

Gifted Traits and Characteristics

Characteristics and Traits of Gifted Children

Gifted children often stand out. Whether you are a parent, an educator, or a student, you are likely here because you have noticed something *different* about a student or about yourself if you are that student in question. Those without a background in gifted education may feel that gifted children stand out because of their good grades or high achievements. However, many of us who work with gifted children know that they are different for other reasons like their quirky sense of humor, their intense questioning, or their refusal to sit still in the classroom and repeat math facts when they would much rather be discussing the nature of infinity. Looking for gifted traits in children can provide information for parents, educators, and students themselves to decide whether they want to pursue intelligence testing, acceleration, or simply have a better understanding of who these children are.

What is Giftedness?

At its core, giftedness is a brain-based difference that contributes to our vibrant and neurodiverse world. This neurological difference means that profoundly gifted students experience a different intellectual, academic, and social-emotional development trajectory than neurotypical individuals. These differences are detailed in "[The Neuroscience of Giftedness](#)," a series of articles from [GRO](#), the Gifted Research and Outreach organization.

To quote a beloved leader in gifted education, Dr. Jim Delisle, "Giftedness is an innate ability to both detect and comprehend the world in complex ways that differ significantly from age-expected norms." (*Understanding Your Gifted Child from the Inside Out*, p8). Importantly, Delisle makes the distinction that giftedness is not always apparent just from looking at a student's achievements. This is often a source of tension when advocating for the highly gifted child who may appear average, or even below average, in school. Parents and educational professionals often hear the same [myths about gifted students](#) and must take the extra step to educate themselves on giftedness in order to better serve the needs of this population.

Like most people, highly capable students are unique individuals with varied and multifaceted talents and interests. Some demonstrate mastery in multiple areas while others excel in a single subject. Gifted identification often relies on a mix of [gifted testing](#) and more qualitative observations of gifted characteristics and behaviors.

Common Characteristics of Gifted Children:

- Ability to comprehend material several grade levels above their age peers
- Surprising emotional depth and sensitivity at a young age
- Strong sense of curiosity
- Enthusiastic about unique interests and topics
- Quirky or mature sense of humor

- Creative problem solving and imaginative expression
- Absorbs information quickly with few repetitions needed
- Self-aware, socially aware, and aware of global issues

The National Association for Gifted Children lists additional [traits of giftedness](#) that parents may find useful. Of course, each gifted student is unique, and they may present with a mix of these traits or only two very intensely or perhaps you find that none of them at all fit.

What are Traits of Profoundly Gifted Children?

Profoundly gifted individuals score in the [99.9th percentile on IQ and achievement tests](#) and have an exceptionally high level of intellectual prowess.

Characteristics of profoundly gifted individuals may include:

- **Rapid Comprehension:** An advanced ability to learn and process information rapidly, combined with a need for constant mental stimulation; profoundly gifted students often work at a different pace than neurotypical peers—going far ahead or pausing to dive deeply in areas of interest.
- **Intuitive Understanding of the Basics:** Difficulty concentrating on tasks that are not intellectually challenging, including repetitious materials or rote tasks; profoundly gifted children often need less practice to master an idea or concept.
- **Tendency toward Complexity:** A need to understand the “big picture” of what they are learning; they may ask endless “why” questions or prefer to learn whole-to-part rather than part-to-whole.
- **Need for Precision:** An appreciation for nuance and a need for precision in thinking and expression; they may often respond to questions with “that depends...” and they may struggle with multiple choice assessments that ask them to make definitive decisions without an extensive contextual background to questions.
- **High Expectations:** A tendency to hold themselves and others to high standards, which can sometimes present as perfectionism or a very defined sense of justice; this may lead to challenges when understanding rules set by others or interacting with same-age peers who don’t hold the same standards.
- **Divergent Interests:** A vivid imagination and niche interests may make it difficult to connect with same-age peers; profoundly gifted students may seek out older children or adults who share their interests, or they may connect with younger children who are flexible in their thinking and engage in imaginal pursuits.

Oftentimes profoundly intelligent young people are not properly identified and, thus, do not receive an appropriately challenging education. Research shows this can lead to underachievement or even dropping out of school – studies indicate that 40 percent of all gifted students may be underachievers (*Handbook of Gifted Education*, p. 424). The Davidson Institute exists to help these young, bright children gain recognition in the national conversation around giftedness and works directly with families to help them reach their potential.