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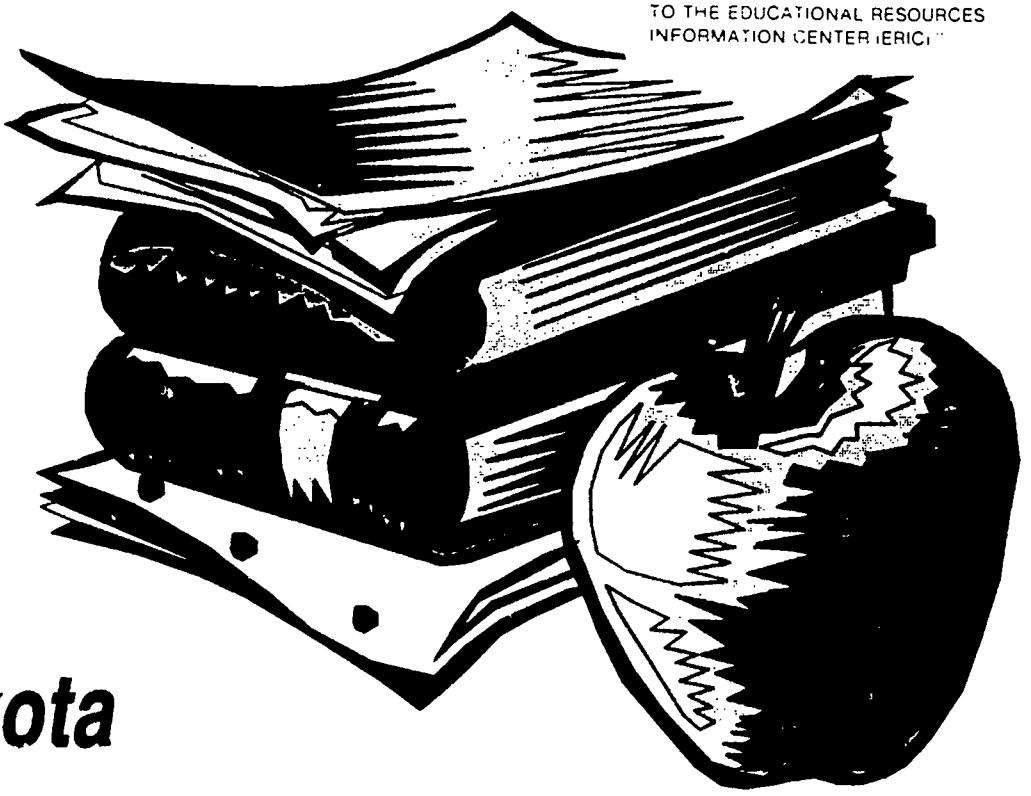
ABSTRACT

This guide for parents of gifted children in South Dakota provides information and help in the following areas: (1) identifying personal feelings about giftedness (a self-assessment instrument); (2) deciding who is gifted (including federal and South Dakota definitions); (3) characteristics of giftedness (myths versus facts); (4) the school's role (in nomination, screening, identification, and placement); (5) the parent's role in working with the school (common concerns of parents and students and possible pitfalls in advocacy efforts); and (6) the parent's role in helping the gifted child (emphasis on social development and "Ten Commandments for Rearing Gifted Children"). Nine additional sources of information are recommended. (DB)

# A Guide for Parents of the Gifted Child









## South Dakota

### Department of Education and Cultural Affairs

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## *Message for parents of the gifted child --*

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, Speak to us of Children,

And he said:

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

from
The Prophet
Kahili Gibran

# FOREWORD

## Gifted Children

Sections: Beyond the Gibran message the Parent Guide has been developed to lead the reader through a series of important personal steps.

1. How do I feel about giftedness - a self assessment.
2. Who are the Gifted?
3. What are the characteristics of giftedness?
4. What is the school's role?
5. How can parents help?
6. What can parents do to help the gifted child?
7. Where can we find more information?

# *How Do You Feel About Giftedness?*

## ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

Before you begin reading this text, you may find it helpful to try the following questionnaire. These questions allow you to look at your beliefs and understandings regarding gifted children. Before each statement place the number that you feel most closely represents your present position. The results are discussed at the end of this exercise. Be as open as you can. You may discover some new insights about yourself.

1. *I strongly agree.*
2. *I agree.*
3. *I have no opinion.*
4. *I disagree.*
5. *I strongly disagree.*

___1. The term gifted can mean different things to different people and often causes confusion and miscommunication.

_____2. Intelligence can be developed and must be nurtured if giftedness is to occur.

_____3. We seldom find very highly gifted children or children we could call geniuses; therefore, we know comparatively little about them.

_____4. Thinking of, or speaking of, gifted children as superior people is inaccurate and misleading.

_____5. As schools are currently organized, it is not always possible for gifted children to receive appropriate educational experiences without special programs.

_____6. Equal opportunity in education does not mean having the same program for everyone, but rather programs adapted to the specific needs of each child.

_____7. Gifted children, while interested in many things, usually are not gifted in everything.

_____8. Difficulty conforming to group tasks may be the result of the unusually varied interests or advanced comprehension of a gifted child.

_____9. Teachers often see gifted learners as challenging their authority, disrespectful, and disruptive.

____10. Some gifted children use their high level of verbal skill to avoid difficult thinking tasks.

____11. The demand for products or meeting of deadlines can inhibit the development of a gifted child's ability to integrate new ideas.

____12. Work that is too easy or boring frustrates a gifted child just as work that is too difficult frustrates an average learner.

____13. Most gifted children in our present school system are underachievers.

____14. Commonly used sequences of learning are often inappropriate and can be damaging to gifted learners.

____15. Gifted children, who can be very critical of themselves, often hold lower than average self-concepts.

____16. Gifted children often expect others to live up to standards they have set for themselves, with resulting problems in interpersonal relations.

____17. Gifted children are more challenged and more motivated when they work with students at their level of ability.

____18. Some gifted children may perform poorly or even fail subjects in which they are bored or unmotivated.

____19. The ability of gifted learners to generalize, synthesize, solve problems, engage in abstract and complex thought patterns, and think at an accelerated pace most commonly differentiates gifted from average learners; therefore, programs for gifted students should stress using these abilities.

____20. The persistent goal-directed behavior of gifted children can result in others perceiving them as stubborn, willful, and uncooperative.

____21. If not challenged, gifted children can waste their ability and become mediocre, average learners.

____22. Gifted children often express their idealism and sense of justice at a very early age.

____23. Not all gifted children show creativity, leadership, or physical expertise.

____24. People who work with, study, and try to understand gifted children have more success educating the gifted than those who have limited contact and have not educated themselves as to the unique needs of these children.

____25. I would be pleased to be considered gifted, and I enjoy people who are.

The questionnaire you have just completed should give you some indication of opinions of gifted children that are supportive to their educational growth. The more *"I strongly agree"* answers you were able to give, the more closely your opinions match those who have devoted their energy to understanding gifted children. In the pages to follow, we examine these issues and others that augment our understanding of and ability to better educate gifted children.

*B. Clark, Growing Up Gifted, 1992.*

# *Who are the Gifted?*

Creative and imaginative people are often not recognized by their contemporaries. In fact, often they are not recognized in school by their teachers either. History is full of illustrations. Consider some of these:

***Einstein*** was four years old before he could speak and seven before he could read.

***Isaac Newton*** did poorly in grade school.

***Beethoven's*** music teacher once said of him, "As a composer, he is hopeless."

When ***Thomas Edison*** was a boy, his teachers told him he was too stupid to learn anything.'

***F. W. Woolworth*** got a job in a dry goods store when he was twenty-one, but his employers would not let him wait on a customer because he, "didn't have enough sense."

A newspaper editor fired ***Walt Disney*** because he had, "no good ideas."

***Caruso's*** music teacher told him, "you can't sing, you have no voice at all."

The director of the Imperial Opera in Vienna told ***Madame Schumann Heink*** that she would never be a singer and advised her to buy a sewing machine.

***Leo Tolstoy*** flunked out of college.

***Werner Von Braun*** flunked ninth grade algebra.

***Admiral Richard E. Byrd*** had been retired from the Navy, as "unfit for service" until he flew over both poles.

***Louis Pasteur*** was rated as "mediocre" in chemistry when he attended the Royal College.

***Abraham Lincoln*** entered the Black Hawk War as a Captain and came out as a private.

***Louisa May Alcott*** was told by an editor that she could never write anything that had popular appeal.

***Fred Waring*** was once rejected from high school chorus.

***Winston Churchill*** failed the sixth grade.

Probably these people were identified as low achievers in school or as misfits on their jobs because of problems or relevance.

Lists, such as the one compiled above, are common in the support literature for bringing about an awareness of the need to be more careful in the declaration of who is and who is not a "gifted person," "a creative person," "a talented person," or "a potential leader." As amusing as it may seem--that people "really missed the boat in spotting the abilities of these people" --the lesson for parents, teachers, and the population in general is simply, *we too need to look more carefully at the "whole person" and not just one or two indicators such as achievement scores, socio-economic status, or good behavior.*

While we are at it, let us also point out that, in most of the above cases, each individual somewhere in his or her biography has indicated that there was a **significant supporting adult**--parent, teacher, spouse, etc.

*Dayton Public School, Parent Information Book, 1990*

## *The Gifted and Talented Children's Education Act of 1978, states* *(TITLE IX-A)*

The term 'gifted and talented children' means children and, whenever applicable, youth, who are identified at the preschool, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities which give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as those listed below, and who by reason thereof, require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school:

1. *general intellectual ability*
2. *specific academic aptitude*
3. *creative or productive thinking*
4. *leadership ability*
5. *visual and performing arts*

## *How do we View Giftedness in South Dakota?*

Gifted and Talented students are those "children whose demonstrated ability and/or potential for accomplishment is outstanding with their peer group and or total school population and who may require curriculum/program modification to meet their educational needs. Differentiated education opportunities must be developed and implemented in the local school system as their needs are identified".

The State Board of Education supports the belief that:

A. *Gifted students are capable of high performance in one or more of the following areas:*
   1. *General intellectual ability;*
   2. *Specific academic aptitude;*
   3. *Creative/productive thinking; and,*
   4. *Leadership ability.*

B. *Student's potential for high performance in one or more of these areas requires that school systems provide appropriate educational options (programming) to assist these children/youth in the development of their abilities.*

## *Why Label Youngsters as Gifted?*

Labeling students as being "gifted" is, for right or wrong, merely a designation of what parents, teachers, and even the peer group perceive -- the child is -- "outstanding in comparison with his/her peers, "is capable of high achievement," and "is of very high ability." Several years ago, "gifted" was chosen as a softer term than "bright", "most able," or "precocious." Of chief concern to your authors is not the identification and labeling a student as "gifted," but it is that many schools do not provide a suitable program to meet the needs of that student. If we label children gifted to improve their educational experiences, then we have an obligation to keep the negative aspects of labeling from becoming the major effect (Clark, 1988). School personnel need to work very closely with the parents to provide information, remove myths and misunderstandings, and --above all -- get rid of the unnecessary obstructions which stand in the way of fulfilling the high potential of the gifted students.

## *What are the Myths and Facts about Gifted/Talented Children?*

There are many myths which have been associated with giftedness. The following summarizes some of the fallacies and facts related to the population defined above.

| *MYTH* | *FACT* |
|---|---|
| 1. Gifted children are weak and unhealthy. | 1. Gifted children actually tend to be stronger, have fewer illnesses and equal or exceed other children in height and weight. Many are outstanding athletes. |
| 2. The gifted child is an oddball. | 2. Teachers often fail to identify gifted children because they seem so normal. Studies show gifted people are highly stable. Only a small number of them spend time in mental institutions. |
| 3. The gifted child is a bookworm, wears glasses, and does not participate in normal children's activities. | 3. Most gifted children are good readers but they engage in many types of activities and have many interests. Some may actually meed remedial help in reading. |
| 4. Gifted children are enthusiastic about school and academic work. | 4. Many gifted children are enthusiastic about school, others are bored and are found among dropouts. |
| 5. Gifted children usually are from upper/middle class, professional families. | 5. Gifted children occur in about the same numbers in all socioeconomic groups. |
| 6. Most gifted children are failures in their adult life -- the "ripen early and rot early" theory. | 6. Research indicates that outstanding successes are achieved by most gifted individuals if they have been identified and their giftedness has been nurtured. |
| 7. All gifted children are social misfits. | 7. Gifted children enjoy social situations, talk readily and know a great deal about many topics. They are often good mixers and assume more than their share of social leadership in school and out. |
| 8. The play interests and activities of gifted children are different from those of normal children. | 8. Although gifted children may prefer more complicated and challenging games, their play interests are usually the same as those of normal age mates. |
| 9. Gifted children are likely to be egotistical and snobbish. | 9. Most gifted children possess desirable personality characteristics. |
| 10. Gifted children with the same IQ's have the same kind of abilities and interests. | 10. Pupils with the same abilities differ widely as each pupil's pattern of abilities and talents is unique. Therefore, differences make it difficult, if not impossible, to put the gifted in homogeneous groups. |
| 11. Gifted children often fail to adjust socially in college as they have been accelerated in elementary and secondary schools. | 11. Unless acceleration is excessive, most gifted children make very good social adjustments in college. |

*Dayton Public School, Parent Information Book, 1990*

# *What is the School's Role?*

The school is responsible for four basic processes:

*(Note: All process statements used in this section may vary from district to district.)*

***Nomination***---is one of the processes employed with the identification of gifted, talented, and creative students.

1. Students may be nominated for gifted education screening by a parent, classroom teacher, community leader, self-nomination, and/or administrative nomination (Renzulli, 1987).
2. Nomination will not indicate that a child is or will be placed in the gifted program (Fraiser, 1987).
3. Nomination will place a student on a list of students to be screened by personnel who will review the nomination and add or eliminate that student from the screening process.

***Screening***---is the process by which a local educational agency reviews the nominated student to determine if there is evidence of giftedness and need for educational considerations beyond those provided in the regular program.

1. Students shall be screened by a variety of methods, such as the following: (a) Parent nomination; (b) Teacher nomination; (c) Self-nomination; (d) Peer nomination; (e) Scores on group tests of intelligence; (f) Scores on group tests of achievement; and (g) Product evaluation.
2. School personnel will review the nominee's documented evidence (i.e. school records, student products, evidence of prior gifted education placement, test scores, rankings, and recommendations.)
3. Successful screening does not guarantee the presence of giftedness, but represents the judgment of school personnel that there is sufficient evidence that further consideration (identification) processes are in order---or that there is evidence that indicates the student is in need of special services.
4. If a student is passed over in the screening process, he/she may be considered at a later date, may be recommended to participate in some of the "talent pool" activities, and/or "become the victim" of a quota in that program.
5. The parent has the right to clarification of any action taken by school personnel---referred to identification processes or passed over.

***Identification***---is a process which finalizes the selection of a student into the gifted program. The procedure for identification of gifted students is as follows:

1. The referral of students for the gifted education program shall follow procedures established in the local district's written plan.
2. Students shall be evaluated by at least two assessment methods such as the following: (a) Scores on individual tests of intelligence; (b) Scores on individual test of achievement; (c) Scores on individual tests of creativity; (d) Teacher checklists; and (e) Parent checklists. *South Dakota Administrative Guidelines (24:03:06.01:04).*

***Placement***---is a process of actually placing an identified student in the program for the gifted in that school system so as to meet the educational needs of that identified student. Depending upon the administrative structure of the program, the placement may be for designated programming in the regular classroom, resource room, advanced placement, or combinations of options. One of the key functions of the resource personnel is to continue the screening and identification processes in addition to providing instructional opportunities.

Based upon the school personnel's decision to continue the placement process, it is essential to find more information on the presence of giftedness and to try to identify where such gifts, talents and creativity lies---and/or what can be enhanced by programming. This calls for further testing, rating and ranking of specific characteristics, one-to-one interviews, and actual participation in activities designed for high ability students. Generally, an identification search seeks specific information in any or all of the following areas:

**High Intellectual Abilities**

Presumably, high intellectual abilities are at the base of all giftedness and will manifest itself in a wide variety of talents, interests, and creative ventures. The following are some of the indicators (in addition to I.Q. scores):

**Large vocabulary, accurate use of many and/or unusual words, with comprehension of their meaning;*
**Keen power of observation and willingness to examine the unusual;*
**Ability to analyze problem situations which require the ability to reason;*
**Rapid insight into cause-and-effect relationships;*
**Ability to form concepts and to synthesize new ideas from observed relationships;*
**Seemingly innate ability to evaluate decisions from the use of standard measures or intuitiveness.*

A note on intelligence testing and the use of I.Q. scores:

Any intelligence test measures broad potentialities. It is generally accepted that test scores for intelligence reflect the child's functioning at that time of that particular testing. Scores may fluctuate, depending upon many variables---environment, time of day, wellness, desire to do well, who administers the test, and, many times, anxiety. I.Q. tests are not valid test of intelligence, but are devices helpful in assessing potential in many skill areas including academics. I.Q. tests are good predictors of academic success, provide valuable data to use in conjunction with other information, and often uncover abilities of students who may be overlooked in the nomination processes. Unfortunately, the abuse of I.Q. scores has at times been to exclude students and groups from gifted programs.

## High Academic Abilities

Academically gifted students are talented learners who excel in the school curriculum and/or reflect their abilities in achievement testing in specific or general content areas. It is important that score records reflect both classroom work and standardized data. Academic scores are good predictors; if for no other reason, they indicate the student's willingness to attempt to excel. Other characteristics of academically able students are:

**Verbal proficiency which demonstrates an understanding and breadth of knowledge;*
**Application of analytical and synthesizing skills to solve problems;*
**Extreme quickness at mastery of basic content;*
**Avidness for reading;*
**Intense curiosity to know "hows" and "whys";*
**Strong tendency to pursue learning for breadth and depth determines whether a child needs to be referred to or receive an alternative educational service.*

Work with the gifted, talented, and creative students is just emerging as a "mandated program" in the schools of South Dakota. Many school districts and teachers have done a lot for their gifted students in the past; it is, however, important to know that the reason for the mandate is that many gifted students were and are being overlooked. Many good things are happening--but parents and the gifted students need to help improve the schools' efforts.

## High Creative Abilities

More attention is being paid to the creative aspects of the gifted student's abilities. This high individualistic and illusive factor is difficult to assess and predict. Current testing is aimed at trying to determine the creative potential rather than measure or predict the presence of creativity. Three specific areas about creativity are used in assessing potential:

***The Creative Person:*** *Checklists of characteristics are made from the review of adjudged "creative persons" out of the past (Edison, Disney, Einstein, etc.) and seeing if some of those characteristics match those of the gifted student. Many of these are behavioral and require long periods of observation in settings which will demand creative effort for solutions.*

***The Creative Product:*** *Considerable effort is being made to provide those who work with gifted students with strategies that will bring out the student's creative abilities. Some of these are well known, such as brainstorming, creative problem-solving, and "mind-benders". Other strategies require extensive training on the part of the teachers and "time on task" with the student. Simply, the strategies give a student a chance to learn how to use processes that will enhance his/her creative abilities.*

***The Creative Product:*** *Most people feel that if a student is creative, he or she must be able to produce something creative. Students are provided with opportunities to work with various media, problems, and materials so that they can produce an idea, a work of art, a written work, an invention, or a drama. Programs such as Odyssey of the Mind encourage products.*

**Interests, Hobbies, Talents, and other Abilities**

Gifted, talented, and creative students' interests extend beyond the academic sphere into the realms of their hobbies, their potential and successes in a talent area such as music, art, athletics, and ballet. Students who are identified with high intellectual abilities and who maintain high academic success are frequently those possessing high physical abilities, psychomotor skills, leadership abilities, and potential in the visual and performing arts It is unfortunate that our schools are not able to provide extended opportunities in music, art, dance, drama, speech, etc. Collaboration between gifted resource teachers and parents in finding mentors, tutors, or any potential outlet to assist the gifted students in fulfilling their potential in areas of interest, hobbies, and talent expressions.

The above processes assigned to the school are "textbook" defined practices and need to be seen realistically in light of the size of the school, number of students, staff assignments, and many other local and state variables. In practice, however, "the larger the community or school, the more closely the school will adhere to specific guidelines" in nomination, screening, identification, and placement. What is important is that each school must have a program for its gifted students, and it must make provisions to meet the needs of those identified. Parents have the right to know that the processes listed above have been incorporated into the school district's plan for education of the gifted.

# *How can Parents Help?*

In this section are several independent items that parents of the gifted should consider when trying to work with the school for the benefit of their gifted child and other gifted children.

## First: The five greatest concerns of parents of gifted children are:

1. Assuring the growth and development of the whole child.
2. Providing opportunities for the gifts and talents to develop.
3. Working with the gifted child in handling pressures, peers, school, exploiters, and sibling rivalry.
4. Restraint in glowing, pushing, and bragging about the giftedness and talents of the child--and themselves.
5. Seeking and getting adequate, qualified help when it is needed.

Milne and Kasen, 1989.

## Second: Ten common concerns G/T students have about their friends:

1. I have trouble getting them to understand me.
2. It's hard to get along with kids my own age.
3. I hate being labeled "gifted" by kids. It makes me feel too different.
4. I hate being teased about being smart.
5. Kids tease me when I don't get A's all the time.
6. Kids tease me when I get A's all the time.
7. My friends don't really understand me. Sometimes I feel like I'm way over their heads.
8. I don't like it when somebody gives me the brush-off for doing better than they do.
9. I have trouble coping with the way peers act. Sometimes they seem so dumb.
10. It's hard to ignore peer pressure without your friends thinking you're ignoring them.

J. Galbraith, *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide*, 1984.

## Third: Parents can be helpful to schools in many ways.

There are untapped resources that school personnel do not have time to explore. The following suggestions indicate activities in which parents can enrich the school's activities:

1. Become personally acquainted with his/her teachers, counselors and principal. Make them aware of your desire to be of help to the school. The gifted child needs a united environment. In order to dove-tail his/her academic, social and home life, he/she will find his/her parent's help to be essential.
2. Offer your services for establishing a resource file of persons within the community with specific talents or experiences which would be extremely beneficial to the bright children. Enlist the help of these people.
3. Volunteer your time and efforts in arranging and conducting field trips.
4. Help to secure resource materials and persons for mentors or research purposes.

5. Share school interest with the child. Do not be simply a bystander, but participate in the activities as a member of the group.
6. Be well-informed about the gifted children and what is being done for gifted children in the school before becoming involved with demands for his/her learning situation.
7. Secure the help of local organizations for providing scholarship aid for talented youngsters for after school and summer activities. A theater group, a science seminar operated by research scientists and technologists, and a myriad of other school extension programs will need funds for operation. The community as well as the school is obligated to assist the growth and development of its children.
8. Investigate the possibilities that may exist for observing programs in educating the gifted. Many programs like Odyssey of the Mind require parent support and involvement.
9. Be willing to be an audience for the performances of the gifted youngsters, not just your own child. The fostering of the special abilities of the child and other gifted children is essential. They need "live audiences" of interested persons.

Adapted from: "Mentally Gifted Children and Youth", Pennsylvania Department of Education.

## Fourth: Pitfalls in trying to maintain advocacy efforts for gifted and talented students:

### Pitfall #1: Using an adversarial rather than a persuasive approach.

Perhaps part of the problem advocates have with being advocates is the term itself. "Advocate" originates from the Latin word for legal counselor. It means one who pleads in favor of, supports by argument, defends or vindicates. Even common usage of the term is closely associated with legal practices.

Another part of the problem is the lack of appropriate models for advocates of the gifted and talented. There is a natural tendency to model after the advocates for rights of minorities and rights of the handicapped. They were successful, so we feel that if we do the same thing we will also reap big rewards for the children we represent. Unfortunately this line of reasoning will not work. Those "other advocates" were very adept in various pressure tactics. But these tactics will not work as well for advocates of the gifted for three reasons:

* The "cause" is different. The basic rights of the handicapped and children from minority backgrounds were violated when they were systematically segregated from others.
* Times have changed. Everyone has learned to be more assertive as pressure tactics have become a part of every day interactions.
* We are wiser. We have learned a lot from the 60's and 70's. Legal procedures can take years to complete. Even though we have "won" mandated programs, it takes a long time to get things into practice in the local and state educational programs. It really is an evolutionary process that depends upon a lot of "education about the gifted"--a minority or handicapped person is much more easily understood.

In summary, "winning through intimidation" may work sometimes--but it frequently backfires when angry decision makers are forced to act.

**Pitfall #2: Assuming that people in administration and educational positions are not too bright or not very knowledgeable--or both.**

Sometimes in being concerned and upset over "what is not being done," parents and other advocates display attitudes and actions that are destructive to the cause. Although many administrators and people in educational positions do need much more "education on the gifted;" mandated programs for the gifted and talented represent only **one educational concern out of many**. This is not a cop-out. Many of the decision makers in education are exceptionally competent and capable people. They are also extremely busy and deluged with constantly changing requirements, mandates, and focuses in the whole of the educational scene. As with people in the legislature or on a school board who are not generally educators, there is much to learn, and learn quickly. When dealing with an awareness issue in education, they, as human beings, respond more favorable to well-documented and defined information than they do when encountered by someone feeling superior in knowledge on the subject. Despite our own feelings on the matter, gifted and talented programs will probably always be a minor issue--if for no other reason, it concerns only a small percent of the schools' students.

**Pitfall #3: Being impatient.**

It is very difficult to be patient when you see children whose abilities need attention and development right now, and then also see that the schools are doing very little to do anything to attend to those needs. Again, advocate outbursts are counterproductive. Often times, the attention of the decision makers is focused upon "another complaining parent" instead of trying to remediate the problem. There is no secret formula as to "when to push" and "when to back off." but it is important to gain the ear of the decision makers--and that is best achieved by quieter tactics and patience.

**Pitfall #4. Being human.**

Sometimes when decision makers fail to make appropriate steps to fulfill the needs of the gifted, for whatever reason, it becomes so frustrating to the parent advocate that they seek to go to other potential sources to bring about pressure--the media, pressure groups, and undermining gossip. Few cases where such "outside" forces have experienced success are recorded. Getting a chorus of protesting parents on the presumption that the board of decision makers will listen to a group more than they will an individual is a total fallacy! Decision makers will try to be responsive, but in the end, they still have to handle a total agenda needed to maintain a top-quality program for all students. What is the alternative? You must be willing to share in the responsibility of helping the school system--if you are part of the problem, you must be part of the solution. The best words the decision maker can hear from a chorus of committed parents is, **"how can we help?"** When the school and the parents work together, the product of their labors is much more rewarding.

Adapted from: An Advocate's Guide to Building Support for Gifted and Talented Education, National Association of State Boards of Education, 1981.

# *WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO HELP THE GIFTED CHILD?*

Although it is a little too late when a gifted student is identified after he/she enters school, there are several things parents should understand about skill developments that occur very early in a child's life. Read a basic book on parenting such a Frank Main's *Perfect Parenting and Other Myths,* available at B. Dalton Bookstores and most other bookstores.

1. Very early after the birth of the child, the parents will begin to notice indications of exceptionality through cues that are in advance of "normal" child growth and development.

   By the third month, and each successive month thereafter, the child will generally develop gross motor skills, eye-hand coordination skills, emotive expressions, and communication skills with greater control than the "typical" age and sex mates.

   Nurturing (physical and psychological) within the first three months are the most critical factors in growth and development that will follow.

   From the third to the 36th month are when many values, social behavior, feelings of acceptance, and self-confidence are established.

   Most of a child's values, social behaviors, communication patterns, self-concepts, physical growth and development patterns, and attitudes toward self, family and others are established in the first 72 months.

   Most of the coordination skills, gross and fine motor, are developed by the child's 12th year.

   Sense perception by all five senses has reached the majority of its potential development by the age of 12.

   The attitudes, values, moral and ethical standards a child take into adult life are basically established by the age of 16.

   There is a high correlation between how a 6-12 year old child handles freedom, independence, and leisure time with later adolescent and young adult behavior.

   Milne and Kasen, *Strategies for Parenting the Gifted*, 1989.

## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

2. Social development brings additional dilemmas. Many gifted children play happily with children of all abilities and interests and have a wide circle of friends. Others have only one or two close friends. Parents worry that these children may be lonely or may be failing to develop needed social skills.

Their concern is legitimate. People need other people, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. But children differ in their social needs just as they do in other needs. Some children seem to need many friends and thrive on peer acceptance and opportunities to participate in, or lead groups. Bobby wants desperately to be well-liked and feels competition keenly. It was wisely decided that he shouldn't skip a grade although he could easily do the work. Other children are very happy with a few close friends. Julie is satisfied working alone or with her one close friend in her accelerated program. She accepts herself and her performance with ease. Neither child is maladjusted. They are simply different.

3. Chronological age is only one criterion which may be used in the establishment of a peer group. Children can also be peers in mental age or interests so that a child who consistently prefers older friends may still be socially comfortable and adept.

4. The important guidelines of social development for parents to observe are whether a child:

   Is sensitive to the needs of others
   Can show appropriate concern for and responses to others
   Uses words and behaviors which reflect confidence and comfort with others
   Has a few close friends

5. Parents can provide early social opportunities through a playgroup for toddlers or a preschool experience for three and four year olds. Neighborhood and school friends can be involved in interesting home projects or taken with the family to a library, museum, or zoo. Parental approval can do much to encourage budding friendships. Candidly expressed disapproval may discourage them. Listening to their children can help parents discover why some children consistently choose to be alone. The problem may be resulting from a lack of shared interests with other children. A child's own insecurities or misbehaviors may be the root of the difficulty. When parents understand the cause of the behavior, they can often assist their children. For example, Jenny needs help recognizing when she becomes too bossy. Once she understands, she may be welcomed by the new girl next door.

6. Moral growth plays an essential role in supporting the full development of gifted children. They need to develop self-discipline, an understanding of personal values and an ability to make decisions.

   Gifted children, like all children, must develop a system of inner controls. They are not born with acceptable behavior patterns and means of expressing emotion; parents and others help them develop these. Too often bright children are expected to behave at the level of their intellectual performance, but they are just not ready. Unrealistic expectations lead to great frustrations for both parent and child. Most articulate two year olds still dissolve in tears when another toddler takes a favorite toy. Often precocious thirteen year olds suffer painful adolescent self-doubts.

7. Gifted children need help exploring, understanding and operating on their personal values. The intellectually gifted, particularly, have the keen insight and powers of abstract reasoning when quite young to assess situations and recognize their own position

and power within them. Their ability to analyze and synthesize enables them to see causes, consequences, and interrelationships. They learn how things affect them--what makes them feel happy or unhappy, capable or ignorant, satisfied or restless. And they learn how things affect other people. They constantly seek to clarify their own values and the values of others through examining experiences and ideas.

Many gifted children do not accept authority without question. They demand full explanations for rules and requests; they scoff at "easy answers". When they consider explanations valid they readily cooperate. If they judge the explanations inadequate, they are apt to choose their own course of action. The inexhaustible questioning and independent behavior of many gifted children may thoroughly wear out their parents. However, as the parents continue to listen and respond to them, they model such characteristics as patience, tolerance and acceptance--attributes most are eager for their children to value and adopt. Further, through open discussions they help their children clearly define personal values and operationalize these values in a wide variety of situations. For example, through an active investigation of many churches and religious philosophies, Charlene developed commitment to her family's religion as well as an appreciation for many other belief systems.

Similarly, children need parental guidance as they learn to make decisions. Decision-making is not a simple question of choosing "right" and "wrong". Children must learn to assess total situations, looking at individual circumstances and examining motives, needs, background and behavior of the people involved, as well as possible consequences of actions. They then need to evaluate all this information in relation to their personal values.

Even gifted children are not born knowing it is wrong to pick the neighbor's flowers without permission. All children first behave to please others. They then formalize their behavior according to externally imposed rules. As they mature they learn to internalize the rules and modify them according to individual circumstances and needs.

Because gifted children can deal with abstract ideas at an early age they may go through stages of questioning and testing rules and values sooner and more vigorously than other children. With help they can learn to make examined decisions at an early age. Parents can give them frequent choices and help them look at the consequences of their decisions. Family members can tell stories where children identify motives behind behavior in a particular situation and decide what possible courses of action the characters might take. Parents can ask mind teasers like:

> "Is it worse to steal ten cents or a dollar? Why?"
> "What might someone else do if they were caught shoplifting?"
> "What might you do? Why would you act differently?"

Children, too, can generate these teasers. Family problems can be solved through negotiations, with both children and parents expressing their ideas, examining alternative solutions and anticipated consequences.

Milne and Kasen, *Strategies for Parents of the Gifted and Talented*, 1992.

8. What can we do at home to encourage gifted students?

Parents play an important role in the development of exceptional abilities in children, especially in encouraging a favorable attitude toward these tendencies.

Encourage children to play an active, real role in family decisions.
Listen to their suggestions; apply them whenever possible.
Encourage storytelling and use of the imagination. Allow flights of fancy,
even projecting ideas to the absurd.
Develop democratic relationships early and maintain them.
Encourage laughter; explore humor and laugh with the child; develop a sense
of humor as well as an interest in the fanciful.
Provide children with material that does not demand a specific use; scratch paper,
crayons, paints, scissors, tape, and paste are wonderful (rather than coloring books).
Permit ample time for thinking and daydreaming; do not fill their entire day or weekend
with planned activities--encourage them to do likewise.
Use natural and logical consequences to replace reward and punishment; allow them to
predict the consequences of pending activities.
Gifted children--all children--learn by precept and example; model reading, exhibit
reflective decision making, listen to good music, select good television,
expand your own interest and talents; skills are gained by trial and error or modeling.

## *Ten Commandments for Rearing Gifted Children*

1. *Love*
2. *Listen*
3. *Value learning*
4. *Talk about something important;*
   *both child things and adult things*
5. *Spend time, not money*
6. *Provide constructive materials/discovery equipment*
   *that requires a student to do something*
7. *Expect something*
8. *Encourage fantasy and creativity*
9. *Pump the ego*
10. *Turn off the television sometimes*

*Linda Perigo Moore*

# *Where Can We Find More Information?*

**Adventuring with Books: A Booklist for Pre-K-Grade 6.** 9th edition, Mary Jett-Simpson, Editor. 1989. 21 chapters. 542 pp. Books categorized by genre (poetry, classics, traditional, fantasy, scifi) or subject (sports, social studies, science, crafts) and by numerous subtopics. Each subtopic is separated into listings for primary and intermediate readers.

**Your Reading: A booklist for Junior High and Middle School Students.** 7th edition. James E. Davis and Hazel K. David, Editors. 6 chapters. 486 pp. Only the large categories of fiction and nonfiction are listed by subtopics (i.e., animals, ecology, history, sports, and technology).

**Books for You: A booklist for Senior High Students.** 10th edition. Richard F Abrahamson and Betty Carter, Editors. 47 topical listings. 503 pp. Alphabetical listing of topics for adventure to health, with such timely topics as careers, colleges, death and dying, drugs and alcohol, human rights, and social situations.

*(These books can be ordered by contacting: National Council of Teachers of English, Fulfillment Department, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801; (217) 328-3870)*

**The Inventive Thinking Resource Directory;** U.S. Department of Commerce, Patent and Trademark Office, Project XL, Washington, DC 20231.

**South Dakota Curriculum Center;** 435 South Chapelle, Pierre SD, 57501;
Telephone (605) 224-6287. The Curriculum Center has a variety of Gifted/Talented resources available. Individuals may borrow this information by contacting them.

**Playtime is Science:** Educational Equity Concepts, 114 East 32nd Street,
New York, NY 10016; (212) 725-1803

**Education of the Gifted: Programs and Perspectives.** Joan Franklin Smutny, Rita Haynes Blocksom. Phi Delta Kappa, PO Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. 1990 A monograph (80 pages) on identification, program types, special populations and evaluations. A valuable overview with extended bibliography and resource lists.

**What's a Gifted...?** *A Parent-Child Dialogue on What It Means to Be Gifted.* Lynn Donahue Proegler. DOK Publishers, PO Box 605, East Aurora, NY 14053. 1990. A 20-page pamphlet asking and answering the universal questions about giftedness. Written as a response to children's concerns, but helps with grandparents and neighbors as well.

**Enjoy Your Gifted Child.** By Carol Addison Takacs, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse NY 13244-5160, 1986. Well-chosen chapter titles speak directly to the parent: Discovery, Nurturance, Cherishing, Sharing. Written as a response to the parent who wishes "my child were average".

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