

## Getting Started – Part 1: Set Your Terms

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There are a lot of different identification terms used in different contexts throughout the gifted and neurodivergent communities. Some terms or identification labels may resonate with or reflect the experiences of you and your child more than others.

This section is meant to help you define your terms in your own words. It is not uncommon for parents and educators to have different understandings and associations with the same term. Getting clear on your terms and what they mean for your specific child and their specific experiences can help to clarify your advocacy work.

### How We Define Terms

As an organization, the Davidson Institute serves profoundly gifted young people 18 and under. We define profoundly gifted students are those who score in the 99.9<sup>th</sup> percentile on intelligence and achievement tests. Profoundly gifted students who have diagnoses other than giftedness are often considered twice-exceptional. For over twenty years, we have worked to support profoundly gifted and twice-exceptional students and their families as they navigate academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development.

Over the last few decades, the fields of education, giftedness, and neurodivergence have grown and evolved in exciting and, at times, challenging new ways. As these fields have grown and changed, identification labels have also changed. Some Young Scholar families feel comfortable with the terms PG and 2e. Sometimes, we work with families who prefer terms like differently wired, neurodivergent, or gifted to describe the differences in the ways in which their child experiences the world.

### Who Should You Tell About Your Child's Giftedness?

Many parents ask the Family Services team what they should say about their child's giftedness, whether when working with a school, talking to other parents, or parenting their own child. What are the right words to say?

One suggestion we share is to tailor your conversations based on the situation and need. What does this person need to know about your child's giftedness in order to support them?

For example:

- If you have a supportive school, perhaps you talk through your child's test scores and any diagnoses may be discussed in a testing report.
- If your school is less supportive, perhaps you pick and choose what you share about your child's profile, based on the supports and resources the school is able to provide.
- With a parent on the soccer field who you don't know very well, perhaps you more specifically talk about the behaviors or interests your child has, without mention of giftedness.
- With a parent you are closer with, maybe you do share details of your child's giftedness or diagnoses.

As with any other detail of your and your family's life, the personal details you share will depend on your relation to that person, the circumstances, and your and your child's level of comfort.

## What Should You Say About Your Child’s Giftedness?

Once you decide who you want to talk about your child’s giftedness, it may be hard to know what to say. The good news is that there are no “right words”! Maybe that seems like bad news at first. It is always easier to say something when you know exactly what to say. However, this is still good news, because it lets you, your child, and your family decide what is best for you—which terms resonate with you, which terms don’t resonate with you, and which terms you’re not quite sure about.

Understandings of ourselves change overtime. Understandings of giftedness and neurodivergence are ever-evolving, so it makes sense that the relationship you and your child have with these identities would change too.

An identity label helps others better understand who we are. However—and, arguably, more importantly—identity labels can also help us make sense of how we understand ourselves and how we navigate the world. Getting a new diagnosis for your child can be overwhelming, as it can reveal new information that you weren’t expecting. It is normal to need time to process a diagnosis and what that means for you, your child, and your family. Taking time to process—whatever that looks like for you—is normal. If you receive an unexpected diagnosis—or even an expected one—it is ok to talk that through with your tester and ask for resources that might help you determine next steps as you work to support your child. As we said, identity labels can help folks navigate the world. When a new label is introduced, it understandably can take time to figure out how it fits into your journey.

Still, it is important to remember, regardless of diagnoses, your child is still your child—the same child you’ve loved and taken care of for years. A diagnosis of profoundly gifted or twice-exceptional just means that you know a bit more about how your child’s body and brain are working. They are the same person. You just have more information about them and how they experience the world.

## Finding Your Terms

Below are some prompts to help you think about the terms that best describe your child right now. Remember, as your child grows and develops, these terms may also grow and evolve. That’s ok. Start by focusing on describing your child in this stage of their life.

Feel free to jot down your answers and any thoughts that pop up as you consider the prompt.

### What are five words you’d use to describe your child?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

*Feeling stuck or unsure? Try looking through photos of your child at various ages. What words come to mind? Still struggling to find the right words? Check out [“Is My Child Gifted?”](#) by the Davidson Institute for a little inspiration.*

**What are five words you'd use to describe your child's giftedness?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

*Feeling stuck or unsure? Check out "[Gifted Traits and Characteristics](#)" by the Davidson Institute for a little inspiration.*

**Is your child twice-exceptional? If so, what are five words that you'd use to describe your child's other diagnoses or exceptionalities?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

*Feeling stuck or unsure? Check out the book [Differently Wired](#) or the website [TiLT Parenting](#), both by Debbie Reber, for a little inspiration.*

Now that you've come up with some terms that describe your child, their giftedness, and their exceptionalities, you have a bit more language to describe your child and their profile. This is an important first step in advocacy.

### **Understanding Your Non-Negotiables**

Along these same lines, it is also important to consider what your non-negotiables will be as you embark of your advocacy journey. A non-negotiable is a family or individual value that you use to guide many of life's complicated decisions. While values are often broad terms—such as security, education, loyalty, and connections—a non-negotiable may be a concrete activity that exemplifies a value. For example, if a broad value is "Family," then a non-negotiable might be one-hour of distraction-free family time per day.

Setting non-negotiables is a values-based approach to structuring our lives. Therefore, before beginning to set and work on advocacy goals, it can be beneficial to know what is a must, a non-negotiable for you, your child, and your family. Once you name your non-negotiables, you'll be able to more confidently navigate challenging, stressful advocacy situations, as you'll have your well-defined values and priorities to guide you.

### **How Do You Decide What Is Non-Negotiable?**

1. **Identify some personal truths.** Some people know what their core values are instantly, and some of us maybe have not dedicated time to naming them. There are many ways people identify their values. There are [online value inventories](#) or [values lists and](#)

exercises. You can also think about your own life: Who are the people you admire, and what it is about them that you admire? When were you presented with a difficult choice, and why did you end up with the decision that you made? What is one thing you would love to be doing but haven't been able to fit into your schedule?

2. **Share your values with the members in your family.** Plan a family meeting where you can come together and name around five of your values. How many were shared between multiple family members? Were there any unique or surprising values named from other members? Decide which values will be shared by the family and which will be individual. These values will serve as a base for determining your non-negotiables. Some members may share similar values, such as Creativity, which would lend itself to being a family-shared non-negotiable. Some members may have divergent values; that's to be expected, and those can be incorporated as individual non-negotiables for each person.
3. **Create a list of activities that fall under your values.** These will become your non-negotiables. School, work, and extracurriculars usually do a lot of this legwork for us by providing different opportunities to translate values into actions or goals. Without that, we may need to dig deep and think of practical ways we can bring these values into our lives now. Going with the example above, if multiple members in a family value Creativity, then you can brainstorm activities that line-up with this value, like imaginative play time, learning about famous artworks, or even cake decorating. If the value is individual, you can write down ways you like to express this value in your life or things you wish you were doing more of that fall under this value. These items become non-negotiable because they should be the activities that guide your life and give it meaning. For example, choosing Financial Security as a core value may mean that you have a goal like saving \$100 every month. This goal will be non-negotiable barring significance circumstances and may affect other decisions like foregoing buying new clothes for a few months. This list evolves through time, so there is no need to create an exhaustive list of non-negotiables on the first go. If you have about five values identified, you can start with one non-negotiable activity or goal for each of those.
4. **Write down your non-negotiables, and post it in a very visible place.** If you were not already writing down the list of your top five values and relate non-negotiables, then do so now. You may want to draw out a creative list of your non-negotiables or simply keep a Word file of them. Next, schedule these into a shared calendar. Plan your family's month with these activities as the core of your routine. It can take time to get into a new routine, so check back in with yourself and your family in six to eight weeks to see how these non-negotiables are working themselves into your new life rhythm.

So much of advocacy is you (the advocating parent) working to help the world understand your child, while also helping your child to understand the world. Defining and clarifying your terms and non-negotiables will help you in this goal. Keeping with the theme of setting and understanding the terms used in advocacy work, in the next part of this section, we will discuss the language you'll likely be presented with when advocating in educational settings.