

Affective Issues: A Baker's Dozen

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All children face affective and developmental challenges. Gifted children also face issues that many of their peers will not, including:

- 1. perfectionism** - Many gifted children strive for excellence. However, when this desire to do well becomes an obsession with attaining perfection, the results can be extreme. Social relations and creativity may be impaired in this quest for perfection. Gifted children may develop physical or emotional symptoms such as avoidance and projection.
- 2. dyssynchronous development** - Children do not develop in all areas at the same pace. Priscilla Vail describes gifted children as mobiles which are set askew by one heavy weight (gift) that throws the entire mobile out of balance. They may function at one level intellectually, another level socially, and yet another level emotionally.
- 3. ownership of the gift** - The gifted child, the school, and the family must decide who "owns the gift". What do gifted children owe society, their schools, and themselves? How will this decision be made?
- 4. over-excitability** - According to Piechowski, gifted children experience life with a greater intensity than normal. They may be more vulnerable, more absorbed, and/or more sensitive than their peers.
- 5. social isolation** - While social maladjustment may be overreported in the literature, gifted children often experience degrees of isolation. It may be as simple as not sharing similar interests or having interests beyond those expected for their chronological age. This makes it difficult to find a true peer. Isolation often increases when societal attention is for the gift, not the child.
- 6. multipotentiality** - This "embarrassment of riches" (being good at too many things) sounds like a wonderful problem to have. In reality, many gifted children struggle with multipotentiality. Gifted children may feel confused or overwhelmed with competing expectations. They may dilute their talent by over-scheduling. Because they have strengths in so many areas, career decisions may be difficult.

7. underachievement/non-production - According to Delisle, gifted children may simply choose not to perform as the adults around them expect. Other children may have serious psychological reasons that prevent them from achieving. Proper diagnosis of the type and cause of non-performance is important. Changes may need to be made at school or home or both before the gifted child is actively engaged.

8. acceleration - Gifted children must often deal with difficult decisions concerning acceleration. While acceleration may clearly be the best educational option, is it the best social/emotional option? Should the child be accelerated in all subjects or in just the strength area?

9. communication/misunderstanding - It is often difficult for age-mates to understand gifted children. The gifted may use advanced vocabulary, have the ability to think abstractly, or have an interest in concepts their peers do not yet understand. Gifted children do not feel misunderstood; they are, in fact, misunderstood.

10. lack of study/organizational skills - Children with excellent oral and/or visual memories often do not learn to prioritize or organize or study. When gifted children consistently work below their ability level, there is little need to learn these skills. When gifted children or young adults finally encounter challenging work, they often do not have the study or organizational skills that other children have already developed.

11. chameleon - In many situations it is not "cool" to be gifted. Hiding one's gifts by imitating age-mates is common.

12. misdiagnosis - Unfortunately, with a wide-spread lack of expertise in gifted education, some gifted children are misdiagnosed. A very active, purposeful gifted child may be incorrectly labeled ADHD. A gifted child who is highly sensitive, fearful, or intense may be misdiagnosed as emotionally disturbed.

13. self-concept - Gifted children often have a distorted self-concept. Gifted children who compare themselves only to age-mates may have an over-inflated self-concept, while gifted children who compare themselves to the masters of a given field may have an unwarranted low self-concept.