

Understanding and Intervening
The Psychological and Social Emotional
Dimensions of the Gifted

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Agenda Part 1

- Item 1 • The Neurology of the Gifted Brain
- Item 2 • Risk Factors for the Gifted
- Item 3 • Overexcitabilities
- Item 4 • Asynchronous Development

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- Item 5 • Perfectionism
- Item 6 • Anxiety and Stress
- Item 7 • Idealism and Depression

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The Gifted Brain

How is it different?

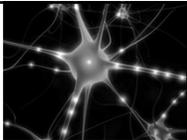
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Neurobiology of the Gifted Brain

- Superior frontal cortex activity
- Larger and unfolded parietal lobe
- More of certain types of neuron cells
- More dendrites and synapses
- MRI studies show a positive correlation between brain size and IQ

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The gifted brain has more connections



- Needs few repetitions to retain material.
- Makes connections across subjects and classes.
- Divergent thinking brings new, sometimes “far out,” connections and solutions.

These are our future problem solvers!

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Brains of gifted people are different

- More efficient
- More measurable tissue
- Less measurable activity
- Learn in different ways, not just faster, but different
- Intelligence may be measured in the future by brain scans, replacing IQ tests and college entrance exams.

---Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Senior Medical Correspondent, CNN



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The gifted brain results in greater:

- Intensity – anything worth doing is worth doing to excess
- Sensitivity – physical and emotional
- Idealism – strong desire to make things right
- Perfectionism - as they try to impose a sense of order to the world and their lives
- Activity – verbal and/or physical (busy brains, busy bodies)

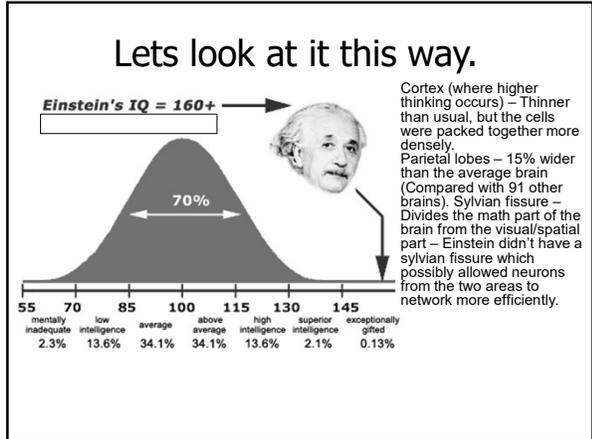
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Also greater incidence of:

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Hypoglycemia (gifted brains burn more energy while learning new material).

See: Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults; Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, Olenchack

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Risk factors for gifted students

- Gifted students are at least as well adjusted as other students, but they face risks to their affective development due to:
 - 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 (maturity verses immaturity depending on the domain)
 - Inadequate support to deal with peer pressures to be "like everyone else"

(Neihart, Reis, Robinson & Moon, 2002)

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The Social Emotional Dimension

The notion of high intelligence being associated with emotional or social difficulties is somewhat counterintuitive. Intelligence assumes problem solving ability, which includes such related areas as forethought, reasoning skills, ability to see cause-effect relations, attention to detail, memory for relevant data and a wide array of knowledge to draw upon. Bright individuals, one would assume, should be able to anticipate, avoid and solve interpersonal problems more easily than others and they should have more self-understanding.

The Australasian Journal of Gifted Education, 20 (1)
Rose Blackett and James T. Webb (2011)

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The Social Emotional Dimension

“In some instances, what makes gifted children special paradoxically can serve to increase their risk for social and emotional difficulties.”

*Steven Pfeiffer, SENG Professional Advisory Board
(Social and Emotional Needs of the Gifted)*

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The Stigma of Giftedness

There is evidence to show that the gifted are influenced by their peers', parents' and teachers' feelings about their abilities. If they are seen as mental freaks, unhealthy personalities, or eccentric simply because they are brainy or creative, many of them will avoid the stigma through conformity. Some would rather underachieve and be popular than achieve honor status and receive ostracism.

Tannenbaum

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Characteristics and Behavior Patterns of Gifted that lead to misdiagnosis

- Difficulty seeing things from others' viewpoint
- Perfectionism—very self-critical; unwilling to take risks; oversensitive to criticism
- Creative—engages in non-traditional behaviors
- Judgment lags behind intellect (asynchronous development)
- Non-conformity; challenges others and traditions; refuses to accept authority; disrupts status quo
- Strong-willed behavior; frequent disagrees strongly with parents, teachers, peers, supervisors; gets in power struggles; is stubborn; gets angry

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Characteristics and Behavior Patterns of Gifted that lead to misdiagnosis

- Neglects duties or people during periods of intense focus
- Advanced, numerous, and/or diverse interests; appears scattered
- "Visual-Spatial" ("Right Brain") non-linear learning styles
- Disorganized learning or job functioning style; leaves tasks unfinished; lacks interest in details; hands in messy work
- Narrow interests or overly focused; reluctant to move to new topics in discussion

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Characteristics and Behavior Patterns of Gifted that lead to misdiagnosis

- Boredom with routine tasks (particularly if educationally or occupationally misplaced); resists routine practice; refuses to do rote homework or busywork
- Underachievement due to excessive conformity with peers
- Asynchronous development; shows scatter of ability levels
- Poor handwriting
- Unusual sleep patterns
- Peer relation problems
- Jokes or puns at inappropriate times

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Emotional Dimensions of Giftedness

- **Extra Perception**- being highly perceptive to stimuli (sounds,sights,touches,tastes).
- **High Involvement**- unusual preoccupation with interests, tasks, materials, and questions.
- **Super Sensitivity**- super sensitive to ethical issues and concerns. Highly moralistic and quick to judge others.
- **Idealism**—impatient with failures; experiences keen disappointment; cynicism and depression; feelings of aloneness

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Emotional Dimensions of Giftedness

- **Perfectionism**- feeling that nothing is ever “good enough” (so they may not hand it in).
- **Asynchronous Development** –when intellectual and verbal development are ahead of physical and emotional development.
- **Multipotentiality** – having many abilities makes choosing a major or career path difficult.
- **Low self-esteem or depression** – susceptibility to depression, anxiety, and loneliness.

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Do You Have Any Questions?

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Dabrowski’s Overexcitabilities

- **Psychomotor** – An unusual need for physical activity and movement. (ex. Rapid talk, pacing, hand gestures).
- **Sensual** – Greater than normal perceptiveness of sensory experiences; unusual awareness and enjoyment of sensation.
- **Imagination** – Inventiveness, the ability to visualize clearly, metaphorical speech, dreaming, fantasy and magical thinking.
- **Intellectual** – The desire to question, to analyze; the ability to delight in the abstract and theoretical, in logical thinking, puzzles and problem solving.
- **Emotional** – An intensity of feeling and of relationships; preference for few close friends rather than many acquaintances; natural empathy and compassion.



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Dabrowski said

"One who manifests several forms of overexcitability sees reality in a different, stronger and more multisided manner" (Dabrowski, 1972, p. 7). Experiencing the world in this unique way carries with it great joys and sometimes great frustrations. The joys and positives of being overexcitable need to be celebrated. Any frustrations or negatives can be positively dealt with and used to help facilitate the child's growth.

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Psychomotor OE

- heightened excitability of the neuromuscular system
- "capacity for being active and energetic" (Piechowski, 1991, p. 287)
- love of movement for its own sake, surplus of energy demonstrated by rapid speech, jealous enthusiasm, intense physical activity, and a need for action (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 1979, 1991)
- may talk compulsively, act impulsively, misbehave and act out, display nervous habits, show intense drive (tending towards "workaholism"), compulsively organize, or become quite competitive

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Psychomotor OE

- When feeling emotionally tense:
 - Talk compulsively
 - Act Compulsively
 - Display Nervous Habits
 - Show intense drive
 - Compulsively Organize
 - Become competitive
 - Act Out

This Psychomotor OE child has the potential of being misdiagnosed as Attention Deficit Disorder: Hyperactive Type

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Problems associated with Strengths

Strength	Problems
High energy, alertness, eagerness; periods of intense efforts.	Frustration with inactivity; eagerness may disrupt others' schedules; needs continual stimulation; may be seen as hyperactive.

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Psychomotor Strategies

- Allow time for physical or verbal activity, before, during, and after normal daily and school activities-these individuals love to "do" and need to "do." Build activity and movement into their lives.
- Be sure the physical or verbal activities are acceptable and not distracting to those around them. This may take some work, but it can be a fun project and beneficial to all.
- Provide time for spontaneity and open-ended, free-wheeling activities. These tend to favor the needs of a person high in Psychomotor OE.

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Sensual OE

- Seeing, smelling, touching, tasting and hearing are much more heightened
- Unusual sensitivity to music, language and foods
- Objects to florescent lights or the buzzing of such lights
- Can be overwhelmed by perfumes, or textures of food

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Sensual OE

- heightened experience of sensual pleasure or displeasure emanating from sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 1979, 1991)
- have a far more expansive experience from their sensual input than the average person
- have an increased and early appreciation of aesthetic pleasures such as music, language, and art, and derive endless delight from tastes, smells, textures, sounds, and sights
 - Because of this increased sensitivity, they may also feel over-stimulated or uncomfortable with sensory input.
- sometimes have difficulty with sorting out all they hear, feel, or smell
- sensitivity makes them easily distractible

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Sensual OE

- When emotionally tense, some individuals high in sensual OE may overeat, go on buying sprees, or seek the physical sensation of being the center of attraction (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 1979, 1991). Others may withdraw from stimulation.
 - Sensually overexcitable children may find clothing tags, classroom noise, or smells from the cafeteria so distracting that school-work becomes secondary.
 - These children may also become so absorbed in their love of a particular piece of art or music that the outside world ceases to exist.
- This Sensual OE child has the potential of being misdiagnosed as Sensory Impaired/Sensory Integration Disorder

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Problems associated with Strengths

Strength	Problems
Intense joy associated with favorable sensual experiences.	Physiological discomfort with unfavorable sensual experiences. May be seen as sensory processing disorder which is also associated with Autism.

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Sensual Strategies

- Whenever, possible, create an environment which limits offensive stimuli and provides comfort.
- Provide appropriate opportunities for being in the limelight by giving unexpected attention, facilitating creative and dramatic productions which have an audience. These individuals literally feel the recognition that comes from being in the limelight.
- Provide time to dwell in the delight of the sensual and to create a soothing environment. Remember to allow time to just lounge in a warm scented bath, listen to rain, or just be present in a lovely garden.

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Intellectual OE

- Curiosity
- Asking Probing Questions
- Concentration
- Problem Solving
- Theoretical Thinking

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Intellectual OE

- have a marked need to seek understanding and truth, to gain knowledge, and to analyze and synthesize have incredibly active minds
- intensely curious, often avid readers, and usually keen observers.
- able to concentrate, engage in prolonged intellectual effort, and be tenacious in problem solving when they choose.
- relish elaborate planning and having remarkably detailed visual recall.

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Intellectual OE

- frequently love theory, thinking about thinking, and moral thinking.
 - This focus on moral thinking often translates into strong concerns about moral and ethical issues-fairness on the playground, lack of respect for children, or being concerned about "adult" issues such as the homeless, AIDS, or war.

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Intellectual OE

Quite independent of thought and sometimes appear critical of and impatient with others who cannot sustain their intellectual pace.

- This intellectual intensity seems to cause the greatest difficulty at school and home when children become so excited about learning and thinking that they interrupt or blurt out answers at inappropriate times or are too honest about or critical of others' ideas.

This Intellectual OE child has the potential of being misdiagnosed as Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

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Problems associated with Strengths

Strength	Problems
Ability to conceptualize, abstract, synthesize; enjoys problem-solving and intellectual activity.	Rejects or omits details; resists practice or drill; questions teaching procedures.
Inquisitive attitude, intellectual curiosity; intrinsic motivation; searching for significance.	Asks embarrassing questions; strong-willed; resists direction; seems excessive in interests; expects same of others.
Thinks critically; has high expectancies; is self-critical and evaluates others.	Critical or intolerant toward others; may become discouraged or depressed; perfectionistic.

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Intellectual Strategies

- Show how to find the answers to questions. This respects and encourages a person's passion to analyze, synthesize, and seek understanding.
- Provide or suggest ways for those interested in moral and ethical issues to act upon their concerns-such as collecting blankets for the homeless or writing to soldiers in Kosovo. This enables people to feel that they can help, in even a small way, to solve community or worldwide problems.
- If individuals seem critical or too outspoken to others, help them to see how their intent may be perceived as cruel or disrespectful. For example, telling someone "that is a stupid idea" may not be well received, even if the idea is truly stupid.

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Imaginational OE

- Drawn to complex, imaginative schemes, usually with great drama.
- Rich imagination
- Fantasy play
- Imaginary friends
- Animistic thinking,
- Daydreaming

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Imaginational OE

- Imaginational OE reflects a heightened play of the imagination with rich association of images and impressions, frequent use of image and metaphor, facility for invention and fantasy, detailed visualization, and elaborate dreams (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 1979, 1991).
- They often mix truth with fiction, or create their own private worlds with imaginary companions and dramatizations to escape boredom.

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Imaginational OE

- They find it difficult to stay tuned into a classroom where creativity and imagination are secondary to learning rigid academic curriculum.
- They may write stories or draw instead of doing seatwork or participating in class discussions, or they may have difficulty completing tasks when some incredible idea sends them off on an imaginative tangent.

This Imaginational OE child has the potential of being misdiagnosed as ADD inattentive type.

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Problems associated with Strengths

Strength	Problems
Creative and inventive; likes new ways of doing things.	May disrupt plans or reject what is already known; seen by others as different and out of step.
Diverse interests and abilities; versatility.	May appear scattered and disorganized; frustrations over lack of time; others may expect continual competence.

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Imaginational Strategies

- Imaginational people may confuse reality and fiction because their memories and new ideas become blended in their mind.
- Help individuals to differentiate between their imagination and the real world by having them place a stop sign in their mental videotape, or write down or draw the factual account before they embellish it.
- Help people use their imagination to function in the real world and promote learning and productivity. For example, instead of the conventional school organized notebook, have children create their own organizational system.

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Emotional OE

- Extreme complex emotions and intense feelings
- Excessive worry about others
- Heightened concern about environment
- Strong emotional attachments to people, places, and things
- Intense compassion, empathy, sensitivity and anger



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Emotional OE

- Children
 - Temper Tantrums
 - Displays of rage
 - Emotions Extreme
- Adolescents
 - Involved in social causes
 - Idealistic – saving people or things
 - Cynical or angry
 - Existential Depression

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Emotional OE

- is often the first to be noticed by parents. It is reflected in heightened, intense feelings, extremes of complex emotions, identification with others' feelings, and strong affective expression (Piechowski, 1991).
- physical responses like stomachaches and blushing or concern with death and depression (Piechowski, 1979).
- have a remarkable capacity for deep relationships; they show strong emotional attachments to people, places, and things (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977). They have compassion, empathy, and sensitivity in relationships.

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Emotional OE

- are acutely aware of their own feelings, of how they are growing and changing, and often carry on inner dialogs and practice self-judgment (Piechowski, 1979, 1991).
 - are often accused of “overreacting.”
 - compassion and concern for others, their focus on relationships, and the intensity of their feelings may interfere with everyday tasks like homework or doing the dishes.
- This Emotional OE child has the potential of being misdiagnosed as Bi-Polar, Depressed.

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Problems associated with Strengths

Strength	Problems
Sensitivity, empathy for others; desire to be accepted by others.	Sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection; expects others to have similar values; need for success and recognition; may feel different and alienated.

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Emotional Strategies

Teach individuals to anticipate physical and emotional responses and prepare for them. Emotionally intense people often don't know when they are becoming so overwrought that they may lose control or may have physical responses to their emotions. Help them to identify the physical warning signs of their emotional stress such as headache, sweaty palms, and stomachache. By knowing the warning signs and acting on them early, individuals will be better able to cope with emotional situations and not lose control.

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FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES

- Jointly discuss the positives of each overexcitability when you first introduce the concept, and continue to point out these merits. Benefits include being energetic, enthusiastic, sensual, aesthetic, curious, loyal, tenacious, moral, metacognitive, integrative, creative, metaphorical, dramatic, poetic, compassionate, empathetic, and self-aware.

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CHERISH AND CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

It is vital when discussing OEs that individuals realize that overexcitability is just one more description of who they are, as is being tall, or Asian, or left-handed. Since OEs are inborn traits, they cannot be unlearned! It is therefore exceedingly important that we accept our overexcitable selves, children, and friends. This acceptance provides validation and helps to free people from feelings of "weirdness" and isolation.

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CHERISH AND CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

Another way to show acceptance is to provide opportunities for people to pursue their passions. This shows respect for their abilities and intensities and allows time for them to "wallow" in what they love, to be validated for who they are. Removing passions as consequences for inappropriate behavior has a negative effect by giving the message that your passions, the essence of who you are, are not valuable or worthy of respect.

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HELP TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ONE'S BEHAVIORS AND THEIR IMPACT ON OTHERS

Paradoxically, overexcitable people are often insensitive and unaware of how their behaviors affect others. They may assume that everyone will just understand why they interrupt to share an important idea, or tune out when creating a short story in their head during dinner. It is vital to teach children and adults to be responsible for their behaviors, to become more aware of how their behaviors affect others, and to understand that their needs are not more important than those of others. The key is to realize that you can show children and adults how they are perceived, you can teach them strategies to fit in, but they must choose to change.

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REMEMBER THE JOY

- Often when overexcitability is discussed examples and concerns are mostly negative. Remember that being overexcitable also brings with it great joy, astonishment, beauty, compassion, and creativity. Perhaps the most important thing is to acknowledge and relish the uniqueness of an overexcitable child or adult.

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Do You Have Any Questions?

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Asynchronous Development



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Asynchronous Development

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer... Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away."

-Henry David Thoreau

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Some examples of asynchronous development...

Think about being chronologically 8, with the physical capacity of a 5 year old, the mental capacity of a 16 year old and the emotional capacity of a 10 year old.

A young child who can ride a bike like an 8 yr. old, play chess like a 12 yr. old, do algebra like a 15 yr. old, and have a tantrum like a 2 yr. old when asked to share a cookie



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“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)

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What is Asynchronous Development?

- Cognitive development occurs at much faster rate than emotional/physical development.
- A gifted student with asynchronous development may appear to be different ages in different situations.
- Friendships are often a concern for students with asynchronous development.

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“To have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties.” (Hollingworth, 1942)

“In addition to being out of sync in their own development, gifted children are out of sync: with family relations, both parents and siblings, socially with age-peers and older, and with schools and the larger community.” (Kearney, 1991)

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Problems for the Asynchronous Child

- Child may feel frustrated because of the extreme difference between their intellect and their ability to express or use that intellect. Singer, L. (2000). Uniquely Gifted: Identifying and Meeting the Needs of Twice Exceptional Students.
- Child finds it hard to "fit in" with children the same age.
- Child is expected to act more mature, socially and emotionally because of their academic achievements.
- Child's intense feelings regarding world/social issues are not taken seriously. Child considered "overly dramatic" (Tolan, 2005).
- Child can become stressed and have emotional outbursts because their physical capacities, especially fine motor skills, are far less developed than their intellectual capacities, and may even lag in comparison to other individuals their age (Delisle & Lewis, 2003).

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Idea-Skill Gap

- This idea skill gap is extremely frustrating for the gifted students whose heads are like sparklers, firing off one idea after another. The frustration is compounded by the fact that many gifted youngsters actually excel at something right off the bat, giving them the false impression that that is how it should be for everything they try. Consequently, they set the bar for everything accordingly, even those things that require years of training and effort. (Jacobson 2003)

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Asynchronous Development in Adolescence

- Executive functions include "planning, goal setting, organizing thoughts, suppressing impulses, and considering consequences before acting" (Willis, 2009) executive functions are thought to be controlled by the brain's frontal lobe. In all children, this is the last part of the brain to mature during the slow process of refinement of neural connections, a process that occurs roughly from age 5 to 20 or even later.
- Until the frontal lobe is mature-that is, until the brain changes complete-adolescents are likely to make judgments based on emotion rather than reason and failed to take into account long-term goals were making short-term decisions.
- While adults might expect brighter students have more mature judgment at an earlier age than their classmates the reverse can be true. Recent research using functional magnetic resonance imaging maturation in gifted students appears to be delayed even longer than in their age matched classmates. (Willis, 2009)

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Coping with Asynchronous Development

- Be aware of the gifted child's uneven development and the special needs that result.
- Promote an environment that meets the educational, social, emotional, and intellectual needs of gifted children.
- Value the child for who he/she is, not for who (or what, in some cases) they are not. Provide opportunities for the child to spend time with other children of similar interests and abilities to help them feel accepted for who they are.

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Coping with Asynchronous Development

- Consider single subject acceleration.
- Help the child accept differing abilities. Point out that all people develop differently and have varying skills, capabilities, and talents.
- Reassure gifted kids that no one expects them to have exceptional ability in every area.

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Coping with Asynchronous Development

- Help children learn needed social skills by role-playing with them.
- Encourage students to feel pride in their gifts and talents rather than despair over uneven development. One way to do this is by assisting gifted students to pursue topics and projects that tap into already developed talents or interests.

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Understanding the Gifted Perfectionist

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Theories on Perfectionism

- Maslow (1970)
 - Struggle for perfection through self-actualization - use of one's potential, capabilities, & talents; absence of neurosis
- Dabrowski (1972)
 - Driving force that served to promote higher levels of development within the individual; tool for self-development, not a maladjustment
- Adler (1973)
 - A striving to rise above feelings of despair and hopelessness

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Theories on Perfectionism

- Silverman (n.d.)
 - Abstract concept: driving force, inner knowing, desire to "create meaning of one's life by doing the best one is capable of doing."
- Kerr
 - "Many perfectionistic children are the products of relaxed, easy-going parents with realistic expectations.... It seems possible that certain children are simply *born* with the combination of temper-aments that create the need for an orderly environment, or conversely, an aversion to chaos. Perfectionism is also a function of asynchronous development of the gifted child. When the mind develops faster than the body, the reasoning and values of the child are more like those of his or her mental peers than like those of age-mates. The child sets standards for him- or herself based upon this advanced awareness.

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Reasons for Perfectionism

- Inborn for some individuals (Dabrowski, 1964; Silverman, 1990)
- Perfectionistic parents (Rowell, 1986)
- Birth order (Leman, 1985; Smith, 1990)
- Messages from the media (Barrow & Moore, 1983)
- Perfectionistic teachers and peers (Adderholdt-Elliott, 1991)
- Asynchrony- developmental dysplasia- intellectual age greater than chronological age (Adderholdt-Elliott, 1991)
- “Hothousing” babies (Elkind, 1981)
- Influence of dysfunctional family
 - Alcoholics (Ackerman, 1989; Crespi, 1990; Smith, 1990)
 - Workaholics (Brophy, 1986)

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Sign of Dysfunctional Perfectionism

• Delayed starts	• High levels of anxiety
• Unwillingness to share work	• Refusal to turn in work or accomplish goals
• Unreasonably extreme response to grades or evaluations	• Inability to tolerate mistakes
• Inability to accept inferior work of less talented peers	• Tendency to magnify & generalize self imperfections
• Feelings of superiority accompanied by loneliness	• Inability to cope with ambiguity and chance
• Relentless self-criticism	• Inability to share responsibility
• Feelings of inferiority	• Susceptible to depression following productive periods
• Fear of the future	(Schuler, 1997)

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Sign of Dysfunctional Perfectionism

• other marked changes in personality. In addition, we find other danger signals for gifted children and adolescents that indicate they may be seriously depressed or suicidal	• self-imposed isolation from family
• self-imposed perfection as the ultimate standard, to the point that the only tasks enjoyed are the ones completed perfectly	• deep concern with personal powerlessness
• a change in noise or quietude	• narcissism -- total preoccupation with self and with fantasy
• repetition of rules and directions to make sure that they can be followed	• unusual fascination with violence
• avoidance of new ventures unless certain of the outcome	• eating disorders
	• chemical abuse
	• rigidly compulsive behaviors (Schmitz & Galbraith,1985)

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Perfectionist vs. Healthy Striver

Perfectionist

- Sets standards beyond reach and reason
- Is never satisfied by anything less than perfection
- Becomes dysfunctionally depressed when experiences failure and disappointment

Healthy Striver

- Sets high standards, but just beyond reach
- Enjoys process as well as outcome
- Bounces back from failure and disappointment quickly and with energy

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Perfectionist vs. Healthy Striver

Perfectionist

- Is preoccupied with fear of failure and disapproval – this can deplete energy levels
- Sees mistakes as evidence of unworthiness
- Becomes overly defensive when criticized

Healthy striver

- Keeps normal anxiety and fear of failure and disapproval within bounds – uses them to create energy
- Sees mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning
- Reacts positively to helpful criticism

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Perfectionist vs. Healthy Striver

Perfectionist

- Avoids new experiences because you are terrified of making mistakes, especially in public
- Throws a fit because the editor of the school paper tampered with your work

Healthy striver

- Willing to try new things, take risks, and learn from your experiences and your mistakes
- Reads the story you wrote for the school paper and notices that the editor improved your copy

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Healthy Strivers
learn to ask themselves the following:

1. Is it good enough?
2. What's the worst thing that can happen?
3. Will it matter in the long run?

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Perfectionism

- Dr. Miriam Adderholdt-Elliot's book Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good? offers the following thoughts...
- "For most people, perfectionism isn't a big problem. It can be, however, for one group in particular, gifted kids."
- What's the big deal anyway? Being a Perfectionist has never hurt anyone!
- According to Whitmore, 1980, The pressure towards perfection is the most overlooked, yet influential aspect of being gifted.

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Perfectionism

- Perfectionism is part of being gifted.
- Expectations are extremely high for gifted students.
- School, society, family and self can contribute to the idea that peak performance should be the norm for students selected for gifted programs.
- Although it can breed excellence it can also be destructive, leading students to think that the only efforts worth making are those that end in perfect achievement.

DeIsle, pg. 34 Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth



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Perfectionists Code

I must be perfect.
 Everything I do should go easily & without effort.
 It's safer to do nothing than to take a risk & fail.
 I should have no limitations.
 If it's not done right, it's not worth doing at all.
 I must avoid being challenged.
 If I succeed, someone will get hurt.
 If I do well this time, I must always do well.
 Following someone else's rules means I'm giving in & not in control.
 I can't afford to let go of anything or anyone.
 If I expose my real self, people won't like me.
 There is a right answer, & I'll wait until I find it.

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Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale

- This questionnaire is designed to measure how much of a perfectionist you are.
- It has 35 questions and should take no more than 10 minutes.
- It was developed by **Dr Randy Frost** of Smith College, Massachusetts.

Please select the option that best reflects your opinion, using the rating system below.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/humanbody/mind/surveys/perfectionism/>

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1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. My parents set very high standards for me.
2. Organization is very important to me.
3. As a child, I was punished for doing things less than perfectly.
4. If I do not set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second-rate person.
5. My parents never tried to understand my mistakes.
6. It is important to me that I be thoroughly competent in everything I do.
7. I am a neat person.
8. I try to be an organized person.
9. If I fail at work/school, I am a failure as a person.
10. I should be upset if I make a mistake.

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**Interventions
for the
Perfectionist**

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Counseling Interventions

1. Establish a counseling program for gifted children as a component of the existing counseling services.
2. Become knowledgeable about their special intellectual needs and social and emotional issues. Understand that they have special guidance needs.
 - Obtain the necessary training and skills in identifying and counseling gifted children
 - Keep abreast of current research concerning counseling needs
 - Collaborate with teachers to provide services in the classroom
3. Establish relationships with gifted children as soon as they enter school.

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Bibliotherapy

- *Be a Perfect Person in Just Three Days!* By Stephen Manes (elem.)
- *Here's to You, Rachel Robinson* by Judy Blume (middle/high)
- *On the Devil's Court* by Carl Deuker (middle/high)
- *Ordinary Jack* by Helen Cresswell (elem.)
- *Winners and Losers* by Stephen Hoffius (middle/high)
- *Mistakes that Worked* by Charlotte Jones and John O'Brien (elem.)
- *Nobody's Perfect: A Story for Children About Perfectionism* by Ellen Flanagan Burns
- *Too Perfect* by Trudy Ludwig (elem.)
- *A Taste of Perfection* by Laura Langston (middle)
- *What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough: The Real Deal on Perfectionism* by Thomas S. Greenspon, Ph.D.

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Counseling Interventions

4. Research different therapeutic models that have been recommended as effective counseling approaches for dysfunctional perfectionists.
 - Individual therapy: Reality therapy, Rational-emotive therapy
 - Counseling Groups
 - Special units on perfectionism
 - Typology of group modalities: Task-Process, Socio-Process, and Psycho-Process Group
5. Become an advocate for gifted children so they may receive the services they need.

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Helping Kids with Perfectionism

- Teach courage: "I know you can try."
- Reward trying
- Expect progress, not perfection
- "Finished" is sometimes a better goal than perfect
- Applaud persistence
- "You kept on trying, even when you didn't know how it would turn out"
- Break down the task
- "Inch by inch, it's a cinch. Yard by yard, it's hard."
 - Acknowledge learning - "what did you learn while you were doing this?"
 - "What part did you enjoy most?"
 - "What might you try next time?"
 - "How might you do it differently next time?"

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Helping Kids with Perfectionism

- Ask, "What's good about it?"
- Help child discover meaning
- "What were you thinking when you were choosing colors?"
- Honor the time invested
- "You gave a lot of time to this. It must be important to you."
- Focus on process and product
- "How did you decide to change the experiment?"
- Make mistakes okay
- Call work practice
- Model making mistakes as okay
(Meckstroth)

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Interventions for Perfectionism

Teach the student to:

- Be selective with their tasks
- Remember that it's OK to be less than perfect
- Set reasonable, attainable goals
- Have at least one "safe" activity
- Realize that a lot of successful people have experienced failure
- Self-talk – "I would prefer for ___ to occur, but can accept that it won't" rather than "I should have made ___ happen."
(Schuler)

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Perfectionism: Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
"I wouldn't be the success I am today if I weren't such a perfectionist."	Perfectionism does not lead to success and fulfillment. Although some perfectionists are remarkably successful, what they fail to realize is that their success has been achieved despite-not because of-their compulsive striving.

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Perfectionism: Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
Perfectionists just have this enormous desire to please others and to be the very best they can.	Perfectionistic tendencies often begin as an attempt to win love, acceptance, and approval.

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Perfectionism: Myths vs. Realities

<p style="text-align: center;">Myth</p> <p>Perfectionists get things done, and they do things right.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Realities</p> <p>Perfectionists often have problems with procrastination, missed deadlines, and low productivity.</p>
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Perfectionism: Myths vs. Realities

<p style="text-align: center;">Myth</p> <p>Perfectionists are determined to overcome all obstacles to success.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reality</p> <p>Although perfectionists follow an "I'll keep trying until it's perfect" credo, they are especially vulnerable to potentially serious difficulties such as depression, writer's block, and performance and social anxiety.</p>
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Do You Have Any Questions?

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Stress and Anxiety

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Stress

Distress	Eustress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Caused by negative situations •Underachievement •Multiple passions •World events •External pressures •Internal pressures •Illness/injury •Intensity/sensitivity / perfectionism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Caused by positive situations •All A's; high grades/scores •Top prizes •First class performer •Attractive •Highly creative, innovative •Social competence

(Hyde & Forsyth, 2008; Fiedler & Kane, 2007)

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Signs of Stress Overload

Signs Of Stress Overload



The diagram is a circle divided into four equal quadrants by a vertical and a horizontal line. The top-left quadrant is labeled 'Physical', the top-right is 'Emotional', the bottom-left is 'Behavioral', and the bottom-right is 'Spiritual'. The center of the circle is a light gray color, and the quadrants are a darker gray.

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Signs Of Stress Overload- Physical

- Sleep difficulties
- Loss of appetite
- Chronic fatigue
- Vague stomach upset
- Low grade infection
- Rashes
- Frequent colds
- Headaches

(Youngs, 1986)

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Signs Of Stress Overload- Emotional

- Nightmares
- Anxiety
- Apathy
- Panic
- Inappropriate laughter
- Feelings of failure
- Feelings of unworthiness

(Youngs, 1986)

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Signs Of Stress Overload- Behavioral

- 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)
- Arson

(Youngs, 1986)

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Signs Of Stress Overload- Spiritual

- 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
- Abandonment of spiritual practices
-(meditation, visualization, prayer, mantra)

(Kane, 2010)

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Stress Overload Can Lead to:

- Underachievement
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Phobias
- Panic Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Depression

When stress interferes with daily life and self-management is not enough, then calling a mental health professional is essential.

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Differentiating Characteristics of 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 he/she 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

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General Sources Of Anxiety

- Terrorism
- Natural disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis)
- Exposure to violence (media; personally)
- Exposure to drugs/alcohol/risky behaviors
- Death; loss of loved one including pets
- Bullying (including cyberbullying)
- Discrimination (race, gender, sexual orientation)
- Changing family circumstances (divorce, moving, financial)
- Loss of romantic relationship (real or imagined)
- Relationships with friends/peers

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Situational Stress of Gifted People

- conflict between our values and the values of others
- interpersonal disharmony
- lack of intellectual stimulation or challenge
- challenges beyond our capability to respond
- threats to emotional or physical well- being
- lack of resources to accomplish a task
- time constraints
- difficulty choosing from equally attractive options

Fiedler, 2007

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Basic Tools for Stress Management

- Remember the "basics" - H.A.L.T.
- More basics: Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep (don't forget!)
- Make contact - the "talking cure" or the "writing cure" or the "texting cure"
- Books can help
- Humor helps
- Knowing when to ask for help; vulnerability is OK

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Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids with Situational Stress

Interpersonal

- Explore topics, where appropriate, that create cause for concern (e.g., what do you think about the destruction of the rain forests? In what ways could our family eliminate hunger?)
- Limit exposure to unsettling images/sounds from media sources and computer games
- Role play or use "social stories" to rehearse how to deal with uncomfortable social situations
- Provide situations for connecting with intellectual peers or mentor
- Share information on personality type (introversion vs. extraversion and implications for social situations)

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Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids with Situational Stress

Intrapersonal

- Provide specific techniques for conflict resolution and teach appropriate assertiveness
- Elicit suggestions from kids on how to use time more efficiently
- Demonstrate decision-making strategies (how does the family select a movie?)
- Use journals to help kids sort out their feelings, fears, joys and frustrations
- Help kids set goals by week, unit or semester – evaluate both the goals and goal-setting process.; modify goals with the kids when their goals aren't achieved

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Self-Imposed Stress of Gifted People

- setting excessively high standards for ourselves
- fear of failure, fear of success
- negative self-talk; self-criticism
- emotionally loaded/highly evaluative beliefs about ourselves and our environment
- believing that everyone should love, respect, and praise us
- buying into others' negative evaluations of us
- catastrophizing
- worrying



(Fiedler, 2007)

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Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids with Self-Imposed Stress

Intrapersonal

- Teach creative problem solving strategies and apply to personal situation
- Hold family meetings regularly
- Model creative, risk-taking behaviors; encourage "courageous conversations" so kids can speak their truth and others can witness
- Probe personal beliefs and concerns; help kids identify issues/stressors

Interpersonal

- Have family try something that no one has done and allow to observe how adults deal with mistakes
- Provide opportunities for different circles of friends

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Existential Stress of Gifted People

- global concerns (e.g., nuclear disaster, war, poverty, world hunger, the environment, etc.)
- idealism
- anger at fate
- isolation
- need for meaning and purpose

(Fiedler, 2007)

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Practical Tips to Help Gifted Kids with Existential Stress

- Provide opportunities for students to learn more about world events and the process of change
- Explore service learning projects so there are outlets for caring; model compassion as family
- Teach kids how to search for careers that address deep concerns
- Bring gifted students together to develop relationships with older, younger, or online peers
- Use bibliotherapy and cinema-therapy to provide an "arms-length" approach for delving into topics
- Connect kids to mentors who share similar concerns and passions
- Encourage/discuss spiritual leaders via biographies/film
- Explore activities such as Peace Jam/Future Problem Solving

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Do You Have Any Questions?

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Depression in Gifted

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Idealism, Unhappiness, Depression, and Resiliency

- Most gifted children are idealists, yet their idealism can actually increase the likelihood of depression.
- Gifted children are often frustrated in their idealism and vision of how things should be.
- They are exposed to internal and external stresses that could make them more at risk for unhappiness and depression.
- Some are unhappy and depressed. But on the other hand, gifted children are resilient and often are better at coping.

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Depression

The condition of depression affects mental and emotional tone and capacity, as well as the physical body. Characteristics of major depression include:

- A sad or depressed mood and a loss of interest and pleasure in usual activities
- difficulty in falling or staying asleep or a desire to sleep much of the time.
- a shift in energy and activity levels, becoming lethargic or extremely agitated.
- poor appetite and weight loss or, in some cases, increased appetite and weight gain.
- negative self-concept and self-blame pessimism, and pervasive feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and despair.
- difficulty concentrating and evidence of slowed thinking, mental fuzziness, lack of cohesion in thought patterns, and indecisiveness.

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Factors

- Patterns and conditions of vulnerability to depression in children include some of the following:
 - Children of parents with depressive disorder are found to have a significantly higher incidence of depression
 - Children who have experienced difficulty with attachment and separation-individuation are more likely to develop depression
 - Children who experience significant loss in the early years are at risk for a depressive episode later in life.
 - Temperament can be a factor. Temperament accounts for a child's activity level, adaptability, threshold of responsiveness, intensity of reaction, mood quality, distractibility, attention span, and persistence.
 - Giftedness brings with it a tendency to interact with their environment in a manner that may results in depression.

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Depression

- With the exception of students creatively gifted in the visual arts and writing research suggests that gifted children are at no higher risk for depression than average-ability children
- Students who do not have an understanding of or support for their Overexcitabilities tend to be at a higher risk for suicidal behavior
- However, depression among all children and adolescents has increased Rates of suicide has increased 300% in the past 30 years for adolescent males
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescents

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Risk Factors for Depression in the Gifted

- Asynchronous development – at risk for existential depression (struggling with meaning of life)
- Perfectionism – is associated in the clinical literature with depression and suicide
 - Perceived pressures with feelings of inadequacy may contribute to fear of failure and negative self-evaluation
- Social isolation – associated with depressed mood
 - Has been noted among highly gifted who are not radically accelerated
 - More of a problem for those under 10 who have less mobility
 - Important to distinguish between loneliness and solitude (only loneliness correlates with depression)
- Sensitivity – speculated to increase suffering from social injustices, personal losses, slights, and perceived rejection
 - No studies have confirmed this

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Dealing with Depression

- First, abandoned the idea that depressed people are weak or that depression is a choice.
- Second, don't try to reason a depressed child out of his or her depression. Depression isn't reasonable, and reminding a child of all the reasons he or she should be happy to make him or her feel guilty, which may lead to even greater depression.

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Dealing with Depression

- Notice how long the child has been depressed.
- Listen to the child.
- Accept the concerns.
- Give emotional support.
- Evaluate the level of depression and degree of risk.
- Ask about suicide.
- Take action.

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Protective Factors

- Some characteristics common among gifted students have also been cited as protective factors
 - High intelligence
 - Problem-solving abilities
 - Advanced social skills
 - Androgyny
 - Advanced moral reasoning
- Gifted may be exposed to higher levels of stress, but personal characteristics may serve as a buffer

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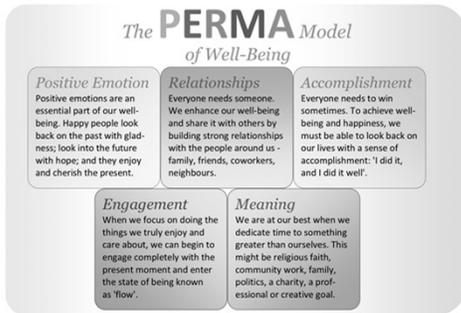
Depression and the Gifted Child

“Gifted children feel keenly the disappointment and frustration which occurs when ideals are not reached. These youngsters are often quick to spot the inconsistencies, arbitrariness and absurdities in society and in the behaviors of those around them. They will question traditions or challenge the accepted. Frustration is often experienced when they try to share these concerns with others because they are met with puzzlement, anger and/or failure to appreciate the concern. These youngsters, even very early in the school careers and particularly the more highly gifted ones, feel isolated from their peers and perhaps from their families as they find that others are not prepared to discuss such weighty concerns.”

Marc A. Caplan 2006 adapted from James Webb

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Interventions for Depression



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Interventions for Depression

- Character Strengths Survey
- <http://www.viacharacter.org>

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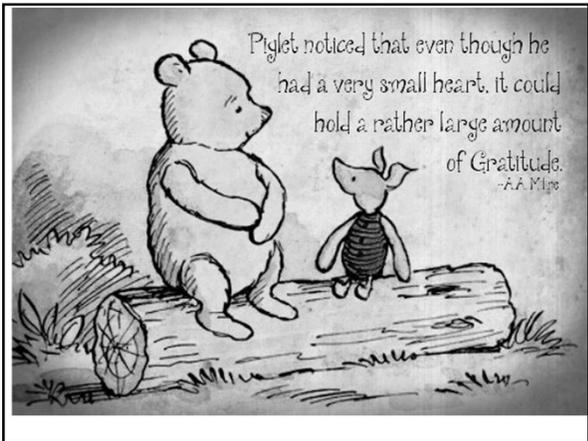


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Attitude of Gratitude



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Existential Depression

- "This kind of depression is not a single-occurring event; it does not go away after a person experiences it. Once existential issues are brought into conscious thought, they must be continually addressed; you cannot return to a time when concerns did not exist." (Webb).
- Existential depression may occur when gifted children begin to feel personally responsible for such things as war, poverty, starvation, cruelty, or any other humanitarian issue or tragedy that stirs a sense of frustration and helplessness. It may also occur when the child confronts issues of existence such as life, death, and freedom.

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Existential Depression

Irresolvable issues ⇔ Existential Stress ⇔ Anger
 ⇔ Helplessness ⇔ Depression

"Is this all there is to life? Is there not ultimate meaning? Does life only have meaning if I give it meaning? I am a small, insignificant organism who is alone in an absurd, arbitrary and capricious world where my life can have little impact, and then I die. Is this all there is?"

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Coping with existential depression

- Listen, Listen, Listen
- Touch
- Humor
- Share in the cause
- Bibliotherapy
- Take action

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**Do You Have
Any Questions?**

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Thank you for coming!
They are worth your time and effort!

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