

Recognizing the Characteristics of Gifted Children

ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children cites three types of characteristics of gifted children: general behavioral, learning, and creative characteristics.

General Behavior Characteristics

Gifted children's behavior differs from that of their age-mates in the following ways:

Many gifted children learn to read early, with better comprehension of the nuances of language. As much as half the gifted and talented population has learned to read before entering school.

Gifted children often read widely, quickly, and intensely and have large vocabularies.

Gifted children commonly learn basic skills better, more quickly, and with less practice.

They are better able to construct and handle abstractions.

They often pick up and interpret nonverbal cues and can draw inferences that other children need to have spelled out for them.

They take less for granted, seeking the "hows" and "whys."

They can work independently at an earlier age and can concentrate for longer periods.

Their interests are both wildly eclectic and intensely focused.

They often have seemingly boundless energy, which sometimes leads to a misdiagnosis of hyperactivity.

They usually respond and relate well to parents, teachers, and other adults. They may prefer the company of older children and adults to that of their peers.

They like to learn new things, are willing to examine the unusual, and are highly inquisitive.

They tackle tasks and problems in a well-organized, goal-directed, and efficient manner.

They exhibit an intrinsic motivation to learn, find out, or explore and are often very persistent. "I'd rather do it myself" is a common attitude.

Learning Characteristics

Gifted children are natural learners who often show many of these characteristics:

They may show keen powers of observation and a sense of the significant; they have an eye for important details.

They may read a great deal on their own, preferring books and magazines written for children older than they are.

They often take great pleasure in intellectual activity.

They have well-developed powers of abstraction, conceptualization, and synthesis.

They readily see cause-effect relationships.

They often display a questioning attitude and seek information for its own sake as much as for its usefulness.

They are often skeptical, critical, and evaluative. They are quick to spot inconsistencies.

They often have a large storehouse of information about a variety of topics, which they can recall quickly.

They readily grasp underlying principles and can often make valid generalizations about events, people, or objects.

They quickly perceive similarities, differences, and anomalies.

Creative Characteristics

Gifted children's creative abilities often set them apart from their age-mates. These characteristics may take the following forms:

Gifted children are fluent thinkers, able to generate possibilities, consequences, or related ideas.

They are flexible thinkers, able to use many different alternatives and approaches to problem solving.

They are original thinkers, seeking new, unusual, or unconventional associations and combinations among items of information.

They can also see relationships among seemingly unrelated objects, ideas, or facts.

They are elaborate thinkers, producing new steps, ideas, responses, or other embellishments to a basic idea, situation, or problems.

They are willing to entertain complexity and seem to thrive on problem solving.

They are good guessers and can readily construct hypotheses or "what if" questions.

They often are aware of their own impulsiveness and irrationality, and they show emotional sensitivity.

They are extremely curious about objects, ideas, situations, or events.

They often display intellectual playfulness and like to fantasize and imagine.

They can be less intellectually inhibited than their peers are in expressing opinions and ideas, and they often disagree spiritedly with others' statements.

They are sensitive to beauty and are attracted to aesthetic values.

Who are the Highly Gifted?

Highly gifted children tend to be those who demonstrate asynchronous development. Due to their high cognitive abilities and high intensities they experience and relate to the world in unique ways. These children are often found as a result of extremely high scores on an individually scored IQ tests, generally above the 140 IQ range. Others may be prodigies in areas such as math, science, language and/or the arts. Profoundly gifted children can score in excess of 170 IQ.

Highly gifted children demonstrate characteristics such as the extreme need to:
Learn at a much faster pace.

Process material to a much greater depth.

Show incredible intensity in energy, imagination, intellectual prowess, sensitivity, and emotion which are not typical in the general population.

The child of 160+ is as different from the child of 130 IQ as that child is different from the child of average ability. Current research suggests that there may be higher incidence of children in this high range than previously thought. Due to their unique characteristics, these children are particularly vulnerable. Highly gifted children need a specialized advocacy because very little has been done to develop appropriate curriculum and non-traditional options for these children.

From the *Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children*

Printed with Permission

Some Myths About Gifted Children

Gifted Kids are like cream that rises to the top in a classroom:

Not necessarily. Gifted Children can have hidden learning disabilities that go undiscovered because they can easily compensate for them in the early years. As time goes on though, it becomes harder and harder for them to excel. Which can lead to behavior problems and depression.

Gifted Kids are so smart they do fine with or without special programs:

They may appear to do fine on their own. But without proper challenge they can become bored and unruly. As the years go by they may find it harder and harder as work does become more challenging, since they never faced challenge before.

Gifted and Talented means the same thing:

Again, not necessarily. There is no rule that states that a child who is capable of scoring to the high ninety percentiles on group achievement testing **must** be considered gifted. We must remember that achievement tests like the Metropolitan Achievement Tests are "Grade Level Testing". Such a child is most definitely Academically Talented. But further individualized IQ and out of level academic testing must be given before we can define that child as "**Gifted**". At the same time, there is no rule that states a child identified as gifted should be **Achieving** to high standards in the classroom. This type of stereotyping can do serious and irreversible damage to both groups. **ANY** child can benefit from enrichment. Academically Talented Children can benefit from Honors (Grade Level) Classes. Intellectually Gifted children need a differentiated curriculum and possibly even a different environment.

They need to go through school with their own age mates:

Where it's true that children need to play and interact socially with other children their age, they do not need to learn with them. Especially in the case of a highly gifted child who may have a chronological age of six and a mental age of 11 who has been reading since two. To put that child in a reading class with other six year olds who are just learning to read is sheer torture for that child.

Giftedness is something to be jealous about:

This is perhaps the most damaging myth. More often than not gifted children can feel isolated and misunderstood. They have more adult tastes in music, clothing, reading material and food. These differences to other children can cause them to be shunned and even abused verbally or physically by other children. Experts in the field of gifted education are beginning to address the higher incidences of ADHD and Spelling/Handwriting disabilities in the gifted population verses those in the much larger normal population.