal education, such as

number and language skills.

- Skills that enhance success in life, such as the ability to make friends, being able to persist with a task and being reliable are not elements that are measured in formal assessments of intelligence.

Similarly, while giftedness has traditionally been associated with significantly advanced intellectual development, it is now recognised that such a perception of giftedness is far too narrow, as children can be gifted in many different areas. These include:

- Verbal/language (eg. reading, writing and speaking ability)
- Logical and mathematical (eg. number, classification and problem solving ability)
- Visual and performing arts (eg. drawing, painting, musical ability)
- Body/movement/psychomotor ability (eg. dance, athletic ability)
- Interpersonal (eg. communication, leadership ability)
- Intrapersonal (eg. reflective, self sufficient ability)

A child may be gifted and talented in one of these areas, or in many areas.

How do I know if my child is gifted?

To be recognised as gifted and talented, a child must have the actual, or potential, ability to perform at a level that is **significantly beyond** other children of the same age. But what might this look like in practice?

As a guide, gifted and talented children are expected to be developing skills well ahead of those expected at their chronological age in at least one area. For example, a three-year-old would be able to talk using the more complex language of a 4 to 6 year old, or a six-year-old would be able to read as well as most eight-year-olds, and so on.

The levels of giftedness, just like varying levels of disability, also needs to be taken into account when considering the needs of a gifted child. For example, the child who is assessed as mildly or moderately gifted will require less intervention than the child who is assessed as highly or exceptionally gifted.

Although forms of giftedness may vary considerably between children, research shows that young gifted children may show a number of the following skills and abilities.

Cognitive (thinking) skills

- Ability to master a new skill with unusual speed
- Quick and accurate recall, and ability to recall skills and information presented in the past
- Remembering and making connections between past and present experiences
- A well advanced sense of humour
- Increased alertness to features in the environment
- Exhibiting deeper knowledge than other children of the same age
- Being resourceful and creative, and improvising well in play.

Learning style

- Great curiosity, and desire to learn
- High level of motivation in areas of interest
- Being bored easily and becoming frustrated quickly if not challenged
- An ability to concentrate for extended periods in areas of interest
- Generally have advanced planning skills for their age
- Using unusual or imaginative ways of doing things
- Unusually intense interest and enjoyment when learning new things.

Motor (physical) abilities

- Development of particular motor skills earlier than other children of same chronological age.

Speech and language skills

- Well developed word knowledge and language skills compared to other children of the same age
- Creative use of language - for example, able to make up complex songs or stories, and having an advanced

sense of humour.

- Able to adapt and vary their language to match the understanding of older or younger children and adults
- Able to understand and carry out complicated instructions for their age
- Reading, writing, or using numbers in ways that are advanced for their age.
- Advanced play interests and behaviours.

Social skills

- Sensitivity to the needs or feelings of others
- Use of verbal skills to handle conflict or to influence another child's behaviour
- Often will organise and direct social and learning activities; may be seen as 'bossy'
- Often seek out and enjoy the company of older children and adults
- May get on better with older children rather than children of their own age
- May be able to take on responsibilities usually given to considerably older children
- Often demonstrate an early interest in social issues involving injustices
- May have unrealistically high expectations of self and others, which may lead to frustration.

Visual and spatial skills

- Advanced visual and spatial abilities; for example with puzzles, building and construction materials, drawing, design and/or painting

While these skills and abilities may be useful as an initial guide as to whether your child is gifted, **formal assessments for giftedness need to be more comprehensive**, and generally require some kind of standardised psychological and/or developmental testing carried out by a specifically trained professional (such as a psychologist or doctor).

Giftedness: nature or nurture?

Giftedness is generally considered to come from both nature (heredity) and nurture (the environment). Research has shown that giftedness often runs in families. However, as with all children, gifted children need to be raised in an interactive and stimulating environment.

The environment begins to influence a child's development before birth and during the birth. The first five years of a child's life are especially important in determining his or her later development, as it is during this period that the brain is undergoing very rapid growth and development. An enriched environment offers gifted children additional stimulation, experience, and interaction to meet their particular needs.

Early school admission

One way that may help gifted children in their development is to admit them to preschool and/or school earlier than is normal, and this has been well supported by research. However, early admission for children who are not ready [to attend school], perhaps because they are not yet confident spending time away from their main caregiver, can negatively impact upon their development and wellbeing.

In South Australia, if a child is to go to school early, he or she is first required to have a comprehensive Intelligence Quotient (IQ) assessment by a registered psychologist. This will indicate the level of the child's giftedness and their specific areas of strength. Other factors to consider will include the child's reading readiness, social, emotional and physical maturity, eye-hand coordination, and general health. It is also important to choose a school that is able to meet the gifted child's special needs.

The importance of early identification

All children, whether unusually gifted or not, will do best in an environment that provides support and stimulation that fits well with their abilities and interests.

Research indicates that because of the importance of providing gifted children with appropriate support and stimulation from an early age, it follows that they need to be identified as early as possible if they are to reach their developmental potential.

Whilst many gifted children will thrive in a supportive and stimulating environment in their preschool or school, some will show behaviour problems because they are bored, or because they are needing to work with, and relate to, older children who are of a similar mental age. Some will not show their advanced skills because they want to be like the other children, and to be liked by them. Some may have specific learning difficulties which mask their advanced abilities in other areas.

Identifying children's giftedness can be a difficult task, partly because of the many forms giftedness can take. Also, many forms of giftedness are not always easy to see in early childhood.

If you think that your child may be gifted and talented, and you have concerns that your child may have needs that are not being met within the preschool, school or home environment, or your child is having difficulties that may be affected by being gifted, you should discuss it with the staff at your child's preschool or school, and with a professional such as a psychologist or doctor.

Can I make my child become gifted and talented?

While environmental factors play a crucial role in helping a gifted child achieve his or her potential, it is unlikely that environmental factors can by themselves make a child become gifted. Indeed, trying to make your child succeed at something which does not interest the child and where the child cannot reach the standard expected can be harmful to both child and parent.

- For example, any child given a knowledgeable coach, regular practice, friends to play with and parents who are interested and supportive may become a very skilful sports player.
- Aiming for greater success, by forcing the child to practice beyond the child's level of interest and skills, can be detrimental to the child's physical and emotional wellbeing, and it is often harmful to the relationship between parent and child.

All children will do their best in an area of their interest, when they have skills and they are encouraged to practice and enjoy themselves.

- Many people have the potential to be very good at something, but without parental support they do not achieve the skill level they could possibly reach.
- It is much easier for gifted children to achieve highly if their parents are excited by, and interested in, the things that interest the child.

Difficulties faced by gifted children

Gifted and talented children may have special needs in one or more aspects of their development and may experience a number of special stresses and difficulties. These may include:

- extra pressure from parents and teachers to be continually successful
- increased fear of failure and a sense of failure when not 'perfect'
- expectations that they will spend unusual amounts of time practicing their special skills such that they do not have normal play and recreation time
- developing high demands and expectations of others
- Frustration caused by having skills at different stages of development (eg. having advanced cognitive skills but only 'normal' for age handwriting skills)
- difficulties in gaining access to a challenging level of education appropriate to their needs
- inappropriate preschool or school curriculum and/or placement
- difficulties relating to other children of the same age and finding same age friends
- confusion in choosing a career for the child who is gifted in many areas.

The stresses sometimes experienced by gifted and talented children may lead to a number of problems, including:

- deliberately not doing as well as they can, in an effort to hide their differences
- emotional difficulties, such as depression, stress, anxiety
- increased emotional intensity and sensitivity (including outbursts of temper or tears)
- boredom in a normal classroom situation (which can lead to school refusal and/or behavioural problems)
- limited social interaction and social development.

Despite the challenges that may face them, being gifted and talented may also of course provide these children with many great opportunities and experiences. In addition, research has shown that most gifted children are socially and emotionally well adjusted.

Parenting gifted and talented children

There are a number of things to think about if you are the parent of a gifted and talented child. Some of the common difficulties that parents face include:

- not understanding how to respond to their gifted child's unique developmental needs
- difficulty in developing appropriate expectations of their child, especially when the gifted child's abilities are developing at different rates in different skill areas
- emotional problems stemming from feeling like inadequate parents.

The presence of a gifted and talented child in the family can also create challenges for families, as well as place pressure on other siblings.

In spite of these difficulties, parenting a child with special talents can also be a very rewarding task, providing parents with much joy and delight as they share a unique journey with their child.

How you can help your gifted child

Generally speaking, parents of gifted and talented children should simply do what all parents need to do - respond consistently to their children's individual needs and interests whilst staying flexible as their children's needs change over time. It follows that many of the ideas below are applicable to all children, gifted or not.

Try to:

- Provide your child with lots of opportunities to learn and try new things.
- Make sure that your child has some things to do that he or she finds challenging, as well as some that he or she likes and can do easily.
- Encourage your child to participate in a broad range of educational and recreational activities.
- Support your child with both their successes and failures.
- Help your child to develop skills needed to relate to friends who may not be gifted and talented.
- Talk with your child about his or her particular talents, what it means to be gifted, and ways to deal with any difficulties that may arise.
- Teach and encourage the social skills that will enable your child to fit comfortably in his social world. Being gifted is not an excuse for bad behaviour.

Try not to:

- Push or place undue pressure on your child.
- 'Show-off' your child or talk a lot about him or her in public.
- Expect your child to be gifted and talented in all areas of his or her development.
- Be too 'bossy' in your parenting.
- Forget that your gifted child is still a child, and has all the normal needs of children, including the need for love, support, stability, routine and fun.

Teachers, preschools and schools

For the gifted and talented child it is important that they are identified and their educational, social and emotional needs are addressed. This is recognised in the Department for Education and Children's Services (DECS) 1996 Gifted Children and Students Policy.

Gifted and talented learners do benefit from such measures and services as:

- acceleration, enrichment and extension in their education
- being placed with other very able children
- being able to work, in one or more subject areas, at a level which is more advanced than that of other

- children their age
- student mentoring
- counselling and vocational guidance
- extracurricular activities and competitions.

Reminders

- Gifted and talented children are present in all socio-economic and cultural groups.
- Gifted children have significantly advanced skills, or potentially have significantly advanced skills, in one or more aspects of their development, and will thrive best when their environment fits their special interests and abilities.
- Giftedness may show itself in many different ways, and can sometimes be difficult to identify, particularly in younger children.
- Early identification of giftedness is important to ensure that gifted children receive the support and stimulation they need to reach their potential.
- Giftedness may bring a number of rewards and difficulties for both child and parent.
- It is essential that parents, pre-schools and schools can cooperatively address a gifted child's specific needs.
- If you think that your child might be gifted, you should discuss it with an appropriate professional in the health or educational field.

Resources

South Australia

- Gifted & Talented Children's Association of South Australia Inc (GTCASA)
PO Box 1111, Unley BC, Unley 5061
Telephone: (08) 8365 4800 Fax: (08) 8365 6800
Email: giftedsa@gtcasa.asn.au
- <http://www.gtcasa.asn.au/site/>

Further information

- Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC)
The University of New South Wales.
Telephone: 1 800 626 824 (toll free) Fax: (02) 9385 1973
Email: gerric@unsw.edu.au
www.arts.unsw.edu.au/gerric

Books for parents

- Harrison C. (2003, 2000,1995): Giftedness in Early Childhood. (3rd Edition) Sydney :Inscript Publishing
- Porter L. (1999). Gifted Young Children: A Guide for Teachers and Parents. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Books for children

- Galbraith J. (1999). The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide For Ages 10 & Under. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

References

Department for Education and Children's Services (1996). 'Gifted Children and Students Policy.' (including Early Enrolment Policies into preschool & school.)

Freeman J. (1996). Gifted children. In V. Varma (Ed.), 'Coping with Children in Stress.' Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 73-87.

George D. (1997). Parenting of Gifted Children. In K.N. Dwivedi (Ed.), 'Enhancing Parenting Skills.' West

Sussex: Wiley & Sons Ltd., 189-204.

Talay-Ongan A. (1998). 'Typical and Atypical Development in Early Childhood: The Fundamentals.' St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 224-235.

The information on this site should not be used as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see a doctor, or ring the Parent Helpline on 1300 364 100 (local call cost from anywhere in South Australia).

This topic may use 'he' and 'she' in turn - please change to suit your child's sex.