

Gifted Social and Emotional Resources

Gifted Social & Emotional Needs of Gifted Children

Many gifted behaviors and traits include an emotional or social component. Parents of gifted children find that both the challenges and the joys of raising a gifted child extend beyond the classroom.

How Does Being Gifted Affect Social and Emotional Development?

Being gifted is part of an individual's identity and, as such, does not only apply to academic settings. Profoundly gifted children experience their emotions and social development in a way that can significantly differ from neurotypical children. Supporting your gifted child includes looking at their emotional needs at home and helping them build social skills outside of a school setting in addition to providing opportunities for intellectual growth.

How Does Giftedness Affect Emotional Development?

While every gifted child's experience is different, two of the main terms associated with the emotional development of gifted children are [intensity](#) and [asynchrony](#).

Intensity as [described by Christine Fonesca](#) is, "how gifted individuals approach life. At its best, intensity is the driving passion that enables some people to achieve amazing things – in any domain. But at its worst, it is the turmoil that has the power to consume these same individuals from time to time as they learn how to manage that aspect of their personality." Linked to emotional development, intensity in gifted children may manifest when their peers or the world at large fail to align with their inner compass for how the world ought to be in their eyes. Examples may include feeling troubled over ethical issues, rigid rule-following at play time, a vivid imagination, and even existential questioning at a very young age. Highly gifted children often struggle to express this intensity and may either direct this energy inwardly, presenting as moodiness or anxiety, or direct this energy outwardly as tantrums or yelling and outbursts.

Asynchrony is also closely linked to the gifted child's emotional development. Asynchronous development in gifted children means that their growth, academically, emotionally, physically, or socially, is not uniform. Profoundly gifted children in particular may be intellectually operating at a 10th grade level at age 9 but have not mastered riding a bike or handwriting at the same time. In the emotional domain, gifted children experience the frustration of an intellect that is miles ahead of their physical self and their educational setting. Furthermore, asynchrony can mean that gifted children may lack the emotional coping skills to process their big feelings and rich inner life.

How Does Giftedness Affect Social Development?

The social development of gifted children is often most strongly shaped by a lack of like-minded peers who share their interests, especially early in life. Extroverted and introverted gifted children alike often describe feeling that they lack a “true friend.” The social development of many gifted children mirrors their academic development in that they are often ready for a more mature friendship at an earlier age compared to their age-peers who might only be concerned with having someone to play with.

[Anxiety and social struggles](#) may occur for gifted children who feel that no one understands them. Gifted girls in particular are at risk for going “underground” and hiding their abilities to fit in with their age-peers. Helping these gifted students succeed socially and emotionally is often linked to finding the appropriate academic outlets though as gifted students may find like-minded peers once accelerated, through an academic summer experience, or by engaging with a niche interest and meeting others who share their passions.

How Can Parents Nurture the Social-Emotional Development of Their Gifted Children?

Parents play an important role in nurturing the social-emotional development of their gifted children by being advocates for their children in school and beyond. This can help address problems with self-image, perfectionism, uneven development and depression. Here are some ways parents can improve their gifted child’s social-emotional learning:

- Provide opportunities for enrichment through programs and activities outside the classroom
- Enhance peer relations by allowing the child to connect with intellectual peers who are a similar mental age
- Establish a professionally guided, ongoing support group of parents of gifted children who can share their experiences of raising their gifted children
- Continuously enlighten educators who may not be able to recognize the needs of their gifted child

Most of all, it is important to remember gifted children are children first. They need guidance and understanding to help them learn to regulate their emotions and overcome social challenges they may be experiencing. The Davidson Institute works with families of profoundly gifted students to provide support in addition to hosting social experiences where these children can feel seen by their cognitive peers.