

Characteristics of Gifted Children

Adapted from Clark (1992) and Seagoe (1974)

Strengths	Possible Problems
Acquires/retains information quickly	Impatient with others; dislikes basic routine.
Inquisitive; searches for significance.	Asks embarrassing questions; excessive in interests.
Intrinsic motivation.	Strong-willed; resists direction.
Enjoys problem-solving; able to conceptualize, questions teaching procedures. abstract, synthesize.	Resists routine practice;
Seeks cause-effect relations.	Dislikes unclear/illogical areas (e.g., traditions or feelings).
Emphasizes truth, equity, and fair play.	Worries about humanitarian concerns.
Seeks to organize things and people.	Constructs complicated rules; often seen as bossy.
Large facile vocabulary; advanced, broad information.	May use words to manipulate; bored with school and age-peers.
High expectations of self and others.	Intolerant, perfectionistic; may become depressed.
Creative/inventive; likes new ways of doing things.	May be seen as disruptive and out of step.
Intense concentration; long attention span and persistence in areas of interest.	Neglects duties or people during periods of focus; resists interruption; stubbornness.
Sensitivity, empathy; desire to be accepted by others.	Sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection.
High energy, alertness, eagerness.	Frustration with inactivity; may be seen as hyperactive.
Independent; prefers individualized work; reliant input; nonconformity.	May reject parent or peer on self.
Diverse interests and abilities; versatility	May appear disorganized or scattered; frustrated over lack of time.
Strong sense of humor.	Peers may misunderstand humor; may become "class clown" for attention.

These characteristics are seldom inherently problematic by themselves. More often, combinations of these characteristics lead to behavior patterns such as:

Uneven Development. Motor skills, especially fine-motor, often lag behind cognitive conceptual abilities, particularly in preschool gifted children (Webb & Kleine, 1993). These children may see in their "mind's eye" what they want to do, construct, or draw; however, motor skills do not allow them to achieve the goal. Intense frustration and emotional outbursts may result.

Peer Relations. As preschoolers and in primary grades, gifted children (particularly highly gifted) attempt to organize people and things. Their search for consistency emphasizes "rules," which they attempt to apply to others. They invent complex games and try to organize their playmates, often prompting resentment in their peers.

Excessive Self-Criticism. The ability to see possibilities and alternatives may imply that youngsters see idealistic images of what they might be, and simultaneously berate themselves because they see how they are falling short of an ideal (Adderholt-Elliott, 1989; Powell & Haden, 1984; Whitmore, 1980).

Perfectionism. The ability to see how one might ideally perform, combined with emotional intensity, leads many gifted children to unrealistically high expectations of themselves. In high ability children, perhaps 15-20% may be hindered significantly by perfectionism at some point in their academic careers, and even later in life.

Avoidance of Risk-Taking. In the same way the gifted youngsters see the possibilities, they also see potential problems in undertaking those activities. Avoidance of potential problems can mean avoidance of risk-taking, and may result in underachievement (Whitmore, 1980).

Multipotentiality. Gifted children often have several advanced capabilities and may be involved in diverse activities to an almost frantic degree. Though seldom a problem for the child, this may create problems for the family, as well as quandaries when decisions must be about career selection (Kerr, 1985; 1991).

Excerpted from *Nurturing Social-Emotional Development of Gifted Children* (James T. Webb, 1994)

