

The Social and Emotional Needs of Advanced-Level Learners: Strategies for Parents

Pat Schuler, Ph.D., NCC, LMHC

Creative Insights

1654 Columbia Turnpike

Castleton-on-Hudson, NY

518-257-2018

gpjs@berk.com

The most important work
you and I will ever do
will be within the walls
of our home.

Nathan B. Lee

Examine:

- Definitions
- Characteristics of giftedness
- Importance of addressing needs
- Internal/External Stressors
- Perfectionism, Anxiety, Stress
- Strategies

Definitions of Giftedness

- **Howard County Public Schools**
Gifted behavior consists of behaviors that reflect an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits...
above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity.

Definitions of Giftedness

- Columbus Group, 1991

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm.



Definitions of Giftedness

- Columbus Group, 1991

This uniqueness of gifted learners renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.



Characteristics of Highly Able Learners

Intellectual

- exceptional reasoning ability
- intellectual curiosity
- rapid learning rate
- facility with abstraction
- complex thought processes
- vivid imagination



Characteristics of Highly Able Learners

- early moral concern
- passion for learning
- powers of concentration
- analytical thinking
- divergent thinking/creativity
- keen sense of humor
- capacity for reflection



Characteristics of Highly Able Learners

Personality

- insightfulness
- need to understand
- need for mental stimulation
- perfectionism
- need for precision/logic
- excellent sense of humor



Characteristics of Highly Able Learners

- sensitivity/empathy
- intensity
- perseverance
- acute self-awareness
- nonconformity
- questioning of rules/authority
- tendency toward introversion

Silverman



Giftedness Affects Psychological Well-Being and Development

- Particular way a person is highly able
- Degree of giftedness
- How well a gifted person's needs are being met



Only a small percentage of highly able children have psychological adjustment problems, so why is it important to address their social and emotional needs?



- our culture is ambivalent about intellectualism
- Advanced learners do not automatically realize their potential abilities
- lack of validation can result in negative self-image, low self-esteem
- too much pressure, overcommitment, loneliness, dependence on external motivation, extreme competitiveness, & other stressors- depression
- the more highly able-more vulnerable to problems
- possible strain on family dynamics



Internal Stressors

- enormous capacity for consciousness
- intensity-intellectual, imagination, physical, emotional, sensual, spiritual
- more curious, more questions, process slower- less smart
- cope with more possibilities, more meanings
 - potential for more mistakes
- hypersensitivities-trouble screening out
 - viewed as less able to cope



Internal Stressors

- wanting to "do it all"
 - frustration
- shame and abandonment
 - should succeed without help
- personalize situations
 - feel more responsible
- twice exceptional
 - Frustration-smart & difficulties



Internal Stressors

- self-expectations- higher than others
 - high performance in all areas
- perfectionistic- see the "ideal" (mental age)
 - helps them to strive
 - not satisfied with performance
 - identity = accomplishments
 - self-image- *great student* or *loser*
 - fear of failure; reluctance to ask for help
 - avoid risk of trying, potentially failing



External Stressors

- lack of recognition & understanding
- low/too high expectations of others
 - stereotypic beliefs and myths
 - inappropriate criticism of others
 - "You should know better"
- perfection expectations-accomplishments
- expectations of behavior-
 - chronological age vs. mental age



External Stressors

- inappropriate placement
 - lack of sufficient challenge- boredom
 - too much challenge- anxiety
 - lack of intellectual peers
 - easy learning- effortless existence
- differences from peers
 - frightening and alienating
- aware of others' incongruities
 - confusion on how to respond

Meckstroth



Perfectionism, Anxiety, Stress (PAS)

- Perfectionism: combination of thoughts and behaviors associated with high standards or expectations for one's own performance
 - Adaptive or Maladaptive
- Anxiety: state of apprehension or worry about a threat or danger that might occur
- Stress: the non-specific response on the body to any demand placed upon it
 - Distress (-) or Eustress (+)



Anxiety Personality Style

Anxiety prone child is usually "responsible, dependable, and motivated...good student, strives to do well academically, wants to please adults and peers, seeks approval and reassurance, usually well-behaved, difficulty with assertiveness, tends to be perfectionistic, high expectations, may be unusually disappointed or frustrated with mistakes or imperfect results, and oversensitive to criticism or rejection."

Dr. Paul Foxman, *The Worried Child...*

What Can Parents Do to Help Their Perfectionistic and Anxious Advanced Learner?

- General Strategies
- PAS Strategies

General STRATEGIES

Provide a safe (physical & emotional) environment

As a teacher (parent), I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. ... In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.

Hiam Ginot, author, psychologist



Every child in our classroom (home) receives what he or she needs.

Ross Greene, author, psychologist

General STRATEGIES

Provide a safe (physical/emotional) environment

- Teach Creative Problem Solving (CPS)
- Acknowledge their sensitivity-avoid "killer statements"
- Model creative, healthy risk-taking behaviors
- Bibliotherapy-supply biographies of notables who were able to resolve personal situations
- Explain the biology of stress-how the body sends signals
- Promote health: sleep diet exercise
- Use Peaceful Parenting (Buck)
 - Ask: What do you want that you are trying to get by___? (safety & security, love & belonging, power, fun, freedom)
- Use quotations

STRATEGIES

- Quotations

You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.

Winnie the Pooh

Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the wrong. Sometime in life you will have been all of these.

George Washington Carver

General STRATEGIES

- Provide time to play
 - Source of relaxation
 - Relief valve for stressed kids
 - Typically in the here and now
 - Antidote to future focus of worry/anxiety
 - Allows kids to express feelings and to release tension or stress, without hurting others
 - Recharges energy
 - Fun!



General STRATEGIES

- Help them to relax
 - HALT: Hungry? Angry? Lonely? Tired?
 - breathing-calming (4/5 secs.)
 - guided imagery
 - progressive muscle relaxation
 - mindfulness
 - lotion/cream on hands
 - "flow" activities
 - Create a "Tool Kit"



General STRATEGIES

- Model how to set reasonable goals
- Help your child to set goals by week, semester, year- evaluate, modify
 - academic, social, physical, emotional, spiritual
- Use **PMI** (Positive-Minus-Interesting) about situations



General STRATEGIES

- Social connections
 - Teach social skills
 - Opportunities to be with others who are similar-different peers: age, ability, social, physical
 - Don't insist introverts become extraverts
 - Don't push to have "many" friends, encourage a "soul-mate"
 - Use mentors who share similar concerns and passions
 - Help develop self-esteem that enables them to stand up to teasing
 - Provide outlets for caring

Strategies for PAS

- Learn about perfectionism
 - positive motivator or cause of stress
 - types of perfectionists
- Sensitize yourself to child's pressures-home and school
- Set and model high, realistic standards for yourself
- Model that making mistakes is ok
- What did I/you learn from this experience?



Strategies for PAS

Types of Perfectionists

- Academic Achiever
- Aggravated Accuracy Assessor
- Risk Evader
- Controlling Image Manager
- Procrastinating Perfectionist

Adelson & Wilson



Strategies for PAS

- Learn about perfectionism
 - positive motivator or cause of stress
 - types of perfectionists
- Sensitize yourself to child's pressures-home and school
- Set and model high, realistic standards for yourself
- Model that making mistakes is ok
 - Teach about "constructive failure"
- What did I/you learn from this experience?



Strategies for PAS

- Discuss importance of "likes" vs. "shoulds"
- Teach/model that time, effort and not giving up-reach goals- "But twist" statements
- Help child understand that negative emotions are typical but need to be expressed in healthy ways
 - Positive Self-Talk Statements
- Teach your child how to deal with disappointment and failure!
- Seek professional counseling if necessary



• “But Twist” Statements

- I don't want to do this task, **but** I can do it.
- I don't want to spend time writing a story, **but** I can just take one small step at a time to do it.
- I don't want to do homework, **but** it really won't take that long.
- I'm not sure I understand the directions, **but** I can ask for help if it gets too hard.

Cooper



Strategies for PAS

- Teach about “constructive failure”
- Teach/model that time, effort and not giving up- reach goals- “But twist”
- Help child understand that negative emotions are typical but need to be expressed in healthy ways
 - **Positive Self-Talk Statements**
- Teach your child how to deal with disappointment and failure!
- Seek professional counseling if necessary



• Positive Self-Talk Statements

- I can do it.
- I can handle this.
- I am worried, but I am OK.
- I am anxious, but I can handle it.
- I am scared, but I am safe.
- I can help myself relax.
- I must face my fears to overcome them.
- It is just my anxiety talking; I don't have to listen to it.

B. Zucker, 2009



Strategies for PAS

- Teach about “constructive failure”
- Teach/model that time, effort and not giving up- reach goals- “But twist”
- Help child understand that negative emotions are typical but need to be expressed in healthy ways
 - **Positive Self-Talk Statements**
- Teach your child how to deal with disappointment and failure!
- Seek professional counseling if necessary



The Social and Emotional Needs of Advanced-Level Learners

Strategies for Parents - Responsive Parenting

- respect relationship between their social and emotional needs and their academic needs
- be cautious about forcing your desires
- do not try to change their basic nature
- teach respect for self - "Separate but connected"
- teach pro-social skill development
- model/teach them to enjoy non-academics
- provide opportunities for down-time
- expose them to *knowledgeable* counseling



and most importantly...

... the presence of a close parent-child relationship - is probably the single most important factor in protecting a child from harm

Steinberg, Adolescents



Resources

- Related Resource List
- National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) www.nagc.org
- SENG: Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted www.sengifted.org
- Howard County Public School System Gifted and Talented Education Program www.hcpss.org/gt



Your Questions



GT Program Information

G/T Advisory Committee's website
<http://hcpssgtac.wordpress.com>

Howard County Education Program
website:
www.hcpss.org/gt

HCPSS News - Select "G/T Program"



Upcoming G/T Parent Academy

What Parents Can Do To Foster Talent in Young Children

Tuesday, February 23, 2010
7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Featured Speaker:
Ms. Kathleen Cecil

Lime Kiln Middle School
11650 Scaggsville Road
Fulton, MD

