

Help Your Gifted Child Develop Realistic Expectations, Good Communication, and Independence

Parents love their children and want to do what is best for them. Good parenting for gifted children involves the same concepts of good parenting recommended for all children. Helping children develop a positive self-concept and experience a variety of activities, while listening and sharing, are important. The following suggestions have been modified somewhat to meet the needs of a gifted child.

Encourage and Support

Help your gifted children understand, accept, and value their talents and abilities. Also teach them to accept and value the talents and abilities of others, which may be quite different from their own.

Reassure your children that no one can do everything well, because even a highly gifted individual will have areas of weakness. Give them opportunities to develop their weaker areas, but focus more on their strengths. For example, if they are talented in music, provide lessons and opportunities in that field; don't insist they go out for football to make them "well-rounded".

Encourage your children to participate in a physical activity they can enjoy *without competition*, whether it's running, karate, dancing, etc.

Visit a Variety of Places...

Visit museums, historical sites, zoos, libraries, parks. Attend plays, concerts, poetry readings, school activities when possible. Watch for free programs. When planning your family vacation, contact the appropriate visitor's bureau. Let your children research the area and plan visits to the attractions that interest them.

Provide Books, Games, Puzzles, Etc.

Again, as many as the budget will allow! And keep in mind, often simple materials like cardboard boxes, paper bags, and kitchen containers can offer better opportunities to be creative than expensive pre-fabricated toys.

Handle Sibling Rivalry Carefully

Family siblings may or may not all be gifted, but one thing is certain: each will be different! Parents must endeavor to give each child equal attention, valuing and encouraging the unique strengths and talents of each child.

Avoid comparing children and their efforts. Provide a powerful role model for your children as they learn to accept and appreciate others who are different from themselves.

Help Set Realistic Goals and Expectations

Gifted children are often their own worst taskmasters. They will accept nothing short of perfection in everything they attempt. If parents reinforce this mindset, gifted children may become afraid to try new things for fear of not excelling or even failing.

"Perfectionism" is a learned trait that can deny gifted children the satisfaction of trying something, performing poorly, trying again, and finally succeeding. It can also keep a child from experiencing the joy of doing some activities "just for fun" and not competitively.

In addition, parents must be wary of burdening their children with unfulfilled expectations for themselves. There is a fine line between encouragement and pushing, and parents must constantly seek to stay on the positive side of that "great divide."

Allow Time To Relax, Play, Reflect, Daydream

Everyone needs downtime in order to deal with stress and to renew their energy and creativity. Gifted children are no different, but it is easy to overschedule them because they are interested in and good at so many things.

Remember, Gifted Children are Children First

Gifted individuals have all of the likes, dislikes, and vulnerabilities of other children. However, gifted children will often respond to rational explanations and open discussions ("leveling" with them), and they may deeply resent lectures. Still, don't treat your gifted child as a miniature adult.

Try communicating with your child on a higher level of thinking at an early age, perhaps six or seven. If he/she responds positively to this stimulus, increase communication on that basis, but be ready to work at the parent-child level whenever the child indicates a child-like handling of a situation. Fostering two-way communication on all kinds of issues from curfews to international affairs will build trust and responsibility.

Foster Good Communication

The key to raising a gifted child with a healthy self-concept and realistic outlook on life is good communication. Communication consists of two parts: talking and listening. For parents, the more important component is *listening*, even though most parents probably spend more time talking. There are many books available to assist you in developing quality communication between you and your children. Talk to your child's school counselor for ideas.

Facilitating Discussion

To facilitate discussion between you and your children, you might ask your children to respond to the following questions.

1. Do I understand my parents' expectations for me? Are they reasonable? Am I worried about living up to these expectations and the consequences if I don't?
2. Do I have the freedom to make my own decisions on most things? Do I worry about criticism from my parents, if I don't decide wisely and things don't go well?
3. Do I feel free to express my ideas and thoughts? If I don't agree with my parents, do they listen to my viewpoint and reasons behind it? Do they accept my opinion – sometimes?
4. Does my family have fun together? What family activities do I especially enjoy? What family activities would I like to try? Do I have a say in decisions made about family activities?
5. Are there places in my home where I can store materials for projects I am working on and keep collections of interesting items?
6. Are there interesting books and magazines in my home? Do my parents spend much time reading?
7. When I feel stressed or pressured at school or from friends, do I look forward to coming home?

Help Your Gifted Child Develop Realistic Expectations, Good Communication and Independence was written by Mercedes "Dede" Smith, Director of the Center for Gifted Education, Drury College.



Why or why not?

The Best Gift

Parents can make home a safe haven from the frustrations, alienation, and pressures at school, on the job, or from friends by opening up communication lines and listening with empathy to the concerns and triumphs their gifted child is experiencing. It is the best gift they can offer their gifted child!

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