

Understanding Your Gifted Child

Gifted people are also gifted emotionally, and this can be both beneficial and harmful. We refer to the social-emotional needs of gifted children as "Affective Needs", and a regular portion of the CATS curriculum focuses on affective needs.

As a parent you'll want to be aware of these needs, and also recognize when to step back and when to step in. Sometimes it is difficult to know when an 'issue' becomes a 'problem'. It is further difficult to recognize that these are not problems we can 'fix,' but rather, problems we can understand.

What You See	How It Helps	When It Hurts	What To Do	When To Seek Help
<p>Perfectionism</p>	<p>Healthy perfectionism can be motivating, lead to high quality work, feel invigorating upon completion of work, and contribute to a sense of accomplishment and pride.</p> <p>As long as a child separates their identity from their work, perfectionism can be empowering.</p>	<p>When the perfectionism turns inward there is a cause for concern.</p> <p>When a child isn't concerned about having a perfect project, but strives to BE the perfect person, this can lead to self-loathing.</p> <p>When a desire to create the perfect project becomes so overwhelming that the child refuses to make any attempt, this can halt academic progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realize that perfectionism cannot be fixed, but can be managed. - Help your child prioritize things. How much does this test matter when compared to a valued friendship? - Share your own failures and how they helped you grow. - Focus on growth mindset (valuing effort) rather than fixed mindset (valuing outcome). <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example:</i> "I like how you worked hard to build this model" rather than "Your model looks good."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell your child mistakes are allowed and make sure you really do allow for mistakes. 	<p>When you notice your child's perfectionism is leading to self-loathing, negative self-talk, frequent emotional outbursts, procrastination, it may be time to consider seeking a counselor.</p>

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<p>Heightened Awareness</p>	<p>Heightened awareness is often referred to as 'being sensitive'.</p> <p>A sensitive child will experience stronger emotions, so simple joys may become truly delightful.</p> <p>They are sympathetic, better aware of their surroundings, and are very perceptive of things happening around them. They recognize their own needs, so they are better at self-care than others.</p>	<p>Heightened awareness also means understanding the true gravity of the situation when, for example, Dad loses his job.</p> <p>It makes teasing from peers feel especially hurtful and confusing, and name-calling becomes intolerable.</p> <p>They may cry easily and often, making an easy target for a would-be bully.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognize that heightened awareness is a part of your child's personality that cannot be changed- neuroscientists have linked it to genetics- and it's a great trait, overall. - Encourage your child to journal about his or her feelings. - Look for triggers to the behavior. The key isn't to avoid the trigger, but to be prepared. The movie about a dying dog is going to make her cry, so talk beforehand and bring tissue! - Build traditions to celebrate joy, experience sadness, or share fears. When the pet frog dies, an elaborate funeral will reinforce that it's okay for him to mourn. - Talk frequently about the things that are and are not within your child's circle of control, and ensure she's not holding herself personally responsible for problems of the world. 	<p>If your child shows signs to indicate that he is struggling to manage his emotions, it may be time to find some extra support.</p> <p>Take note if you are frequently observing your child crying, having emotional high and low swings, or sulking/withdrawing from activities or people he usually enjoys.</p>

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<p>Heightened Anxiety</p>	<p>Stress is a normal, necessary, and useful human emotion. Good stress is referred to as "Eustress". Eustress has been shown to increase cognitive brain function.</p> <p>Anxiety tends to lead to 'worst case scenario' thinking, which is extremely useful in friendships and leadership roles.</p> <p>Anxiety is also linked to increased motivation and excitement, and a degree of anxiousness is essential to quality performance.</p>	<p>Anxiety can also be debilitating, manifesting as fear, inability to act, guilt, and worry.</p> <p>It effects health as well, including an increase in illnesses like flu, digestion problems, memory loss, and weight gain.</p> <p>Negative, chronic stress can be referred to as "distress."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know the difference between good and bad anxiety. Butterflies in the stomach before a test or the big game is healthy, and even good for your child. - Help your child differentiate between stressors that are within or outside of her circle of control. If she didn't study for that big test, her anxiety is self-imposed. Obsessing that rain will cancel tomorrow's big game is outside the circle of control. - Help your child develop soothing/calming strategies. Journaling, meditating, yoga, or video games could all be stress-relieving, depending on the child. - Curb your own anxiety. If you show distress every time your child's grade dips on the parent portal, you'll reinforce that response in your child. - A very successful technique is the "mindfulness" technique, which is far too detailed to recap here, but should certainly be researched by a parent when a child is struggling with anxiety. 	<p>Generally, anxiety should be situational.</p> <p>If it seems to be 'chronic', meaning your child defaults to anxiousness in most situations, or his anxiety seems irrational, you may be interested in seeking a counselor for support and strategies.</p>

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<p>Friendships & Identity</p>	<p>Friendships can be tricky for gifted kids, and not surprisingly, asynchronicity is often the culprit.</p> <p>Consider this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -chronological age=who they're in class with -academic age=who they want to work with -maturity age=who they want to play with <p>A "true peer" is a peer who matches your child's academic and maturity level, and they are just as rare as your child! When your son or daughter finds a true peer, he or she has likely found a lifelong friend. This is why many gifted kids gravitate towards one another, and feel truly comfortable around other gifted children.</p> <p>When gifted children struggle to find true peers, they may develop a dislike of school and other social situations.</p>	<p>If your child struggles to make friends, consider taking the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask Mrs. Hinze for the book, "The Science of Making Friends." 2. Talk with teachers to determine if the problem has been ongoing, or if it is the result of a specific situation within the peer group. 3. Remember: there is a difference between 'being lonely and liking it' and 'lonely'. If your child is happy, he or she may enjoy having time alone more than you realize. 		<p>Kids will usually be verbal about feeling lonely, or lacking friendships. Many counselors have developed some great plans to assist children in developing social skills and making friends.</p>