

## What Parents Can Do for Gifted Children

There are an estimated 165,000 gifted and talented schoolchildren in New York State. But would you recognize one if he was your child, and would you know what to do to help him develop his gifts? Einstein couldn't speak before he was four years old and couldn't read before he was seven. Beethoven's music teacher once said of him, "As a composer he is hopeless." Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because he had "no good ideas." These are just a few examples to illustrate how elusive the characteristics of genius can be. To aid in the identification of the gifted and talented, the following definition was established by an advisory panel to the United States commissioner of education:

The gifted and talented children are those children who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement (top 3-5 percent on standardized tests) and/or potential in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

- a) general intellectual ability [I.Q. above 130]
- b) specific academic aptitude [2 years beyond placement]
- c) creative or productive thinking
- d) leadership ability

Often a gifted or talented child is talented in more than one of these areas, but this is not always the case. For example, children with exceptional creative abilities do not necessarily have high general intellectual abilities, and vice versa. It is possible, therefore, that a child who is very creative may never be discovered in a classroom where only superior intelligence and academic excellence are recognized. This is where parents, who know the child more intimately than anyone else, can be highly instrumental in identifying children of unusual abilities.

**To identify a gifted child:** Dr. Benjamin S. Bloom, a renowned educator, has estimated that the majority of a child's adult (eighteen-year-old) intelligence and attitudes toward intellectual pursuits are developed by the age of four and that most crucial psychological milestones have been reached before the age of six.

A relatively accurate and stable measurement of a child's intellectual ability can be obtained as early as the age of four through the use of professionally administered individual intelligence tests (such as the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale or the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence). An intelligence quotient of 130 or above is often considered an indicator of intellectual giftedness. But the I.Q. score should not be relied upon as the sole measure of intellectual talent, because this score is the product of several factors, some of which are not directly related to intellectual ability. Professional testing should in-

clude indications of the child's strengths and weaknesses in fine and gross motor skills (handwriting and general coordination) and social and emotional development. Disharmony between these areas and the child's exceptional ability can be frustrating for the gifted child, the parent, and the teacher. Take, for example, the intellectually gifted pre-school child who has a thorough command of the alphabet but is unable to write any letters because his eye-hand coordination is still at a pre-school level.

The sooner you can spot your gifted child's special talent(s) the better able you are to help him develop and grow up with them. Here are some characteristics to look for as signs of giftedness in a child at the pre-kindergarten level: 1. a large and accurately used vocabulary; 2. the ability to read before entering school; 3. the ability to concentrate better than his peers; 4. early discovery of cause and effect; 5. proficiency in drawing, music, and other art forms; and 6. preference for older playmates.

**What parents can do:** Experts agree that in promoting both the talent and socio-emotional development of the child, a major factor to remember is that the gifted child is first and foremost a child and will consequently require your acceptance, understanding, and guidance. The gifted child often experiences feelings of rejection by his peers and, consequently, fostering a positive self-image is exceedingly important. Equally important, however, is to avoid "showing off" the child as a prodigy. Seek out other gifted playmates for the child. Teach him patience so that his desire for knowledge or completion of a project does not result in his missing important details. Do not discourage originality or unusual questions. When the child experiences a disciplinary lapse, talking to him and developing a sense of responsibility within the child will be most effective. His home environment should provide an atmosphere in which the exceptionally talented child feels free to express and test his thoughts and perceptions.

You can best help your child develop his "gifts and talents" by becoming involved in and encouraging his early task development, but avoid pushing him. Emphasize his early verbal expression, reading, and the discussion of ideas. Have a ready supply of good books, magazines, and other aids to home learning (encyclopedias, charts, maps, etc.). Allow your child to watch carefully selected TV programs. Provide opportunities for his cultural enrichment—go to museums, art galleries, educational institutions. Provide private lessons in his strong area(s) and cultivate good taste in music, art, and other cultural interests by setting a good example yourself. A useful book is *The Gifted and Talented: A Handbook for Parents*, by Jeanne L. Delp and Ruth Martinson, Leadership Training Institute Publications.

Be optimistic. Studies show that the prognosis for your gifted child's enjoying a productive and satisfying adult life is positive, if you provide him with intelligent educational programming and guidance and emotional support.

—Ron Rubenzer