

The Highly Advanced Gifted Child –

“A sensitivity to the special needs of young gifted children can make a significant difference to their future development and happiness” Joan Franklin Smutney

The highly advanced gifted child is a minority even among gifted children. Their capacity to learn is significantly advanced even beyond the average for the intellectually and academically gifted.

One strong indicator that a child may be highly gifted is the very early development of speech, coupled with an unusually speedy progression through the stages of speech development. In her study of exceptionally gifted children, Gross (1993) recorded linguistic precocity far beyond even that of moderately gifted. The gifted children were able to link words into meaning earlier and with greater degrees of complexity than were their age peers. Early and fluent speech was also linked to excellent memory. Children in the study could recite poetry, passages from books, and songs before the age of 2. The accelerated development of speech and language reflect not only a quickly growing vocabulary and knowledge base, but rapidly improving conceptual and abstract thinking abilities as well. Comprehension, retention, vocabulary, stored information, and logical abilities are often superior.

The highly advanced gifted child is a quick learner and can be passionate about learning. Often they are self directed, highly energetic and goal oriented. For this reason, it is difficult for them to be confined to a curriculum that doesn't meet their needs.

Parents typically note that their child seemed to catch on to things effortlessly, was insatiable curious and had extraordinary memory. Parents report that their child reads a wide range of books, fiction and non-fiction; and is fascinated with numbers. The highly advanced gifted child is also more likely than other children their age to have collections, especially scientific collections. Many parents reported their child to be well-rounded, socially adjusted and physically developed.

In early years, the highly advanced gifted child may show signs of alertness and long attention spans. Preference for novelty is seen as early as infancy in terms of frequent desire for visual changes. They often sit, crawl and walk several months earlier than normal. High energy sometimes leads to hyperactivity when they are insufficiently stimulated. Even at a young age, these children may be aware of their own problem-solving strategies and use them to solve new problems. Handwriting is often a struggle; and they are bored with the goal to be neat. Their friends are often older children or adults. Affectively, highly advanced gifted children may show intense reactions to noise, pain and frustration. They are interested in moral and political problems and may worry about evil in the world. (Ellen Winner, 1996)

Children who are highly gifted may have special problems of development which are correlated with social isolation. Most often age mates do not share their interests, vocabulary, or desire for more complex activities. These difficulties appear particularly acute at ages 4 through 9. When extremely gifted students are permitted to work and play with intellectual peers, loneliness and social isolation disappear and these children become accepted as a valued classmate and friend. (Hollingworth)