

Social/Emotional Needs in Gifted Learners

Individuals with intellectual gifts are similar to their age peers when it comes to emotional development. How individuals deal with emotional stresses depends not upon their level of intelligence, but rather upon the agility of their emotional processing. Because of these pressures, special attention should be paid in monitoring gifted learners. Possible areas of concern include the following:

Characteristic of a Gifted Student	May Result in the Following Concerns
Curiosity and a wide range of interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of being scattered
Desire to be everywhere at once to be able to do more things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of space limitations • Sense of time pressures and limitations
Desire to connect with others and a sense of being accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling a lack of fit with their environment (school, peers, and sometimes family members) • Concealing their ideas and a sense of being untrue to themselves
High ideals and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of obligations and pressure to make major contributions to the world • Feeling the need to “be on top” in grades and academics • Desire to please their parents and teachers • Perceived perception of high expectations from others • Low tolerance of the gap between their ideals and their own abilities to perform (their personal asynchronies) • Goal-hopping
Accelerated thought processes, high expectations, and intensity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in receiving criticism and modulating their behaviors • Impatience with others • Leads others to have high expectations in areas that the student may not be gifted
Independent thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning and breaking traditions • Feeling rejected by others • Feelings of isolation

Gifted children are more prone to stress, perfectionism, and depression than other children. Listed below are descriptions and suggestions that may be helpful.

Emotional Concern	Providing Support for Your Student
<p><u>STRESS</u></p> <p>A feeling of pressure and strong doubts of our ability to cope or manage ourselves or the situations at hand, which typically results in feelings of anxiety and discomfort. We become particularly stressed when we can see no alternatives. Some stress is helpful; too much is hindering.</p>	<p>To help your student manage stress, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help them feel a sense of control over themselves. • Teach goal setting and prioritizing. • Encourage them to take action instead of just stewing about it. • In instances when stress leads to undue distress, please communicate these concerns to your student's teachers, social workers and/or counselors, and principals.
<p><u>PERFECTIONISM</u></p> <p>A feeling that we must hold ourselves to an extraordinarily high standard of performance, and that it is "awful" if we do not meet those standards. Thus, we are valued only if we continuously set and reach extremely high standards —"I am only valued (and can only value myself) for my products, not for me as a person." In part, perfectionism is inherent in most gifted children; a larger part, though, comes from modeling after adults. Parents may espouse (or model) perfectionistic behavior and the media show unrealistic role models.</p>	<p>Help your student manage perfectionistic tendencies by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-wording the "I have to" as "It would be great if I could..." • Gently steering the conversation away from self-criticism; instead focus on the fact that different people have different areas of talent. • Spending "special time" with your student to give quality time and undivided attention doing something you both enjoy. • In instances when perfectionism leads to undue distress, please communicate with your student's teachers, social workers and/or counselors, and principals.
<p><u>DEPRESSION</u></p> <p>The uniqueness and advanced sensitivity of gifted children can lead them to be particularly susceptible to depressive feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In younger children, depression is more likely to be expressed as acting out, bedwetting, withdrawal, imagined illnesses, narrowing of interests, etc. with little or no sadness apparent. • In older children, irritability is more often a sign of depression than the pervasive sadness we expect to see in depressed adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have any concerns that your student may be falling into a depressive mood, please contact the school social worker or counselor, and/or seek outside professional help.

DEPRESSION - Continued

There are three patterns of depression (other than physically based depression) that are frequent for gifted children:

- Overly high standards of morality, responsibility, or achievement
- Feeling alienated from others who appear not to understand or value them
- “Existential depression” over the absurdity of life, values, or the search for human meaning

Adapted from Ellis and Harper (1975), *A New Guide to Rational Living*. NY: Institute for Rational Living.

You may also wish to visit *SENG: Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted*. Resources for parents include Facebook support groups, research, programs, and articles.

www.sengifted.org