Meeting Your Child’s Emotional Needs

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WHAT IS A “GIFTED STUDENT?”

* Recognized definition from field of gifted education:

“Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.”

The Columbus Group, 1991
Cited by Martha Morelock, “Giftedness: The View from Within”
Asynchronous Development...

Image Source: Andrew S. Mahoney

Why might their developmental needs be different?

- Gifted individuals experience the world from a different perspective, with **qualitative** differences:
  - intensities, sensitivities, idealism, perceptiveness, overexcitabilities, asynchrony, complexity, introversion, perfectionism, and moral concerns (Silverman, 2006).

- Can render gifted children and adolescents particularly vulnerable along a number of social and emotional domains
  - Require attention from parents, teachers, and counselors for optimal development to occur.
Middle School

- Developmental Tasks for all at this stage...
  - Identity Development & Self-Understanding – Who am I and how do I fit with those around me?

“Mr. Wickers called me ‘gifted’ in front of the whole class. I’m ruined.”

Making Sense of Ourselves...

SPICES: Facets of the Self

Social relates to interpersonal connections (to others and to community)
Intellectual relates to cognitive abilities
Emotional relates to interpersonal connections; affect
Spiritual relates to meaning and purpose

Physical relates to physical being; the body
Creative relates to imagination

“I don’t think people understand how stressful it is to explain what’s going on in your head when you don’t even understand it yourself.”

Can be a stressful process...
Supporting Healthy Identity Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage in warm, open communication</td>
<td>Emotional support; freedom to explore values /goals</td>
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<td>Initiate discussion that promote high-level thinking at home and at school</td>
<td>Encourages rational and deliberate selection among beliefs and values</td>
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<td>Opportunities to participate in varied extracurricular activities</td>
<td>Allows exploration of real world and areas beyond academics</td>
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<td>Opportunities to talk with mentors and peers who have worked through this stage...</td>
<td>Models identity achievement and how to resolve identity concerns</td>
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Source: Berk, 2011

Types of Gifted Children

*(Betts & Neihart, 1988)*

- **The Successful**
  - Up to 90% of identified gifted students in school programs are this type.

- **The Challenging**
  - Divergently gifted, often not identified in schools.

- **The Underground**
  - Want to hide their giftedness to better fit in with their peers (ex. Middle school girls)

- **The Dropouts**
  - Angry, feel rejected, needs have not been met or have been ignored. May act out &/or be defensive, or may be depressed & withdrawn.

- **The Double-Labeled – 2E**
  - Typically either ignored because perceived as average or referred for remedial assistance

- **The Autonomous Learner**
  - Use the system to create new opportunities.
Stress profiles of gifted children can be affected by:

- Asynchrony of developmental tasks in each area
- Birth order in the family, gender, family constellation...
- Cultural, linguistic, economic background
- Temperament (introversion/extroversion; intensities/sensitivities; optimism/pessimism...)
- Overexcitabilities
- Unique combination of cognitive/affective characteristics of giftedness

Source: Kane, 2011

Particularly challenging for gifted students...

- Unusual emotional depth and intensity
- Idealism and sense of justice
- Advanced level of moral judgment
- Strongly motivated by self-actualization needs
- General sources of anxiety (over which they may have little control): terrorism, natural disasters, exposure to violence, exposure to risky behaviors, death/loss, bullying, discrimination, changing family circumstances, relationships...

Source: Clark, 2008
Situational Stressors...

• Conflict between our values and those of others
• Interpersonal disharmony/dissonance
• Lack of intellectual stimulation or challenge (or too much…)
• Challenges beyond our capability to respond
• Threats to emotional well-being
• Lack of resources to meet tasks
• Time constraints
• Difficulty choosing among equally attractive options...
• Existential stress – idealism, global concerns, need for meaning and purpose

Situational Stressors...

• Setting excessively high standards for ourselves
• Fear of failure/fear of success
• Negative self-talk/self-criticism
• Emotionally loaded beliefs about ourselves
• Beliefs about how others should view us
• Catastrophizing

Source: Fiedler, 2007
How can we help?

- Help them to remember and attend to basic needs...
  - Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep
- Help them to identify and name their stressors...
  - give voice through various means (verbal, written, artistic)
- Connections with others...
- Relaxation techniques/mindfulness
- Help with setting realistic goals
- Humor
- Asking for help – not a weakness but a necessity
- Evaluate the hidden messages you may be conveying
- Model self-acceptance

Help them to explore their own solutions...

Fox Trot

Jason, what are you doing?! Building a model rocket.

Which I will fill with salt and shoot into a cloud,

Thus seeding it for rain.

I asked you to water the lawn! Look, you do things your way, I do them my way!
How can we help?

**7 Things Every Kid Needs to Hear**

1. I Love You
2. I’m Proud of You
3. I’m Sorry
4. I Forgive You
5. I’m Listening
6. This is Your Responsibility
7. You’ve Got What It Takes

- Advocate for them as needed—but also support self-advocacy strategies... they are growing up and we need to let them do so! **
- Reframe perceived negative traits in terms of strengths and potential
- Connect with other gifted parents for additional support and understanding

**As a parent myself I know how hard this can be at times!**

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Questions & Discussion....

~ Carrie Lynn Bailey ~

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“AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE NEED TO KNOW THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE, THAT WE ARE NOT CRAZY OR COMPLETELY OUT OF OUR MINDS; THAT THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO FEEL AS WE DO, LIVE AS WE DO, LOVE AS WE DO, WHO ARE LIKE US.”

BILLY KEL

@interbrain

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When a teacher wants to know if there are any questions, she doesn’t mean any question. She wants to be asked about the thing she’s teaching. So if she’s teaching you about Mexico, don’t ask if “Bubbles” is a good name for a hamster.