Parent Primer:



An A to Z Guide About Being Gifted

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Dear Parents,

Welcome to the world of Gifted Education! Once your child has been identified as gifted, a myriad of questions arise. Hopefully, this handbook will help with some of those questions.

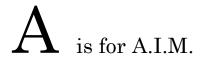
As this handbook was compiled, the focus was on some of the most frequently asked questions about what being gifted means to a child and their parents. Some topics deal specifically with characteristics of gifted children, others with parenting issues. This primer is not meant to contain all the answers, but is more of an overview of the common topics that parents seem to wonder about in conjunction with the education and raising of a gifted child. Many of the experts in the field have been relied upon as resources for these topics.

Most of the topics covered have further information available if you are interested. There are good books on the market which can develop your knowledge. The gifted education department also has a collection of articles that deal with some of the topics in this handbook. Those topics that have corresponding articles are listed at the end of the Primer. You may request a copy of the article(s) if you wish. We would welcome any reading you come across to add to the collection. Our goal is to keep you informed with current and topical information.

We look forward to educating your child and getting to know all of you.

Sincerely,

Nancy Stream Gifted Education Coordinator





A.I.M. is the name Millburn has given to its gifted program. The acronym stands for "Appropriate Instruction at Millburn". The overall goal of the A.I.M. program is to provide an education that fits the needs of gifted children.

Currently, the A.I.M. program has three full time teachers and one half time teacher, one of whom also serves as the coordinator for gifted education. The teachers are: Nancy Stream – coordinator (847-356-8331, ext. 4916), Suzanne Dekorsi (847-245-1600, ext. 3698), Mary Grom (847-245-1600, ext. 4796), and Gail Sinkus (847-356-8331, ext. 4854). Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Besides the classroom experiences we provide for gifted children, we also have an A.I.M. Parent Group. This forum allows parents who have gifted children to come together three to four times a year to learn about gifted education, ask questions, and get to know one another. Information regarding the meetings will come home via reminder notes from your child, be posted on the school calendars, and be posted on Mrs. Stream's website. We also send home an "A.I.M. Focus Sheet" in your child's report card four times a year. This communication covers the units of study, and study and work habits.



B is for Boundless Creativity

Having a boundless need to create can be a sign of giftedness. Many gifted children create in the obvious ways through art, music, drama, and writing. However, creativity can be displayed through other avenues. For example, in mathematics when a child is able to come up with unusual solutions to problems, that's creativity. Or when a child uses puns and word play in conversations, that's creativity. Or when a child asks lots of questions that seem to cover every aspect of a certain topic, that's creativity.

As parents, provide your child with encouragement to create. Sometimes that means providing materials to make things: art supplies, paper, Lego's, display space, etc. Other times it means answering questions, or sharing funny wordplays with your child. It may mean signing them up for lessons to pursue their passion(s). You may find that this is a chance for you to pursue your creativity, too!

As Judy Galbraith, the author of <u>You Know Your Child Is</u> <u>Gifted When...</u>, says, "Encourage and support your child's creativity. A child with an active, vivid imagination is a joy. Creative kids have endless energy for the things they love to do." One thing to watch is if fantasy crosses over into reality. Kids need to know that there are times you need to hear the truth, not a story.



C is for Characteristics

Although agreeing upon a definition of what giftedness is can be difficult, there is agreement about certain characteristics gifted individuals possess. A gifted child will not have all the following characteristics, but will possess several that make gifted learners different from others.

Intellectual Characteristics:

Curiosity...exceptional reasoning ability...rapid learning rate...facility with abstraction...complex thought processes...vivid imagination...early moral concern...keen sense of justice...passion for learning... powers of concentration...creative...analytical...reflective.

Personality Characteristics:

Insightful...need to understand...need for mental stimulation...need for precision/logic...excellent sense of humor... perfectionism...sensitive/empathetic...intense... perseverance...nonconformity...acute self-awareness... questioning of rules and authority...tendency toward introversion.

Source: Dr. Linda Silverman

D is for Development

One challenge for parents of gifted children is the fact that gifted children go through the same stages of development as other children, but in a different way.

As Carol Strip explains it, "One part of the child—the cognitive, or thinking, ability—is 'older' than the other parts of the personality. This situation is called 'asynchronous development' because the child's intellect is out of 'sync' with his less developed emotional, social (and sometimes physical) abilities."

Being 'out of sync' can make life difficult at times. Parents, teachers, and other adults can make the mistake of treating the child according to their intellectual ability, forgetting that the child is indeed still six or eight or ten. For the child, making friends can be tough. If you think like a fifth grader, but you are only six physically and emotionally, how do you fit in with your peer group?

Keeping this in mind as you parent can be helpful. Gifted kids are still kids with little life experience to go along with their often wise-beyond-their years outlook. As their guide, they still need your input, parameters, and mediation skills.



E is for Extraversion and introversion

Extraversion and introversion has to do with how your child re-energizes. Many gifted children tend to be introverts. What do these terms mean?

Extraverts are the children who re-energize by being with other people. They need to talk through their ideas with others to process their thinking. Extraverts prefer to work with groups of two or more when they can. These are the children who run into the house at the end of the day and tell you all about their day from start to finish. American schools are set up to encourage extraverts.

Introverts are the children who re-energize by being alone. They need time apart to process their thinking. They like to stand apart and observe before joining. They need time to reflect before making a decision. These are the children who come home from school, and hole up for awhile in their room, or some other special place, before answering your questions or joining the family. American society is set up to change these kids with constant suggestions to help them join in or change their style.

As a parent, you can help your child understand their style. Give an introvert some time alone during a family gathering, or give them time to read in their room when they get home from school. Help extraverts find someone with whom to talk through their ideas. Letting teachers know your child's preference is useful, too.



$\mathbf{F}_{ ext{is for Friendships}}$

All of us want our children to have friends. We know that relationships are part of life, and a good friend can be crucial. For gifted children, making friends can be difficult as finding their real peers may not be as easy as asking the kid who sits in the desk next to them over to play. Children the same age may not be as good a fit as the older child who has the same interests and passions.

Many people feel that gifted children are social misfits. The fact is that it is often it's just who people try to make them fit with that doesn't work. As adults, we have the choice of making friends with people who like the things we do, have similar values, and who are often of similar intellectual background, no matter what the age. Children are asked to be friends with those who are in their same grade, so age becomes the deciding factor, not interests and passions.

It can be helpful for your child to make friends with other children in gifted programs, and often these children do gravitate toward one another. The activities they are involved in outside of school can also lead to friendships based on shared interests. Encourage your child to be friends with children who are both younger and older.



G is for Gender

Gifted girls start school full of curiosity and with an eagerness to learn, but can "begin a gradual retreat from their talents and lose interest in school," as they enter adolescence. Joan Franklin Smutney further observes, "...in school, the desire for friends, a disinclination to stand out, fear of ridicule, along with the need for acceptance, often impel gifted girls to make their abilities appear ordinary or even nonexistent." Being aware of this, if you are parents of girls, can help you encourage your daughters to rely less on appearance and more on valuing shared interests and intelligence. Help them feel at ease with their differences.

Boys can have difficulties, also. Miraca Gross, an Australian professor of gifted education, says, "Boys may perform poorly at school not because they are not motivated, but because they are intent on maintaining their standing in a peer group that regards academic achievement as 'uncool'. Boys are generally socialized to be able to handle anything they try, never or rarely show weakness, and to be in control." Boys can easily pick up on the messages society sends. Providing opportunities for boys to have mentors, and keeping communication open between you and your boys is important.



$oldsymbol{H}_{ ext{is for Humor}}$

Many gifted children have a delightful sense of humor. They like jokes, puns, and word plays. They often get their parents or teachers jokes that other students may not. Laughter, of course, adds to the emotional well-being of the child and your family. It can help to reduce stress which is good for physical health. For gifted children, "being funny" can help lead to feeling accepted by other children. If your child tends to be a perfectionist, learning to laugh at himself and mistakes he makes, can be crucial.

Humor, of course, can also lead to trouble! Sometimes other kids don't get the jokes and subtle word plays a gifted child delights in. Gifted students can also find humor in places others don't which can lead to misunderstandings. Using humor to entertain a class can be disruptive. Helping your child to see when and why humor is sometimes appropriate and sometimes inappropriate is important.

However, that being said, delight and share in the humor found in your world. Share funny reading material. Laugh at your child's jokes. Watch comedies together. See the fun side of life through your child's eyes.



I is for Intensity

Intensity has to do with focus and passion! It's perseverance and persistence! It can be wonderful and troublesome! Gifted children often have intensity. Not about everything, but definitely about what they are passionate about. Intensity is often a characteristic that sets them apart from other children.

Gifted children can be on a "constant, intense quest to learn more" (Strip). This may be a quest about dinosaurs, or polynomial equations, baseball or utopias. They may latch on to a lifetime passion at an early age, or find out all they want to know about a topic in September, and move on to something new by October (of which they are equally as passionate and intense about!) They may be collectors of things that interest them. Their intensity can be exhilarating, but it can also be exhausting. Their intensity can lead to immersion to the extent of ignoring other important things, or your call for dinner. Their persistence can shut out other people, or cause tunnel vision that excludes all that doesn't interest them.

The trick is finding ways to support your child's intensity, but at the same time maintaining balance and a reasonable approach to daily life. "Focus, passion, and intensity are not character flaws. They're what drive us to do our best, reach our goals, and succeed in life." (Galbraith)



J is for Juggling and balancing

We all have to juggle and balance our wants and needs every day. Helping your gifted child learn do so is important.

Gifted children often like to follow their passions. They often have talents that lead them to music, dance, art, drama, science explorations, leadership positions, and the expectation to maintain good grades. Providing challenges and new learning experiences is good. Over extending them causes stress (not to mention the amount of chauffeuring you would need to do!).

Helping gifted children learn to prioritize and set goals can be helpful. Teach them how to weigh pros and cons when choosing to take on a new activity. Help them realize what needs to be done first before dashing off to the next activity.

Also, keep in mind the fact that many gifted children are introverts, which doesn't mean they don't want to join activities or take on new challenges. What it can mean is that introverts need time to think about and maybe preview a new activity. They may choose to watch before joining.



K is for Kudos to parents

Congratulations for being a parent! Parenting a gifted child is wonderful, but once you find out your child is gifted, questions arise.

As it is often pointed out, babies are born without a manual explaining how to raise them! Parenting gifted children also has no manual, however, there is information and support available. There are articles and books available to give you background and answer your questions. There are people you can talk to: teachers, gifted coordinators, other parents of gifted children, and experts associated with various gifted organizations. (See W for websites and resources.)

Some helpful hints from Gina Ginsberg-Riggs are:

^{*}your child is a child first and gifted second

^{*}don't compare your gifted child to other children

^{*}listen to your gifted child

^{*}support your gifted child in his efforts

^{*}discipline is necessary for harmonious family life

^{*}don't expect your gifted child to be gifted all the time

^{*}ENJOY!



L is for Leadership

Many gifted children have a natural need and desire to take on leadership roles. Helping your child develop their leadership potential may be one area you wish to explore.

Leadership involves communication, problem-solving, personal skills, planning skills, decision making, and group dynamics. All of these skills can be important during school years, but also for adult life. Helping your child realize that leaders are found in all walks of life can expand their ideas of who leaders are. Encouraging responsibility from an early age is important for developing leadership skills. Chores, planning family dinners or events, taking care of a pet are beneficial. Also, allowing choice is important. Choice can start small with two things to decide between. As your child grows, expanding their choices and presenting them with good ways to make choices expands their skills for eventual leadership. Discussing and studying leaders can help your child figure out what skills and characteristics make a leader.

As your child enters middle school and high school there are more arenas available for leadership. School and extra-curricular activities provide for leadership positions. Also, there are leadership programs available during the summer if you choose to pursue this avenue.



M is for Mentors

How can a mentor help your gifted child? A mentor can provide learning opportunities that expand learning, outside of school. Mentors can also provide a way for older students to explore a career or field of interest.

A mentor can be anyone that has the interest and expertise your child is looking for. A mentor can provide a level of understanding that isn't provided by home or school. A mentorship can last as short as a day. For instance, a student could shadow an architect for a day. Or a mentorship might last several years and become a highly important part of your child's life.

How you find a mentor depends on what you are looking for. Professional groups can be contacted to see if there is someone your child can shadow for a day. Teachers of particular subjects may know someone in their field who could expose your child to new ideas. Other parents may have a friend or relative who fits the bill. Networking with other parents of gifted children may turn up a match. The National Mentoring Partnership (www.mentoring.org) might help you find a connection, also.

Just keep in mind, that a mentor can provide a way to meet the needs of your child. It is one more way to provide support for your child.



N is for NAGC and IAGC

Two organizations to be aware of are the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (IAGC). Both organizations serve as resources and advocates for gifted education. The Illinois Associated for Gifted Children is an affiliate of NAGC, and provides specific information about gifted education in Illinois.

You are welcome to join either or both organizations. If you join NAGC, you will receive their magazine, *Parenting for High Potential*, as part of your membership. Both organizations also hold yearly conventions and devote a portion of their programs to parents.

However, you are welcome to browse their websites whether you are a member or not. If you are interested in finding out more about gifted children and gifted education, these sites can be a good place to start. Links are given to help you further your search. Here are their addresses:

NAGC IAGC

www.nagc.org www.iagc.org



O is for Overexcitabilities

The Polish psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski developed the idea of overexcitabilities. He felt that some of his high ability patients not only had great intensity and sensitivities, but that they had a highly evolved need to become individuals. Dabrowski believed that these intensities added to an individual's potential for growth. The characteristics of gifted children often showcase intensity. Learning about the Dabrowski's ideas can help you cope, nurture, and guide your child. There are five areas of sensitivity and overexcitability:

Psychomotor: excess energy, drive, enthusiasm and restlessness, often marked with compulsive talking.

Intellectual: enjoyment of questioning and discovery, curiosity, love ideas and theoretical analysis.

Imaginational: highly creative, vivid imagery, love of fantasy, inventive, may have mixing of truth and fiction.

Sensual: highly alert to sensual experience, take pleasure in seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing.

Emotional: intense positive and negative feelings, highly empathetic, may be shy, fearful and anxious.

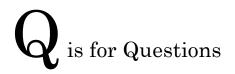
Keep in mind that these children are "wired" this way, and can't help that they have these extreme sensitivities. Sometimes they feel that they are very different from those around them and that there is something wrong with them. They can withdraw, or try to hide their true selves and be more "normal".



P is for Perfectionism

"Gifted kids seem especially prone to perfectionism."
(Galbraith, J.) Perfectionism is never a good thing. It can hold children back from trying something new. It can keep them from finishing work or projects. It can keep them from feeling successful. Their expectations for themselves can be so high that they suffer emotionally. Even a child, who seems to be an underachiever, can be masking perfectionism. Why take a risk to do something if you might fail?

Your perfectionist needs to know that you will stand by her no matter what. Expectations, yours and hers, need to be realistic. Sometimes as parents we send messages about perfectionism without even realizing it. Saying, "Wow! You got a B+. What did you do wrong to not get the A?" still sends the message that the A was expected. Focus instead on new things she learned. Make sure she knows that mistakes are the way we learn. When she stumbles and struggles a little bit, that is when learning is taking place. Celebrate that! Talking to your child about things that may go wrong when she is starting something new, explaining that that is normal, and helping her cope with those initial failures is helpful. We all make mistakes! Finally, involving your child in activities that do not revolve around grades or judging is healthy.









When thinking about this topic, two things come to mind. The first is all the questions your child asks you. The second is how you can use questions to help your child develop thinking skills.

Gifted children have lots of questions. When checking the index of You Know Your Child Is Gifted When..., under Q it states: "Questions, endless. See Curiosity, insatiable!" Curiosity and the need for deeper understanding lead to all the questions gifted kids ask. Sometimes you don't have the answers. Not knowing gives you the opportunity to help develop research skills! You may find you create a research library within your own home.

The type of questions you ask your child will help develop their thinking skills. Questions that encourage higherlevel thinking are often broader and thought-provoking. They tend to guide rather than control thinking. Some examples that would lend themselves to home would be:

*How would you solve this problem?
*How do you know?
*Tell me more. Can you convince me?
*How did you get that answer?
*How would you explain to how you did this?
*How is like?
*How many ways can you come up with?
*How would this look to a?



${f R}$ is for Reading and bibliotherapy

A gifted reader possesses several qualities. They have a voracious appetite for books and often have more than one book going at a time. They easily handle complex language, use what they already know, and automatically use the skills they have to understand the material. One concern of parents is the fact that since a gifted reader has vocabulary, understanding, and skills beyond their age, the books they are capable of reading, may be beyond the emotional and content level a parent is comfortable with. There are good book lists available, librarians to recommend, and teachers to query! The classics are often rich in language and content, without being objectionable. On the other hand, many parents come to terms with some content at an earlier age for gifted children, since they do have a worldly understanding beyond their chronological age. Pre-reading material, or reading books at the same time can help you discuss anything you feel is sensitive with your child.

Books and reading can also be used to help a gifted child understand themselves and their world a little more fully. Providing literature that features gifted characters can be beneficial. If a gifted student can identify with a character, or a problem a gifted character is facing in the story, it can help them understand their own issues.

"We read to know we're not alone." ~C.S. Lewis



S is for Social-emotional needs

Several specific social-emotional needs have been covered in this handbook. However, those familiar with gifted students are aware that beyond academic needs, there are social-emotional needs that are important to discuss with their students.

According to Dr. Ellen D. Fielder some of these needs include:

- *understanding the meaning of giftedness
- *understanding the attitudes of others toward the gifted, including parents and teachers
- *dealing with feelings of "differentness"
- *coping with heightened sensitivities
- *reconciling deeply-felt concerns about morality and justice
- *resolving discrepancies between social and academic selfconcept
- *allowing children to be children ,rather than being treated as small adults
- *learning interpersonal skills and having satisfying social relationships
- *setting and evaluating realistic goals
- *recognizing and dealing with stress
- *having appropriate expectations for themselves and others

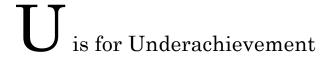
Source: Handout, Dr. Ellen D. Fiedler



is for Teachers

Teachers will be an integral part of your child's life for many years. What makes a good teacher for a gifted child?

- 1. Background in the characteristics and methods for teaching gifted children.
- 2. Acceptance and advocate of gifted children.
- 3. Capability to modify the curriculum.
- 4. Willingness to be a guide and facilitator to lead children toward learning.
- 5. Creative and resourceful.
- 6. Flexible and open-minded.
- 7. A sense of humor.
- 8. Competent in subject matter they are teaching.
- 9. Stamina.
- 10. A genuine interest and passion for gifted children.





Underachievement occurs when a high ability student reaches a point where "their enthusiasm for learning and satisfactory school performance change." (Rimm, S.) An underachiever is a student who may "forget" to do homework, blame others for poor achievement, be disorganized, show little interest in school, and have slipping grades.

Reasons for underachieving stem from both home and school. According to Dr. Rimm, school causes may include: peer pressure, lack of challenge, conflicts with teachers, unidentified learning disabilities, too much or too little competition, and moving to a school with different expectations. Home causes may include: overprotectiveness, sibling rivalry, conflict between parents in expectations for their child, overempowerment, too much or too little attention, an anti-work attitude or overemphasis on work, and feelings of pressure.

To deal with underachievement, be sure to develop a partnership between home and school. Providing the child with some choice in their learning can help. Mentors can be helpful. Encouraging intrinsic motivation is important. The more the child has "ownership" of their learning, the more inclined they are to do well. Avoid labels and confrontations. They only build the pressure a child may feel.



V is for Valuing and accepting

Valuing and accepting your gifted child for who they are is probably one of the most important gifts you can give your child. When you understand something about gifted children and their characteristics, you are learning more about accepting your gifted child.

Finding out your child is gifted can bring a feeling of pride, but also fears. Will you be able to provide your child with the opportunities and learning necessary? Will your child have friends? Will your child be teased? As Dr. Carol Strip points out, "It's paradoxical, but also true, that when gifted children are embraced for being who they are, they gain greater self-confidence, fit in better with classmates, participate in more extra-curricular activities, and are more likely to exercise leadership than if their parents and teachers are constantly trying to 'help' them become more like their classmates." She also says that the people who have influenced gifted children the most are those who have helped them "believe in themselves, support what they attempt, and give the focused attention."

Hopefully, in school you will also find those who value and accept your child. Building partnerships based on trust and respect will only benefit your child.



W is for Web sites

Below are some websites to help you explore gifted children and gifted education:

American Association for Gifted Children www.aagc.org/index.html

Genius Denied www.geniusdenied.org

GT World www.gtworld.org/

Hoagies Gifted Education Page www.hoagiesgifted.org

Illinois Association for Gifted Children www.iagcgifted.org

National Association for Gifted Children www.nagc.org

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented www.gifted.uconn.edu/

YAHOO Resources for/about Gifted Youth K-12 www.yahoo.com/text/education/k_12/Gifted_Youth



X is for eXamining the future

It seems like with gifted learners, you are always looking ahead at what comes next. They learn so rapidly, that there is a need to focus on the future. The same is true about looking ahead to high school and college. Being familiar with high school offerings, whether it is Advanced Placement (AP) classes or honors programs, has to start in early in middle school, and sometimes before that if a child is greatly accelerated. Be sure to keep the paperwork that shows what your child took in middle school, so that high schools have no issue with placing your child properly. There are often opportunities to take the SAT or ACT in middle school, which provides a testing experience where there is a high ceiling to document your child's ability. Save those scores, also, as evidence for placing your child.

Making sure your child has opportunities to learn self-awareness through middle and high school is important. The more a child understands himself, the easier it is to set goals, and choose a path for the future. A good reference for college planning is *College Planning For Gifted Students* by Sandra Berger.

Students need to understand that as they plan for high school and college, they are really planning for their future. How can they make their dreams and goals become a reality? Help them look ahead early and understand their choices.



Y is for Your communication style

Communicating with teachers as your child advances through school will be crucial. As parents, you know things about your child that teachers don't know. It can be important to share that information if it affects a student's learning or behavior. As parents of gifted children, you may be in a position to advocate for your child's educational needs. How you choose to approach the communication with a teacher is up to you. However, some tips for approaching a teacher or school are:

- 1. Gather information. Make sure you have talked to your child about the situation. Know something about the school and what they offer. Have records handy that you may need. Make an appointment.
- 2. Know before you go what you would like the teacher or school to do about a given situation. This doesn't mean a hard line stand, but reasonable expectations and parameters with which you are comfortable. Be prepared to offer suggestions or solutions.
- 3. Approach a teacher first if there is a classroom problem. Just like other business places, there is a "chain of command". Also, a teacher will know your child in the classroom better than an administrator will. They will often be the ones who implement changes, so having a shared discussion with mutual outcomes benefits your child.



Z is for Zipping into advocacy

As you raise your child and learn more about gifted education, there will come times when advocacy is needed. Advocacy may be on a personal level where you are advocating for your own child's needs. On a broader level, there is advocacy for gifted children and gifted education as a whole. Both arenas are important.

Advocating for your child individually requires communication skills, knowledge, persistence, and patience. Your child deserves to have their needs met within reasonable boundaries. Teaching your child to advocate for herself is crucial. As parents, you cannot always be there when your child needs a more challenging assignment, or desires to do an independent study. Children need to learn to respectfully approach teachers, explain what they already know, and propose what they would like to do to expand their learning.

Consider advocating on a broader level, too. Join the state or national organizations. Let your legislators know that you care about gifted education. Become involved in parent groups. Anything you do to heighten awareness of who our gifted children are, and what they need, will benefit your child individually.

Additional articles are available for the following topics:

- **B**: Boundless Creativity
- C: Characteristics
- D: Development
- E: Extroversion and introversion
- F: Friendships
- G: Gender
- J: Juggling and balancing
- K: Kudos for parents (parenting)
- L: Leadership
- M: Mentors
- P: Perfectionism
- R: Reading and bibliotherapy
- S: Social/emotional needs
- T: Teachers
- U: Underachievement
- V: Valuing and accepting
- X: Examining the future
- Z: Zipping into advocacy

To request an article, contact the gifted coordinator.

${ m R}_{ m esources}$

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