Social Emotional Development in Gifted Children

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The Flip Side of the Coin

Gifted students have many strengths. But, those strengths can come with a “down side”.

[Image of a coin flipping and celebratory figure]
• I learn quickly & independently.
• I always have the right answer.
• I’m successful at a lot of things.

• I should be able to handle all my problems on my own.
• If I ask a question, people won’t think I’m smart or capable.
• If I fail, I’m worthless.

Strengths - Possible Issues
Common Social Emotional Concerns

• Unique ability and social-emotional profile
• Impostor Syndrome
• Over-excitabilities
• Stress/Anxiety
• Perfectionism
• When is it a problem?
Unique Ability & Social Emotional Profile
Unique Ability & Social Emotional Profile

• Asynchronous development: chronological age, mental age, emotional age disparities
• A child can feel out of sync with his/her peers
• Pressure: internal vs. external
• Pace of classroom can be frustrating
Remember that all adults should have the same goals for your child: positive achievement and appropriate behavior.

Consider different “peer” groups or individuals.

Teach your child to handle frustration.

How can you help?
Impostor Syndrome
Impostor Syndrome
I feel like a fake:
• I’m not smart any more.
  • I don’t belong at this school.
  • If I try something new, they’ll find out I’m not worthy.

I’m just lucky.
• Some external circumstances made me successful.
• If I try something new, I won’t be successful the next time.

It’s not that hard.
• I’m just naturally good at math (piano, soccer . . .).
• If I try something new, I won’t be good at it.
Feelings and reality don’t always go together.

Emphasize the link between success and effort.

Discourage self-doubt.

How can you help?
Over-excitability
Over-excitabilities

- Psychomotor: characterized by a surplus of energy, extreme enthusiasm, rapid speech, impulsive actions
- Sensual: seeking of avoiding sensory experiences, e.g. overindulging, taking out tags from clothing or wearing ear plugs
- Imaginational: daydreaming, fantasizing, dramatization
- Intellectual: striving for knowledge and truth through questioning, discovering, and analyzing
- Emotional: marked by an intensified level of interpersonal relations to people, places, and things, compassionate feelings for others
Acknowledge, nurture, appreciate the gift.

Allow time for your child to express the over-excitability in a safe place/way.

Focus on strengths.

Educate your child. (and others)

Teach your child to manage the over-excitatibilities.

How can you help?
Stress and Anxiety
Stress and Anxiety

• Short term vs. long term
• The stress of an upcoming test or assignment
• The fear of making a mistake
• The stress of the unrealized possible
• The fear of letting someone down
• The stress of “hiding your light”
• The fear of missing out
Create confidence.

Provide perspective.

Rethink the goal.

Identify and face the fear or stressor.

Teach tools: relaxation, back away for a short time, approach from a different angle.

How can you help?
Fears and Compassionate Concerns
Fears and Compassionate Concerns

• Gifted children experience different fears from children their age and they encounter them earlier.

• They feel emotions deeply, have a hard time getting past them, and suffer for others with a remarkable sense of injustice.

• Their asynchrony of development creates a mature understanding, they grasp the implications, coupled with limited experience.
Do some judicious censoring.

Use information to put the fearful situation in perspective.

Share their concerns.

Don’t try to stop the feelings.

Be honest.

How can you help?
Perfectionism
Perfectionism

• Internal vs. external

• A little perfectionism is a good driver; too much can be crippling

• All or none thinking: it’s either perfect or it’s worthless

• Transforming desires (wants) into demands (musts)

• Focusing on unmet goals and challenges rather than savoring successes
Know when to quit.

Don’t take it personally.

Enjoy the journey.

Study the lives of eminent people.

Set goals and focus on improvement.
When is it a problem?

- Giftedness can lead to the masking and misunderstanding of problem signs
- Avoiding risk-taking
- Underachievement
- Avoiding situations
- Consider
  - Time
  - Severity
  - Resulting behavior
When is it a serious problem?

• Depression
• Panic attacks
• Eating disorders
• Sleep disorders
• Obsessive-compulsive behaviors