

## AN EDUCATORS' GUIDE TO GIFTED CHILDREN

I AM INTENSE

I AM ASYNCHRONOUS

I AM MISUNDERSTOOD

I AM...GIFTED!

### **I am . . . intense.**

Intensity defines me. The further along the IQ spectrum I am, the more intense I am likely to be. Children who are highly, exceptionally, or profoundly gifted have different intellectual, social and emotional needs than those who are mildly or moderately gifted.

My intensity has a huge impact on my educational needs. I am driven by a need to learn more deeply and rapidly than my age-mates. My thirst for knowledge and understanding is all-consuming. My analysis is sophisticated, and my knowledge of many topics may be advanced. I am very likely to be perfectionistic in my quest for truth and mastery, causing me intense anxiety when I don't get it the first time. I may follow logic to extreme conclusions, and be intensely upset when others behave in ways I think are irrational or unjust.

My reactions in the classroom may be fueled by how I interpret what you or fellow students say and do. I may perceive personal feelings and thoughts that you think are hidden to me, but my empathy isn't the same as immaturity, and I may react differently than you may expect. This includes questioning parts of society most people take for granted: it is likely that I fiercely believe children should be treated with the same equality and dignity adults enjoy—yet I also intensely need adult guidance and reassurance as I struggle to understand life's injustices and challenges as we learn about them in school.

I am likely to be extraordinarily sensitive, so that typical school sounds, smells, lights, and physical contact are excruciating and even panic-inducing. At the same time, I may also be sensory-seeking, reacting to noise with noise, and touch with collision. I may need to move constantly while I learn.

What you can do:

- Feed my intense need for knowledge and deep analysis.
- Cultivate a culture of calm, logic, respect and justice in your classroom, and expect that I may have deep perception and empathy.
- Know that I may not be able to control my reactions from oversensitivities and physical overstimuli.
- Ask me before entering my "space," even to offer a high five or make eye contact. Accommodate my need to move while learning.

## I am . . . asynchronous.

I am many ages at once: 8 years old chronologically, but 15 when I read or do math; 10 socially, but only 6 when I write. My asynchrony may work in my favor in one situation, but not in another. This is particularly true if I am gifted but have a learning disability like dyslexia, ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome Disorder or others (this is called being "twice exceptional").

No matter how advanced my intellectual understanding is, it is likely to outstrip my emotional coping skills because of my limited life experience.

I may learn to do math or read early, but I may also develop fine motor skills late.

Even at surprisingly young ages, I am acutely aware of how different I am from my age-mates. I can see that others treat me as if there is something "wrong" with me. But asynchrony isn't an indicator of a problem in itself; it is part of who I am.

What you can do:

- Provide educational content matched to my intellectual age, not my chronological age.
- Challenge me by using vocabulary you would use with an older child, or even an adult. I will ask if I don't understand you.
- Uneven development across domains, even if I am achieving above grade-age level, may indicate that I am compensating for a learning disability.
- Help support my weaknesses and any learning disabilities, while challenging my intellect, so that I can learn to work hard, persist, and take intellectual risks. This is crucial to my well-being.
- Discuss my asynchrony matter-of-factly with me; it is part of who I am. But honor my dignity, particularly in areas where I lag behind.

My family needs your support as much as you need theirs; I wear them out as much as I wear you out! It is okay to offer my parents ideas in helping meet my intellectual needs at home. At the same time, they probably have effective ideas to help make your job with me easier.

## I am . . . misunderstood.

I have astounding educational, social, and emotional needs stemming from my intensity and asynchrony. The higher my IQ, the less likely I am to perform well in school. I crave high-level challenge and vast quantities of information. My need to learn drives me, every waking moment. I am happiest when I am learning new things. Unlike typical kids, I do not thrive on repetition and can be easily frustrated by it.

If I appear to "level out" with typical children in third grade, it is more likely despondence or even depression in reaction to the extreme educational mismatch. I may hide who I am, especially if I am a girl.

But giftedness is not temporary; it is a neurological condition. It is part of my original equipment and will stay with me my entire life.

I may act out because my needs are not being met; this is the case even if I am extremely young. Sometimes I will “shut down” altogether. I may not show teachers what I am capable of, especially if my abilities have drawn unwelcome attention in the past. I may be slow to answer as I mull over many possible answers you may not have anticipated. I may refuse to endure practicing rote materials I’ve known for years. I almost certainly question authority and reject illogical or unjust rules.

I will not socialize with children with whom I have nothing in common just because we have the same birth year. I likely get along better with much older children, or even adults.

But in the correct educational setting, matched to my intellectual age and pace, with true intellectual peers, nearly all of my challenging behaviors vanish. Contrary to what you may have been told, I will benefit intellectually, socially and emotionally from acceleration, especially if the older class is prepared for my arrival.

If my parents are advocating for me, is very unlikely they are pushing me to achieve. Instead, they are trying to find ways to meet my needs. My giftedness, even if profound, is not the result of my working hard (but my family and educators can and should help me learn to do so).

What you can do:

Educate yourself about the top myths about giftedness and gifted education. (Resources are listed on [our website](#).) Know that one of my greatest challenges in childhood will be coping with my understanding of how different I am from my age-mates, and even from other gifted children. Finding ways to include me daily with true intellectual peers is the surest way to help me.

Understand that my giftedness does not imply that I work hard; nor does it imply that my parents are pushing or “hothousing” me. It is who I am, and I am dragging my parents along for the ride.

If you seek to measure my abilities, understand the ramifications of ceiling effect for gifted children, especially those who are highly, exceptionally, or profoundly gifted. Take my parents’ account of my giftedness seriously; research shows that parents are the most accurate predictors of the level of their children’s giftedness, particularly for highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted children.

## **I am . . . incredibly unique.**

...even among other gifted children. My abilities may differ from other gifted kids. I may be lousy at math, but years ahead in reading. I may be incredibly talented in math, but after years of not being challenged in school, I may have very poor work habits and may have lost my innate love of learning. My advanced potential may lie in non-academic areas, or areas that schools don’t always measure well, like pattern-spotting, leadership skills, emotional precociousness, or the arts.

The further along the bell curve I am (see chart), the more likely it is that you have never encountered a student like me before.

My IQ is	Then I am	Kids like me occur
145-160 on WISC-IV w/ extended norms (3-4 S.D. from the mean)	Highly Gifted (HG)	1:1,000 - 1:10,000
160-174 on WISC-IV w/ extended norms (5-6 S.D. from the mean)	Exceptionally Gifted (EG)	1:10,000 - 1:1 million
175+ on WISC-IV w/ extended norms (6+ S.D. from the mean)	Profoundly Gifted (PG)	Fewer than 1:1 million

Adapted from: <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/underserved.htm>

What you can do:

- Educate yourself about how unique gifted children are even from one another.
- Get to know me. I am unique!

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