

Understanding and Encouraging the Exceptionally Gifted

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Emotional and social diversity are as clearly manifest in gifted persons as is intellectual exceptionality. In this regard, we recognize three gradients within the gifted range: gifted, from 130-145 IQ; highly gifted, 140-160 IQ; and exceptionally gifted, above 160 IQ. Parents of highly and exceptionally gifted persons have found it useful to retain a family psychologist or counselor to develop relationships in a preventive function.

In this article, five facets of critical development are highlighted: (a) interpersonal relationships; (b) acknowledgement of uniqueness; (c) school adjustment; (d) creative self-expression; and (e) user-friendly environment. In each area, several interventive strategies are suggested.

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Thirteen years ago, 57.5% of school administrators responding to a national survey indicated, "No gifted here" (Marland, 1972). Through a variety of media and inservice efforts, misconceptions are being slowly dislodged and replaced with awareness of the special needs and abilities of children with exceptional potential.

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In understanding this population, gradients of abilities become apparent. Gradients in abilities, sensitivity, intensity, talent, and creativity within the gifted range must be recognized just as we acknowledge and program for graduations of ability below the norm.

In a few progressive school districts, recognition of these variations is defined in policy and programming for highly gifted students above the 140-145 IQ range. There is a comparative void of responsive awareness to the needs and abilities of people above the third, and, even more acutely, fourth standard deviation from the norm. Understandably, the typical response to inquiries about special programming for youngsters with above 160 IQ is, "We don't have any." However, that statement is incongruent with our experience in Ohio. We are now in clinical and support contact with families having a total of 18 children and several adults in this exceptional range, and have had previous contact with several others. That is without publicity seeking to locate this population.

Definition of Terms

Basic to understanding and encouraging children in this ability range is the standardization of terminology. After sorting through many labeling attempts including profoundly, severely, acutely, genius, even terminally, and our favorite, ultra bright, we have designated the term "exceptionally gifted" for the group scoring above 160 on individually administered IQ tests. To classify persons in the 145-160 IQ range, we endorse the term used by many school districts, "highly gifted", with the term "gifted" thus reserved for those with measured IQ's between 130-145. When additional exceptional abilities or talents are recognized, a five to ten point deviation below the standard is granted.

As expectations are carefully delineated on an ability gradient for persons below the norm, people in each designated category above the norm require a similar gradient of responsiveness in academic, social, and emotional opportunity. As presented at the 1984 NAGC Convention, this article will define several pervasive characteristics and needs of exceptionally gifted people, and some corresponding options to nurture their sense of competence, confidence, and life satisfaction in synergy with their environment. These areas of need for adjustment include: (a) interpersonal relation-

ships, (b) acknowledging unique patterns, (c) school adjustment, (d) creative self-expression, and (e) establishing a user-friendly environment. In each of these components for optimum development, one other person can effect a significant difference.

Within this exceptional group comprising less than .25% of the population with a potential spread of over 50 IQ points, there is a great range of characteristics, needs, and abilities. There is as much potential variation in comparing exceptionally gifted and gifted children as in comparing an average child with a child well below the norm.

Interpersonal Relationships

Extraordinary vulnerabilities are very often companions to exceptional intellectual ability. As intellectual levels increase, so does the person's risk of experiencing intellectual, social, and emotional problems. This child is more susceptible to develop mental difficulties than any other ability group above the norm (Terman, 1925; Terman and Oden, 1947; Tannenbaum, 1983; Hollingworth, 1942). This "at risk" component of adjustment continues throughout the person's life span.

There is a corresponding increase in potential for misunderstanding this complex group. It is important to first acknowledge that we probably will not fully understand the extent of the exceptionally gifted person's perceptions. They tend to experience the world holistically in all of its connectiveness. Andy, age six, often responds to counseling feedback with, "Well, not exactly." This indicates an experience of life that is more serious and personal than most other gifted children. Personal meaning in an activity thus becomes the defining force for the exceptionally gifted. Essentially, they internalize a great deal of their experience and sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between what is imagined and what is actualized. One mother discerned that some details of her daughter's school day description were not probable and, upon questioning, the daughter replied, "But I thought they could happen."

When the exceptionally gifted confront disappointment, they most often respond with profoundly internalized grief. When they confront injustice, they are insensed. When they are depressed, it seems, and often is, life threatening. When they are happy, it is with a deeper experience of joy. This depth of response to all emotional ex-

perience is exaggerated because of their intense awareness brought to nearly any situation. They are aware of more. They seek more. They need more. Their needs for others to listen, explain, support, and nurture are intensified. They also have more to give in return. Awareness of this, however, can be a tremendous burden for the child. Sometimes this burden is assumed from comments such as, "You are the answer to tomorrow's problems," and; "You will be tomorrow's leaders, scientists, and Nobel prize winners." Because these persons are very adept at finding the illogical and the loopholes, they gain exceptional awareness of the injustice, inequity, hypocrisy, and rigidity in the world. These then become limiting factors for adjustment in an imperfect world.

Alienation

In examining children above 180 IQ, Leta Hollingworth confirmed, "Isolation is the refuge of genius, not its goal" (Hollingworth, 1942). A measure of solitude is required, but someone to share meaning, success, and disappointment is also essential. Follow-up studies of Terman's investigations and our clinical work confirm that meaningful, intimate, interpersonal relationships are essential to the sense of life satisfaction for the exceptionally gifted. A 1984 study of values conducted with our clientele confirmed that a close, intimate relationship is more highly valued by the gifted than being "popular." Witty (1951) found this to be even more characteristic of the exceptionally gifted. In that context, as IQ advances above 130, there is a corresponding decrease in the probability of accepted leadership potential which is further reduced for those beyond 160 IQ (Gallagher, 1975; Hollingworth, 1942).

Isolation for the exceptionally gifted is intensified when they become aware that other people do not perceive or even experience the world as they do. Stephanie Tolan offers the microscope analogy. She explains that exceptionally gifted children will feel more tolerance for others if they understand that compared with the way most people see the world, they see it as if looking through the microscope. They see and feel much that other people cannot even imagine exists. Critics often suggest that exceptionally gifted people are out of touch with reality. When we talked with one gifted coordinator about our interest in this population she responded, "Can you really talk with them?" In therapy, Rachel, age 13, confided that her greatest problem was, "I have to lie." If she

were to reveal what she truly thought, other people would not understand and would call her weird. Alienation thus becomes the partial suicide of gifted people who snuff out discrete segments of themselves which they anticipate will not be understood or accepted. There is a gulf of identity that separates most exceptionally gifted from their chronological peers (Austin & Draper, 1981). This social alienation is intensified when adults pressure children to spend most of their time with age peers.

Parents and teachers often express concern that an exceptionally gifted child does not have any friends. In counseling sessions, however, we often find that these children treasure their relationships with several people outside of the classroom. An intimate intellectual peer may be an uncle. An emotional peer could be in the Sunday school nursery class, and the city soccer team might offer friends for play. When it is possible, however, to access merged emotional, situational and intellectual similarities in a chronological peer, the benefits of this relationship are often reflected in an overflowing sense of confidence and enthusiasm. Reports from Johns Hopkins and Duke University, where exceptionally gifted youngsters have an opportunity to associate with intellectual peers during special summer instruction, confirm the nurturing effect of this experience. Interpersonal satisfaction and congruity are associated significant benefits. Extraordinarily gifted children typically choose friends with those who are a similar mental age (O'Shea, 1960).

After our role in networking for two five-year-olds with IQ's over 180, one parent observed, "Until Sara's relationship with Mark, there was no relationship that meant much to her. Sara had tried to reason with her other playmates, but upon awareness of their comparative disadvantage, their usual response was to get physical." Sara then chose to withdraw. Such children may deprive themselves of learning appropriate social skills. Locating a "compeer" is a valuable resource for life satisfaction and stress reduction. Opportunity to be with a group of intellectual and age peers compounds the beneficial effects.

To assuage the sense of isolation, we need to convey understanding. There is a world full of responses communicating that they are not as smart as they may think. Others will rationalize with them; persuade them to accept a different reality, and otherwise discount

the child's perspective.

Pervasive in encouraging exceptionally gifted children is accessing their cognitive ability to work for them (Powell and Haden, 1984). Exceptionally gifted persons tend to be focused internally in creating their own meanings. Since the universe in their head predominates life experience, they can be guided by letting them own in their minds what they may not actually experience. Out of this perspective, parents can define their children's mental world as a TV screen and encourage them to "switch channels" when discouraging thoughts dominate.

Case studies reveal the presence of an imaginary playmate. When there is a dearth of available companions, original substitutes are created. They may be actual, like a stuffed bear; fanciful; or acquired, like Snoopy. We strongly advise not treading on imagination! Imaginary friends can provide much comfort and counsel through internal dialogue and often they can also be a source of reflection and enhance development of coping alternatives.

Sensitivity

Intense sensitivity and mental responsiveness of exceptionally gifted people is manifest in everything they experience (Whitmore, 1980). Nearly everything matters, and it matters that it matters. When Steven was asked how he got a bruise on his arm, he spent five minutes describing everything that was going on in the room at the moment he bumped into the door. Why couldn't he just say, "I bumped into a door?" Because of his enriched experience of the event, he was unable to sort out what would be appreciated by those receiving his description. He might even have assumed self inflicted responsibility (Silverman, 1983) for both the event and the exceptional reaction.

What is passed over as trivial by others may be cause for severe emotional response. Parents describe: "He's always been so old, old, old. I just wish he weren't so sensitive. She understands the other children, but they don't understand her. He's eight years old and it's as if he has the weight of the world on his shoulders." This sensitivity renders the child vulnerable with little protection; everything gets through.

These children are empathetic to feeling others' pain. Shirley, who gets A's in math, reported, "A lot of kids are getting F's in math. I hate math!" They interpret their environment personally feeling that what happened to someone else happened to them. What someone

says or does is often interpreted as directed at them. Andy's mother noticed that he piled his stuffed animals around him on Tuesday and Thursday nights. When questioned about this pattern, Andy explained that on Wednesday and Friday he had gym and music and that those teachers never smiled. Andy interpreted that lack of warmth as a dissatisfaction expressed directly toward him. If Jason, age eight, does not like the way his egg is cooked, his mother reports that he might retaliate, "You people treat me like trash." Jason further advises his family, "You have to understand, I have good reason to be moody."

Is there such a thing as being too sensitive? No! That would suggest that some people might be too aware of their world. However, as many writers have described, high levels of sensitivity can become a burden. To alleviate this overload, parents and other caring adults need to teach their children that most other people will not see or feel what they do.

Part of the cynicism exceptionally gifted children feel stems from viewing themselves as thinking adults who see the weaknesses of adults. A resistance to learn from adults may then ensue with a resulting need to maintain autonomy. These children are thus in the dilemma of resenting treatment like a child and their necessary dependency on adults. They often defend themselves against the world and feel that they are the only ones capable of doing so (Roepert, 1984). At least one parent is very likely gifted, capable, and accessible. Therefore, parents are the most probable source of essential trust, acceptance, and understanding of their child.

Ambivalence in Separation

Exceptionally gifted children live in a world where they are never quite sure if it is acceptable to be gifted or not. This is because of mixed messages often sent by parents (Powell and Haden, 1984). Ambivalence thus becomes part of the basis for a potentially enmeshed relationship with one or both parents. Another component of this common theme is the child's susceptibility to seizure for the vicarious accomplishment of a parent's ego. Parents, coaches, teachers of the gifted, and others should be cautioned not to impose their needs in exploiting these children. The exceptionally gifted child is a particularly vulnerable target for this sort of abuse (Miller, 1981). If this pattern is practiced, resulting symbiosis creates resentment and may restrict a child's identity and autonomy. It is during adolescence that excep-

tionally gifted youngsters experience problems of separation from a parent who is possibly also gifted. This parent may have been the child's best friend, intellectual peer, listener, and, perhaps the only one who really has understood the kind of person the child is. Out of this close relationship, defining separation in areas of specific identity and daily living tasks while simultaneously counseling for a recombination of emotional support, friendship, and social strength in an evolved adult to adult relationship is an essential component of counseling.

The growth and development of probably gifted parents must also be recognized and supported. Parents can only give what they are to give. They teach their sense of hope and satisfaction, and they teach their disappointment and despair. A sound goal for parenting is to emphasize adult satisfactions in both effort and accomplishment and to openly disclose disappointments in mistakes. The exceptionally gifted can respond to an invitation for cooperative consultation from a parent and will learn appropriate adaptive response patterns in the process. This population needs to learn flexibility in adversity.

Cornell's studies (1981) report that parents of a gifted child tend to overinvest in that child. An exceptionally gifted child in the family needs a great deal of stimulation and demands attention. Exceptional dedication is required. Parenting exceptionally gifted children can be an intense and awesome experience as the following comments illustrate: "The biggest concern I had when I learned her IQ score was suddenly the responsibility of parenting was made more serious, a weight. If she had scored in the gifted range, I would have known there were resources available. When I talk about my child, other people think I'm bragging and cut me off. I thought he would slow down, but he's just grown by leaps and bounds. . . . now, I realize we need help." Jason's school counselor reported that his teacher told her, "If he's so gifted, it's his own parents' fault, not because of his ability." Many popular parenting principles simply do not apply to these children. The result is a sense of ostracism: "Other people think I let him get away with murder, but I can't see making him miserable just to make other people happy."

Professionals can document and advocate that parents are not being pushy; but are probably concerned with getting obstacles out of the way so that their child can run at his own

speed. Parents also need support paving the way for their pushy child.

Establishing a professionally guided, ongoing support group for parents of the exceptionally gifted is one of the most effective and comprehensive means to encourage their children and facilitate their development. These groups can easily accommodate parents with children from preschool into adolescence. In this format, parents of older children may receive confirmation and serve as resources to parents of younger children. Cohesiveness becomes an active ingredient of support. In such a group, parents gain courage for their efforts to encourage without overinvesting. These parents also need peers who understand how it feels to live with an exceptionally challenging child. A valuable concept which evolved from such a group was presented by group members at the 1985 Ohio Association for Gifted Children Conference. One parent expressed that an exceptionally gifted child requires an abundance of "Power, Attention, and Time." They need more PATs! For parents, this role can become awesome and exhausting, but the burden does not need to be borne by parents alone. Parents can creatively broaden their resources through a network of other adults. Auxiliary care givers such as interested neighbors, relatives, friends and church members can be accessed to contribute to a broader base of stimulation, care, trust, and mentoring for exceptional children.

Acknowledging Unique Patterns

Adult Expectations

Pressures for parents to conform to other parents' roles and rules permeate relationships with their own unique children. Frequently a child's problems emanate from the discrepancy between their performance and the expectations of significant adults. Many parents and teachers believe that their role is to control, shape, and manage the lives of their children. Especially in the cases of exceptionally gifted children, adults see so much more potential and often respond with increased measures of control and management to gratify their perception of what the child should be. With the exceptionally gifted, this is especially destructive. These youngsters have a tremendous positive potential; but it is also counter-balanced by a great potential for personal sadness, depression, sensitivity, and awareness of inequity. When adults assume control, these children

are once again being punished for their giftedness. This is intensely insulting because it is their giftedness that enables the double standard creating such inequity.

In school, many educators believe that if the child is smart, he should do more work. Students are sometimes penalized for not completing more than the class assignment. Other adults tend to expect more from any gifted child and think that they should know better. This concept is magnified for the exceptionally gifted. We forget that the label does not apply equally to all facets of the child's life and that living up to potential in all areas is impossible.

Role Conflicts

In addition to inappropriate adult expectations, role stereotypes for age and sex groups distort our appreciation and understanding of exceptionally gifted children. Families often have vested values where intellectual exploration is not as revered as are practical pursuits. Fathers have lamented that recognition of superior intellectual ability will cause a boy to be less masculine. Parents want to confirm that they have a normal boy who will grow up to be a normal man. The masculine role stereotype becomes especially difficult for exceptionally gifted boys to maintain. Since they are extraordinarily sensitive, these young men often need counseling for self acceptance. They also need specific skills in relating to others without internal resentment.

An underlying self-sabotaging pattern persists for many girls. Covert constraints keeping them compliant and lovable are often interpreted as threats of being "too smart for your own good". Many exceptionally bright women limit themselves through perceived sex roles and consequently have difficulty balancing accomplishments with acceptance (Fox, Tobin & Brody, 1981). Exceptionally gifted girls tend to discount themselves as deceivers who are not as competent as they appear: "I got an A+ in chemistry only because the teacher likes me."

Uniqueness

Any discrepancy from the norm exaggerates adjustment problems. Even within gifted programs, qualities of exceptionally gifted children are not often acknowledged, accepted, valued, or actualized. Expecting an exceptionally gifted child to maintain the mental pace of the 130 range is blatantly inappropriate.

Inherent in exceptional giftedness is

a wide variation in abilities. The exceptionally gifted also differ from one another more than they resemble each other in abilities, interests, and personality. Intellectual acuity does not predispose a person toward any personality features, but rather it intensifies characteristics that do exist. The more intelligent a person, the more complex, sensitive, and intricate are his perceptions of the world. A significant goal in counseling is to discover the unique patterns of individual characteristics and to nurture an understanding of how these patterns relate to opportunity and development. Parents need to be receptive to discovering and encouraging a varied range of abilities and not to expect accomplishment and interests to be within a strictly intellectual frame. As Howard Gardner expressed in *Frames of Mind* (1983), there are multiple modes of expressing intelligence including musical, intrapersonal, and visual-spatial.

Self Concept

Developmental gaps may exacerbate perceived deficiencies. Uneven development can result in inappropriate expectations by adults and by the child who is frustrated when actual fine motor skills do not comply with ambitious ideals. Exceptionally gifted children's tendencies toward analytical skepticism embrace their own self-concept. Uneven development, inappropriate expectations, and critical acuity often culminate in a low self-concept and greater risk for damaging their psycho-social well being. (Hollingworth, 1942, Terman & Oden, 1959)

Through informal or professional counseling the exceptionally gifted child can access a realistic ideal self-concept (Powell, 1982). In this context, ignorance of abilities is anathema to confidence building. One kindergartner was asked to withdraw from school because she was too immature. Evidence cited to substantiate this claim was her usual gaze out of the window. After the mother consulted with a psychologist in an attempt to escape her daughter's incessant harassment for stimulation and attention, testing revealed that the child had an IQ of 163! In another case, a high school graduate came for counseling to help find focus in her life direction. Her school experience had been frustrating, tedious and discouraging. Examination of early school records revealed that she had scored 155-165 IQ on a Binet when in the second grade! Her exceptional potential was never revealed to her or her family. This young woman continued to wonder why she felt so

left out.

To ameliorate the devastation of inappropriate expectations, parents and professionals need to cooperate in developing realistic reflections of the exceptionally gifted child's interests and abilities. These children need specific intellectual, personality and behavioral assessment for early identification of abilities. Such assessment enables a preventative approach to parenting and appropriate and flexible educational planning. This is acquired by a careful history, a journal of behaviors, and marking of developmental milestones. Journal keeping is a particularly effective means for parents to maintain an objective perspective and develop insights about their children. Then the child needs to be individually evaluated, not just tested, by a psychologist. This evaluation should include intellectual and personality screening assessments. When parents are also evaluated, understanding and encouragement for the family is further facilitated.

Results of testing should be conveyed to the child and parents. More importantly, the implications of options relative to those results need to be shared. It is a misconception that knowledge of one's abilities results in becoming snobbish. That is possible; but more often, it is **not** knowing that creates damage. When interpreting IQ scores, professionals and parents must also remember that similar IQ scores do not necessarily indicate similarity on additional variables with any other person.

A Psycho-educational Consultant for the Family

Professional assessment might also become the basis for establishing an ongoing relationship with a competent mental health professional who can provide objective interpretations for the family in a preventive mode. This built-in relationship can be particularly useful in a crisis situation where the essential trusting relationship has been pre-established. The involved psychologist or other professional can also be especially valuable in consultation with school personnel about adjustment in the school milieu.

Parents, teachers and counselors need to be cautious not to define a child by relative weaknesses. An extreme deviation from the norm creates a contrast with otherwise normal abilities which appear incongruent and deficient by comparison. Because of these apparent contrasts, adults are prone to focus on the relative problems of exceptionally gifted children rather than recognition of their

strengths. In the Pringle (1970) study, most of the bright children who attended a clinic on referral for maladjustment had teachers who underestimated their abilities. Lack of confidence was the most often presented symptom.

Through receptive dialogue with parents or professionals, a confirming, confident self-concept may emerge. This is developed in a caring process of reflective listening and Socratic questioning in mutual self exploration. The involved psychologist or other professional can also be especially valuable in consultation with school personnel around adjustment in the school environment.

School Adjustment

Uneven Development

Because of the potential for uneven development in exceptionally gifted children, customary school and many gifted programs are not adequate for them. Children within the entire range of giftedness often need the challenge of stimulating material to evidence their possible ability (Robinson, Roedel, and Jackson, 1979). High intellectual ability does not alleviate the recipients of needing to learn. While learning seems easy and natural in some areas, it is not that way in all aspects. In many areas these extremely gifted children seem to learn in leaps. They integrate several steps into one giant jump. When six-year-old Michael was exposed to the concept of multiplication by an explanation that there are three 3's in 9, he wanted to use that rule in multiplying more digits. Being able to work this principle with 57689×4723 was more satisfying than merely multiplying 33×4 . Sara learned all the moves of chess in playing one game with her father and immediately became an avid chess player. Exceptionally gifted children usually experience school as listening to teachers present material then repeat it and repeat it again.

Parents need to be counseled in acquiring the expertise and courage to become ongoing tactful and active advocates for their child's appropriate school experiences. They also need to accept responsibility in providing enrichment that supplements what schools offer. Parents should continuously enlighten educators who are not able to recognize the needs of their child such as when one principal advised a parent, "It's only common sense, if you have a bright child, you give that child more work!" Most edu-

cators are unaware of how much they do not know about these children's differences. They need parents to be rich sources of information and advocacy.

Teacher Trauma

Just as school adjustment is difficult for exceptionally gifted children, it is challenging for the teachers whose job it is to engage and inspire them! What does it feel like to be a teacher of one of these children? Some memorable responses include: "She challenges my authority as a teacher. I want her to be quiet and listen to me. I cannot ask her a challenging question without losing the rest of the class. He lives in a mental world all his own even though he is there in the classroom waiting for intellectual stimulation."

"I wish I had had the opportunity to perform brilliantly."

Reflections on school experience from the students' view were expressed by participants in the Johns Hopkins summer program on a panel moderated by Julian Stanley: "Being in school whipped me into submission. I wish that I had had the opportunity to perform brilliantly. and; I was going nowhere fast; I could just coast."

Stress

For more exceptionally gifted children, when school begins, so does increased stress for them and their families. This major stressor stems from a milieu that seeks to normalize. In typical school settings, more is expected from these children, but they are expected to produce with less help and attention. When school starts, so should counseling for proactive program flexibility and stress management.

Exceptionally gifted children need to be aware of benefits to themselves for accommodation of others — showing cooperation and support and simultaneously interpreting to themselves how evidencing support will work for them. Exceptionally gifted children need to be made aware of their inner self-talk or the "TV screen in their mind". They can then experience a choice to direct that self-talk or to change the channel to alleviate stress and access an encouraging memory. This positive memory is potentiated when it is associated with a person who is valued as well.

Focused Acceleration

The following described model has been successfully implemented for three years with one child and adapted for several others. This focused accel-

eration plan is responsive to a child's need for both intellectual and age peers, and for the need to be stretched in one or more academic areas — the ones in which interest is the highest. Through acceleration of perhaps as much as four or more grades, or to programs outside the school system, a child has sanctioned permission to pursue subjects at his own level with others who share his interests and abilities.

To meet a child's social needs, especially in the primary grades, it is most often recommended that the child remain with his age mates for music, art, recess, lunch, handwriting and other age appropriate subjects. In remaining academic areas, based on specific assessment, the child is then placed at the corresponding appropriate grade level. This plan requires one coordinator with access to the entire school system's resources (Lewis, 1984). Using a school psychologist, invested administrator, or counselor has worked well. This coordinator's role is to arrange and evolve the child's schedule, independently evaluate progress other than regular grades, respond to concerns, and negotiate fluid access to the school's and community's resources. The coordinator also needs to meet regularly with the child's parents to maintain support, communication, and understanding.

Essential elements in any individualized effort to manage opportunities for the exceptionally gifted in the focused acceleration plan are: (a) appropriate periodic assessment for placement basis; (b) involvement of the child in substantive decision making; and (c) assurance that one or more of the child's abilities is stretched toward its current potential (Lewis, 1984). Such programmed flexibility begins the process of delivering autonomy, judgement, and a practiced sense of internal control to the child. This is an essential feature of emotional adjustment and personal growth. Since the exceptionally gifted will not be able to control much of their environment, emotional adjustment may often depend on their experience of internal control in at least some significant portions of their lives. To realize this control as a child is an invaluable preparation for life-long adjustment. The school system can thus contribute to this developmental milestone. Parents need to accept the responsibility for making and remaking educational decisions many times. In each instance, the chosen options must include repeated assessment, flexibility, and counseling components.

Prove It or Lose It

Parents of exceptionally gifted children need to be continuously cautioned against conveying appreciation to their child for what can be accomplished. Parents even need to compensate for the innate tendency many of these children have to drive themselves toward achieving. Fay, six, accelerated to second grade, has expressed that she has to prove that she is the smartest kid in her class or she loses her place. This prove or lose attitude is intensified by pervasive perfectionism. Karen Williams refers to parents' difficulty in establishing a comfort zone between their encouraging outstanding performance and excessive pressure that creates burnout (1984). Many capable people have more sense of what they cannot do than a perception of pride in their effort process. Because of their adeptness in conceptualizing elaborate possibilities, they easily become impatient and disappointed with the results of their endeavor. Part of the drive for excellence may be learned from projected perfectionism in parallel with perfectionistic parents. Perfectionist tendencies may also develop from childhood experiences of conditional positive approval. David Willings (1982) found that these people are the least happy adults. As adults, they seek stability on their accomplishments and even may marry as an achievement.

Counseling toward setting small, attainable goals is important to modify perfectionistic tendencies, reduce stress, and encourage creativity. The goal may be merely to try an activity. The defined task could be to make a plan. Encouraging adults need to focus on the meaning an activity has for the child, rather than on an evaluation of the product. Parents and teachers can comment on the time and dedication a child gave to a project or practice. Adults can help children to be task selective and pursue meaningful activities that have value to the child. Children can benefit from reading biographies of creative, accomplished people to reveal how failures can be incorporated as an experiment. It is beneficial for adults to provide a model by their own "articulated processing" of positive mental messages. Learning from articulated processing is just as persuasive as is learning from hearing the mother tongue. Significant adults need to model and recognize the difference between personal selfworth and final performance. Remediation for debilitating perfectionism should include an enriched environment of unconditional love that incorporates noncompetitive activities, recognition

of process as well as product, self-paced materials, access to community resources, and exploration of the creative arts.

Creative Self Expression

Self expression in creative endeavors may be one of an exceptionally gifted person's most valued means of confirmation. Artistic expression is a symbolic statement of psychological freedom. For example, programs at The Roeper City and Country School and many magnet schools for the performing arts reflect the long term benefits of acquiring skill and appreciation for creative self interpretation and expression. Because most exceptionally gifted children will not acquire these opportunities in their schools, parents become the main resource to provide the enriching exposure and encouragement of stretching a child in at least one expressive mode of the fine arts such as music, art, dance, dramatics, a craft, or language. Components for this development include individualized instruction, paced advancement, and an opportunity to display ability or to compete. Since competitions usually provide association with peers, mutual sharing frequently generalizes to a sense of inclusion and competence.

Career Guidance

One exceptionally gifted parent reflects, "My problem is that I've always had too many opportunities." This indicates an inherent dilemma for people who have the keen capacity to conceptualize many possibilities. They are aware of more alternatives. In their minds, they are tantalized by a cognizance of even greater possibilities. Thus, recognition of more carries the corollary that more must be denied. Even though they may actualize many options, these persons deny more than they are able to actualize. This denial leads to more frustration, depression, and grief for the loss of what they never had.

Exceptionally gifted adolescents are often plagued by the typical counseling for gifted, "You can be anything you want to be." Their responsive recoil from that random platitude may be into a depression of fear, avoiding a commitment to anything. Career counseling for these young people needs to focus on fulfilling their sense of value. If they have a "why" to work, function becomes a way to facilitate what they believe in and care about. Career counseling should encourage them to follow their dreams — to believe in a cause in conjunction with what they like to do. Career guidance needs to be framed as a means for the adolescent to access

more of the world he wants. For some, this broadening experience might be actualized through endeavors such as foreign commerce, journalism, or management. The guiding principle is, "Go with the gift."

User-Friendly Environment

Attributing achievement solely to natural gifts, however, is ignoring a critical part of the developmental process. Achievement does not occur spontaneously. Environment is the catalyst for risk-taking, accomplishment, and satisfaction (Feldman, 1979). We need to build opportunities for social and emotional growth into our children's experience. Otherwise, they may feel like they missed too much. As one exceptionally gifted adult reflected on all the things that might have been, "I wanted to go to my parents and say, 'Why didn't you mortgage yourselves and provide what I needed?'"

What is a user-friendly environment? How do you limit behavior without breaking the spirit? The formula includes:

1. Giving the child full flexibility within firm outer limits.
2. Experiencing natural and logical prenegotiated consequences.
3. Avoidance of punishment.
4. Knowledge of behavior management applied in a consistent, kind manner.
5. Positive reinforcement.
6. Enhanced relationship building signified by parents who are crazy about their children but not controlled by them.
7. Full range stimulation — intellectual, creative, social, and emotional.

Such a system allows the child maximum choice potential in a significant cooperative decision making role. When discipline or misbehavior issues occur, the previous pattern of cooperation is in place. For exceptionally gifted children, enlisting cooperation through a history of negotiated planning for behavioral consequences is effective discipline. Appealing to their sense of logic strengthens cooperation. Behavioral goals for these youngsters lie in developing a secure, confident self that is achieved through self-discipline.

You Make the Difference

Essentially, parents of exceptionally gifted children are rewarded in experiencing their children's characteristic passion for excellence.

However, they need encouragement in developing synergistic relationships for each family member's enlightenment and life satisfaction. Because there are few compeers, a parent may be the available significant person in appreciation of a child's intense experience of meaning, joy, isolation, suffering, disappointment and awareness of the exquisite detail in life.

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Smart Girls, Gifted Women: Special Guidance Concerns

Barbara A. Kerr

The reasons for gifted women's failure to realize their full potential are both external and internal. The external causes center around sexism, discrimination and lack of resources. Internal causes may be fear of success, the "Imposter" phenomenon, the "Cinderella Complex" or simply a tendency to adjust too easily and congenially to society's lower expectations for women. Parts of this article are excerpted from Smart Girls, Gifted Women by Barbara Kerr, Ohio Psychological Press, Columbus, OH 43210

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Why do girls of extraordinary intellectual potential so often fail to become women of accomplishment? Many studies of gifted females show a pattern of declining career aspirations, declining intellectual achievement, and disappointing career achievements. Increasingly, gifted educators are becoming aware of the need for specialized guidance strategies to prevent the underachievement of gifted girls and women.

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Career Aspirations

Despite the socialization for inferior status that all females in our society receive, gifted girls' interests are more similar to those of gifted boys than to those of average girls. When surveyed as children, the gifted girls in Terman's sample had strong interests in academic activities, outdoor activities, and adventure. The precise vocational interests of Terman's girls will never be known, because the girls were not administered the vocational interest test taken by the boys (Terman & Oden, 1935). It is likely, however, that like the boys, they would have displayed moderate to high career aspirations. When mathematically gifted junior high girls in the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth were asked about their career goals, 96% intended to have a career (Fox, 1976).

By adolescence, gifted girls usually have career aspirations which are lower than those of gifted boys. Kaufmann's follow up of Presidential Scholars showed that gifted girls as adolescents had had career goals which were moderate in status and prestige, compared to the high-status, high prestige careers chosen by the boys (1981). Another study showed evidence that adolescent gifted girls show lower career aspirations compared to gifted boys (Kerr, 1982), although these aspirations can be raised by specific guidance techniques. Kerr's (1985) small sample survey of a group of 22 gifted women graduates of a special accelerated learning program showed a clear pattern of declining career aspirations beginning in adolescence. The career goals claimed by gifted females in fifth grade, eighth grade, twelfth grade, and college senior years were, on the average, lower in status, salary, and prestige with age.

Intellectual Achievement

Gifted girls typically excel in elementary and high school work, usually out-performing gifted boys in grades and honors (Terman & Oden, 1935; Card, Steele, & Abeles, 1980). A variety of studies shows that females' verbal achievement scores remain superior to males throughout adolescence (Eccles, 1985). The well known differences favoring males in achievement test scores in quantitative reasoning emerge by junior high among gifted populations. However, the differences in math achievement are not very large — they account for less than 4% of the