

MISDIAGNOSIS, DUAL DIAGNOSES, AND MISSED DIAGNOSIS OF GIFTED CHILDREN AND ADULTS

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Two Definitions of Giftedness

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally. (The Columbus Group, 1991)

Areas of Giftedness

General Intellectual
Specific Academic Areas
Creativity
Leadership
Visual and Performing Arts

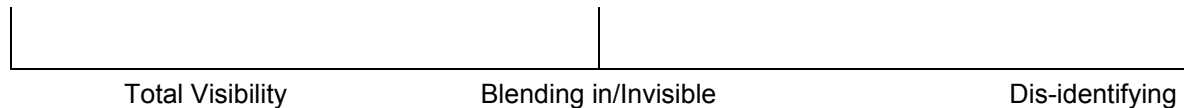
Axiomatic Statements about Gifted Students

(Cross, 2001)

1. Gifted students share many developmental characteristics and problems with all people.
2. Gifted students have life experiences and issues that are different just because they are gifted.
3. Influences outside the individual have an impact on gifted students.

Continuum of Visibility

(Cross and Coleman)



Common Myths about Gifted Children

(Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries)

- Gifted children are usually gifted in all academic areas.
- Giftedness is entirely a matter of hard work.
- All children are gifted.
- Gifted children will become eminent adults.
- Gifted children will show their abilities and talents in their school achievement.
- Gifted children seldom have emotional or interpersonal issues.
- Educators will know exactly how to work with gifted children.

Common Intellectual Characteristics

- Strong verbal abilities
- Rapid acquisition, retention, and access to information
- Enhanced attention
- Strong curiosity
- Complex thinker
- Strong imagination and creativity

OVEREXCITABILITIES (Adapted from Falk, Piechowski, & Lind, 1994)

Psychomotor

- **Heightened excitability of the neuromuscular system**
- **Capacity for being active and energetic; Love of movement for its own sake**
- **Organic surplus of energy** [Rapid speech; marked excitation; intense physical activity; need for action]
- **Psychomotor expression of emotional tension** [Compulsive talking and chattering; impulsive actions; acting out; nervous habits (tics, nail biting); drive; workaholism; organizing; competitiveness]

Sensual

- **Heightened experience of sensual pleasure or displeasure** [Seeing; smelling; tasting; touching; hearing]
- **Intense sexuality**
- **Sensual expression & outlets for emotional tension** [Overeating; buying sprees; seeking the limelight]
- **Aesthetic pleasures** [Appreciation of beautiful objects, words, music, form, color, balance]

Intellectual

- **Heightened need to seek understanding and truth, to gain knowledge, analyze and synthesize**
- **Intensified activity of the mind** [Curiosity; concentration; capacity for sustained intellectual effort; avid reading; keen observation; detailed planning; detailed visual recall]
- **Penchant for probing questions; problem solving** [Search for truth, understanding; tenacity in problem solving]
- **Preoccupation with logic and theoretical thinking** [Love of theory and analysis; thinking about thinking; non-judgmental introspection; moral thinking; conceptual and intuitive integration; independence of thought (sometimes criticism)]
- **Development of new concepts**

Imaginational

- **Heightened play of the imagination**
- **Rich association of images and impressions (real and imagined)** [Frequent use of image and metaphor; facility for invention and fantasy; detailed visualization; poetic and dramatic perception; animistic thinking; magical thinking]
- **Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension** [Animistic imagery; mixing truth and fiction; elaborate dreams; illusions]
- **Capacity for living in a world of fantasy** [predilection for fairy and magic tales; creation of private worlds, imaginary companions; dramatization]

Emotional

- **Heightened, intense positive and negative feelings** [Extremes of emotion; complex emotions and feelings; identification with others' feelings; high degree of differentiation of interpersonal feeling; awareness of range and intensity of feelings]
- **Somatic expressions** [tense stomach; sinking heart; blushing; flushing, pounding heart, sweaty palms]
- **Strong affective expressions** [Inhibition (timidity, shyness); ecstasy, euphoria, pride; strong affective memory; feelings of unreality, fears and anxieties; feelings of guilt; concern with death; depressive and suicidal moods]
- **Capacity for strong attachments and deep relationships** [strong emotional ties and attachments to persons, living things, places; compassion, responsiveness to others; empathy; sensitivity in relationships; difficulty adjusting to new environments; loneliness; conflicts with others over depth of relationship; intense desire to offer love]
- **Well differentiated feelings toward self** [Awareness of ones real self; inner dialogue and self-judgment]

Ten Common Criticisms of the Gifted (Jacobsen, *Liberating Everyday Genius*)

10. Why don't you slow down?
9. You worry about everything.
8. Can't you just stick with one thing?
7. You're so sensitive and dramatic!
6. You have to do everything the hard way.
5. You're so demanding.
4. Can't you ever be satisfied?
3. You're so driven.
2. Where do you get all those wild ideas?
1. Who do you think you are?

Frequent Misdiagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults

Attentional and activity problems

- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Anger diagnoses

- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Conduct Disorder
- Intermittent Explosive Disorder
- Disruptive Behavior Disorder NOS

Ideational and/or anxiety disorders

- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Asperger's Disorder
- Schizoid Personality Disorder
- Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Mood disorders

- Bipolar Disorders
- Cyclothymic Disorder
- Dysthymic Disorder
- Depression Disorder

What We Know about Social and Emotional Needs of Gifted and Talented Persons:

A Synopsis of the Meta-analysis of the National Association for Gifted Children

(Compiled by Rick Olenchak, Ph.D. from Neihart, M., Reis, S.M., Robinson, N.M., and Moon, S.M. (Eds.) (2002). *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

General Conclusions

- Typically, G/T students are at least as well adjusted as other groups of youngsters.
- However, they face risks to their social and emotional development:
 - mismatch with classrooms not responsive to the pace and level of gifted students' learning and thinking*
 - inappropriate accommodations for high creativity, energy, intensity, and aspirations*
 - few if any adaptations to their internal asynchronous development (e.g., maturity versus immaturity depending on the domain)*
 - inadequate support to deal with peer pressures to be "like everyone else"*

Issues Deriving from Student's Advancement Compared to Peers

- Educational issues include:
 - "out of sync" with level and pace of instruction in heterogeneous classrooms*
 - few teacher accommodations that are appropriate with repetitive, minimalist curricula*
 - academic concerns leading to problems establishing and maintaining friendships*

- Interventions include:
 - differentiated curricula & instruction at personally appropriate levels of challenge*
 - progressively more complex learning tasks based on mastery and readiness*
 - challenging interest-based alternatives*
 - classmates of similar interests, ability, and achievement*
- Peer relations issues include:
 - heightened sensitivities to their differences so that they try to hide their talents*
 - exacerbated distinctions during adolescence*
- Special issues for extremely gifted students include:
 - significant discrepancy between physical and intellectual selves*
 - inevitable frustration finding supportive environments producing serious isolation*
 - difficulty finding compatible friends resulting in less social skill*

Issues Deriving from Internal Asynchronous Development

- Emotional regulation issues include:
 - social maturity lagging behind talent areas despite such maturity being greater than same-age peers*
- Unevenness in abilities issues include:
 - heightened unevenness in domain-specific giftedness*
 - significant discrepancies between verbal and visual-spatial abilities or global versus sequential problem solving abilities*

Disorders That May Involve Giftedness in Children or Adults

- **Learning disabilities**
 - Asynchrony is typical for gifted
 - Handwriting is often poor
 - Compensatory skills can mask LD and/or prevent identification as gifted
- **Allergies & Asthma**
 - Incidence 40% to 60% of highly gifted
 - Usually food allergies; may also be oversensitive to medications
- **Parent-child relationship problems**
 - Power struggles
 - Lack of understanding due to thinking style differences
 - Parent enmeshment with child
 - Parent using “gifted” as a reason for criticisms
- **Reactive hypoglycemia**
 - Incidence 5% to 7% of highly gifted
 - About half also have allergies and need less sleep
 - May be misdiagnosed as ADD/ADHD or Bipolar Disorder
- **Sleep Disorders (Nightmare, Sleep Terror, or Sleepwalking Disorders)**
 - Normal “short sleepers” and “long sleepers”
 - Sleep patterns (20% need less; 20% need more)
 - Bedwetting
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**
 - Excessive intellectualizing
 - An extension of perfectionism
 - Related to guilt feelings
- **Depression (existential)**
 - Very likely among highly gifted
- **Asperger’s Disorder**
 - Can be misdiagnosed as “quirky gifted”
 - True Asperger’s behaviors are not situation-specific
 - Is on a continuum
- **Adult Gifted Relationship Issues**

Who are the twice-exceptional? The terms twice-exceptional and multi-exceptional refer to the gifted child who has one or more disability, such as a physical disability (e.g., visual or hearing impairment), a learning disability (e.g., in reading, math, or written language), or an emotional/mental disability (e.g., ADHD, Depression, or Asperger's Disorder).

Characteristics of Twice-Exceptional Children

(Adapted from Nielson, Weinfeld, and others)

- Inordinately frustrated by school
- Uneven academic skills
- Low self-esteem
- Strong questioning attitudes
- Strong observational skills
- Organizational or study skills weaknesses
- False attributions for success and failures
- Sensitivity regarding their disability

The 2e Road to Intervention

- **Develop a relationship with the student**
 - Support and encourage
 - Separate the child from the disability
 - Understand and accept the student's giftedness
 - Explore the nature of the student's twice-exceptionality
- **Communicate with parents**
 - Work together to plan and intervene
 - Listen to parent concerns
 - Support parents; don't try to convince them
 - Take concerns seriously, but not personally
- **Know what it takes to succeed in your classroom**
 - Recognize the skills necessary in your classroom
 - Explore whether these skills play to the student's strengths or weaknesses
- **Provide specific, concrete interventions and accommodations**
 - Start small with one idea
 - Focus on managing arousal level and developing perseverance
 - Balance remediation of weaknesses with empowerment in areas of strength
- **Monitor and reinforce progress over perfection**
 - Use small success as a stepping stone
 - Always remember the relationship with the student is the key

Gifted Underachievers: A Hidden Majority?

Underachievement among the gifted is an all-too-frequent occurrence, but often not recognized until the pattern is entrenched and more difficult to address. The exact cause of a student's underachievement is often unclear, and there are almost as many routes to underachievement as there are underachievers. While there are no easy answers and no specific set of interventions, here are some ideas.

- Develop a school environment that promotes positive achievement by fostering a positive image of being smart and making it "cool" to talk about achievements.
- Set high priorities for intellectual attainment as well as athletics.
- De-emphasize the myth that gifted programs are elitist
- Emphasize that fair does not mean equal.
- Emphasize and in-service on diversity, and include giftedness as a part of that training.
- Value innovation and excellence over conformity and mediocrity.
- Encourage creativity and risk taking.
- Emphasize that no mistakes and no failure often means no learning.
- Model putting forth good effort and working hard.
- Use quotations and stories of famous people who have failed to motivate students.
- Emphasize that delaying gratification can produce great results.

- Focus on and reinforce effort rather than outcome.
- Avoid rote memorization when possible.
- Decrease drill, practice, and repetition as gifted students, even if they are underachieving, will learn quickly and without much repetition.
- Provide advanced and complex material at a faster pace—raise the expectations rather than lower them.
- Encourage independent studies in an area of interest, but provide substantial help with creating a plan and developing the necessary structure for success. Remember to emphasize learning and effort rather than outcome and grades for such projects.
- Allow students to create hands on projects or oral presentations rather than written reports when appropriate.
- Find mentors and other role models for students. Use biographies if local resources are limited.

Perfectionism & Giftedness

Perfectionism is defined as a combination of thoughts and behaviors generally associated with high standards or expectations for one's own performance. Depending on how perfectionism is channeled, it can be either a mobilizing force that promotes intense satisfaction and creative contribution or a potent force that brings intense frustration and paralysis.

Tips for addressing perfectionism among gifted students in your classroom include:

- Convey courage to try
- Encourage risk-taking
- Reward attempts & persistence
- Expect progress, not perfection
- Help students remove “should” and “ought” from their vocabulary
- Occasionally give students permission to be messy, late, or incomplete
- Encourage reflection on how past accomplishments made the student feel
- Discuss both strengths AND weaknesses when reviewing individual differences
- Acknowledge learning
- Help students set priorities
- Reflect on the value of mistakes
- Honor time invested not outcome

Treatment and Intervention Needs for the Gifted Child with Asperger's Disorder

(Compiled and adapted by Schuler & Amend)

Information

- compensatory strategies
- use of visual organizers (maps, visuals)
- parts to whole instruction
- use rote styles of learning

Support

- Need strong, intuitive teachers and therapists who are
 - aware of their own tone and how things are said
 - can turn “affect” off—cool and objective manner
 - make directives/corrections short and to the point

Coping with Special Interests

- controlled access
- timetable or schedule
- constructive application learn about feelings,
- friendships, behaviors
- incorporate interest in non-motivating activity
- earn extra time to access interest
- encourage interest in computers

Managing Symptoms

- social skills training
- behavior problems
- self monitoring
- self awareness
- self control
- identification of and response to own/others' emotions
- tolerance for the world

Educators

- Provide individual attention, small work groups, and one-on-one aide
- Make available opportunities for social interaction with fairly structured/supervised activities that center around common interests
- Develop real-life skills
- Afford opportunities for independent study on topics of interest
- Explore leadership opportunities to help perspective-taking and social interactions
- Adapt curriculum content and requirements to challenge for strengths and compensate for or remediate weaknesses
- Expect rigidity of thinking
- Recognize need for counselor or "safe" person

Teaching Gifted Students with Asperger's Disorder

(Amend, Gallagher & Gallagher, Henderson, Lovecky, Neihart, Schuler)

- Provide opportunities for intellectual complexity; they need to feel adequately stimulated
- Provide opportunities to be with intellectual peers
- Use visual supports—give "big picture" for visual-spatial learners who are not holistic
 - Offer models of completed tasks
 - Provide visual models and diagrams such as timelines or webs
- De-emphasize timed tests
- Teach brainstorming skills and creative problem solving
- Teach strategies for improving attention and short-term memory
- Watch tone of instruction, especially sarcasm
- Establish orderly classroom routine for child
- Use arbitrary or pre-selected pairings for partner work projects
- Teach listening skills
- Use assistive technology like calculators and word processors; teach keyboarding
- Teach social skills and provide opportunities for safe practice (social stories, cartoons)
- Build perception and perspective-taking skills through social training
- Work on issues of arousal and activation
- Improve work effort by:
 - giving less work in a time period
 - using shortcuts: read synopsis, listen to book on tape, read it
 - dividing long tests into two parts
 - decreasing homework into manageable amounts
 - giving assistance on open-ended tasks, creative themes, inferential thinking
 - setting time limits for how long to work; prioritize and plan for how to get going

Classroom Interventions: General strategies for high energy gifted students, distractible or inattentive gifted students, and gifted students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder:

- 1) Be as structured as you can without being rigid. These types of students typically benefit from routine, consistency, and clear expectations, but also need some flexibility.
- 2) Use clear and specific directions; check for understanding.

- 3) Provide positive reinforcement to encourage task orientation and completion.
- 4) Use frequent praise for effort to boost confidence, develop good work habits, and connect effort with outcome.
- 5) Break large assignments into shorter sections to promote task completion and success.

To specifically address task orientation and distractibility, particularly in young children:

- 1) Consider using a “silent signal” to encourage task orientation. For example, you may tug your ear or touch your nose to signal the student to return to task. A second signal may be used to send a positive message to the student that he/she is doing a good job. In this way, no one other than you and the student is aware of this communication.
- 2) Use a small card with different colors on each side. Place on (or attach with small pieces of Velcro to) the student’s desk. One color is used as a reinforcer to indicate that the student is on task, while the other color sends the message that the student is not on task as he/she needs to be.

To address activity level, decrease disruption in the classroom, and increase on task behavior:

- 1) Keep those hands busy!
Provide something for the student to “fidget” with during instruction. Plush toys, koosh balls, and stress bags are examples that others have used with positive results. The student may focus better on classroom activities if given something to keep his/her hands busy. This, of course, would need to be something that will not disrupt the class, and let the student know that this is a privilege and could be taken away if not used in a specified manner. A bright child who truly needs this type of stimulation will be sure to not disrupt the class; impulsive students may have more difficulty.
- 2) Provide regular opportunities for movement and stretching to promote a positive and appropriate outlet for energy.
- 3) Consider alternatives to desk seating such as sitting or lying on the floor, using an exercise ball for seating, or working in a sunny or shady area.

Mostly Do’s (and a few Don’ts) about Gifted Children

1. DO be aware of myths and your personal beliefs about gifted children.
2. DO talk about “being gifted” and what it means to them.
3. DO help them identify and accept their talents and strengths as well as their weaknesses.
4. DO provide learning experiences by allowing natural consequences.
5. DO listen to gifted children.
6. DO challenge your students and provide encouragement.
7. DO encourage intellectual risk-taking.
8. DO make “failure” acceptable in certain situations to help combat perfectionism.
9. DO value uniqueness.
10. DO communicate acceptance.
11. DO foster healthy competition.
12. DO model what you want.
13. DON’T use a child’s ability to point out shortcomings (“You’re so smart, why can’t you...?”).
14. DON’T expect a gifted child to be gifted in all subjects and make all A’s all of the time.
15. DON’T use sarcasm with young gifted children because they may not understand it as such.
16. DON’T alienate parents of gifted children because we are all on the same side.

RESOURCES

INTERNET RESOURCES	JOURNALS
www.sengifted.org	<i>Advanced Development: A Journal on Adult Giftedness</i>
www.hoagiesgifted.org	<i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>
www.nagc.org	<i>Gifted Education Press Quarterly</i>
www.davidsongifted.org	<i>The Journal for the Education of the Gifted</i>
www.tagfam.org	<i>Journal for Secondary Gifted Education</i>
www.uniquelygifted.org	<i>Roeper Review</i>
PUBLISHERS	<i>Understanding Our Gifted</i>
www.greatpotentialpress.com	<i>Parenting for High Potential</i>
www.prufrock.com	<i>Gifted Education Communicator</i>
www.freespirit.com	

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