

- **Gifted Minds, Complex Lives**
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Gifted Minds Complex Lives

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September 2025

Intros



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Agenda

1	Definitions & Core Principles
2	Understanding Disability in Gifted Populations
3	Identification & Assessment
4	Systemic Barriers
5	Strategies for supporting gifted individuals
6	Case studies
7	Q&A



01

Definitions & Core Principles



Concepts and Definitions of Gifted & Talented

The term gifted consists of natural abilities of an outstanding potential of many kinds that can be converted into talents through outstanding performance, a life-long process. The terms gifted and talented should not be used synonymously.

Gagné (1983, 1985, 2000, 2003)

“the top 1% level in general intellectual ability, as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale or a comparable instrument.”

Terman et al. (1926, p. 43)

Proposed the theory of multiple intelligences (MI), suggesting a domain approach to giftedness. Seven intelligences (linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) were initially identified, and two more (naturalist and existential) were added later. Giftedness can be demonstrated in one or more of these intelligences.

Gardner (1983)

Gifted: having great natural ability; talented: gifted children

Gifted (n.d.). In Merriam Webster's online dictionary

“Giftedness is a great awareness, a greater sensitivity, and a greater ability to understand and transform perceptions into intellectual and emotional experiences.”

Roeper (2000; p.33)

Florida defines gifted students as students who have superior intellectual development and are capable of high performance. Each school district serves gifted students through local plans that provide support.

FLDOE online (2025)

...students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities (Part A, Section 9101(22), pp.544).

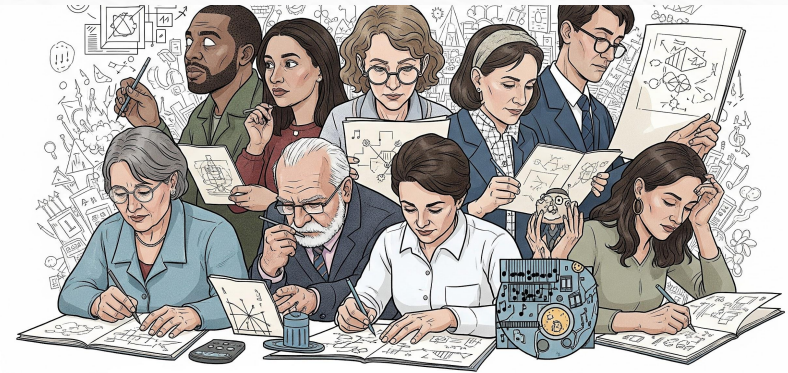
Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (2001)

Renzulli's 3-Ring Conception of Giftedness



Gifted Characteristics

- Facility with abstract symbols
- Early/advanced language skills & memory
- Original, divergent thinking
- Precocious thought and humor
- High moral reasoning & independence of thought
- Emotional intensity & high energy
- Early reading and comprehension
- Logical reasoning, motivation, insights, and advanced interests
- Intellectual curiosity
- Strong observational skills
- Vivid imagination
- Metacognition



(Dai, 2010; Fiedler, 1999; Reis & Renzulli, 2009)



Creativity in Giftedness

- Marked by enthusiasm, curiosity, humor, and varied creative interests (Davis, 2003)
- Involves changing the world to solve problems, enrich experiences, and transform environments (Feldman, 2003)
- Distinct from academic intelligence; often domain-specific (Sternberg et al., 2011)
- Requires flexibility in reasoning, originality, and elaboration of ideas
- Contributes to personal success and societal advancement





Social & Emotional Findings

- **Resilience** linked to traits such as task commitment, verbal ability, and self-understanding (Callahan et al., 2004)
- **Sensitivity and intensity** create a vivid, complex inner world (Daniels & Piechowski, 2008)
- **Social challenges** often stem from mismatched academic/social settings, not from giftedness itself (Robinson, 2008)
- Some may hide giftedness to **fit in**, though this is not typical (Gross, 1993)
- Strong **self-awareness**

Overexcitabilities (OEs)

Psychomotor OEs

- Surplus of energy, almost never tire out
- Constantly in motion, fidgety
- Impulsive, need for action
- Intense drive (can work long hours without tiring as adults)

Sensual OEs

- Heightened awareness of all 5 senses
- Sensitive to food smells, tastes, or textures
- Tactile sensitivity: e.g., cannot bear tags in clothing
- Heightened appreciation of beauty in all its forms (art, nature, objects like jewellery)

Imaginational OEs

- Daydreaming
- Very vivid dreams
- Fear of the unknown
- Love of poetry, music, and drama
- Love of fantasy, magical thinking

Intellectual OEs

- Deep curiosity - go down rabbit holes
- Analytical, theoretical and independent thinking
- Avid reading + love of knowledge

Emotional OEs

- Depression, anxiety, timidity and shyness
- Heightened sense of right and wrong, need for justice
- Extremes of emotion, problems adjusting to change
- Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority

Personality Traits

- MBTI tendencies: introverted, thinking (girls), intuitive, perceiving
- MMPI-A profiles: similar or lower scores on psychopathology compared to peers
- Persistence and strong task commitment
- Perfectionism (more common in girls)
- High empathy, early moral concern, and moral sensitivity
- Idealistic
- Moral concern



(Cross, Cassady, Dixon, & Adams, 2008)

Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD)

Idealistic

Quality is the measure

Takes a moral stance

Calls for higher standards

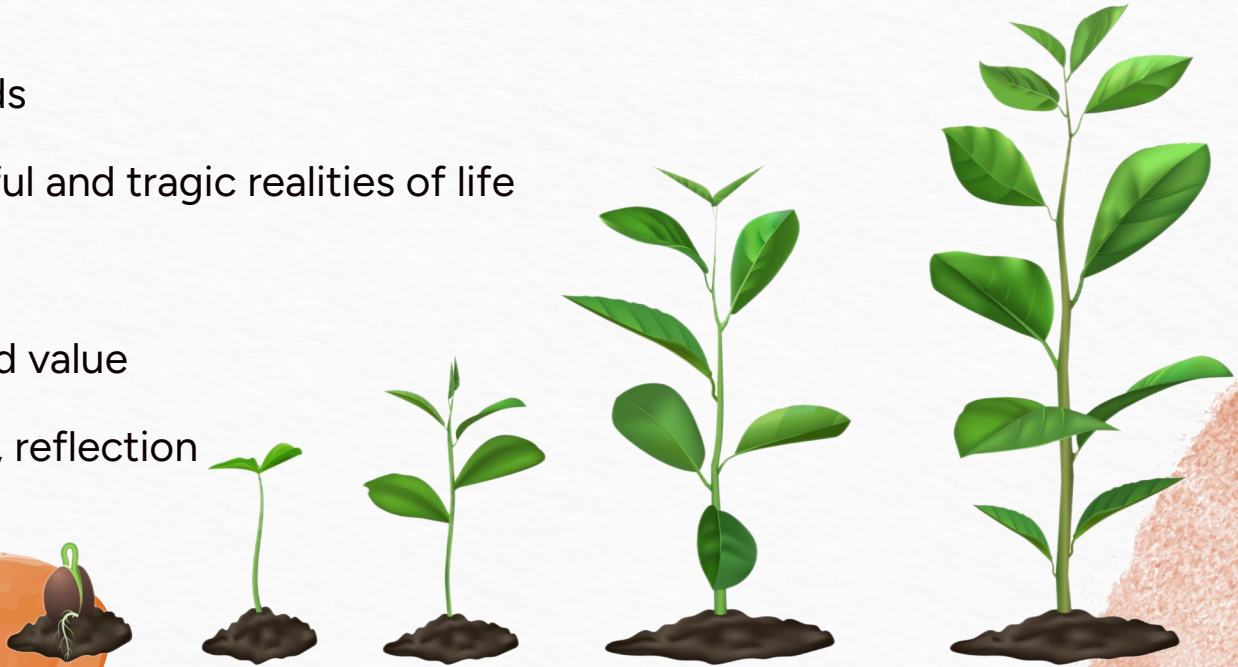
Acknowledges the painful and tragic realities of life

Is based on clear value

Emotion has appreciated value

Conducive to interiority, reflection

(van der Kaaij and Mink, 2009)





Motivation

Gifted children often display higher intrinsic motivation compared to peers



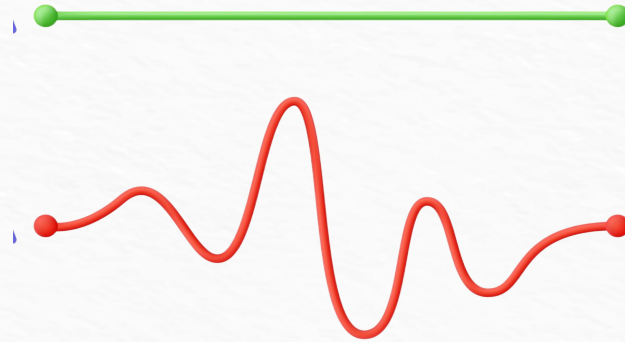
(Davis et al., 2011; Gottfried & Gottfried, 1996, 2004)






Asynchrony

Uneven or out-of-sync development across cognitive, emotional, and social domains (Peterson, 2009)



Characteristics:

- Cognitive abilities often outpace emotional and social maturity
 - May lead to heightened sensitivity, intensity, or frustration
 - Can affect peer relationships and adjustment
- 



02

Understanding Disability in Gifted Populations

Assets & Burdens

Assets	Burdens
Advanced reasoning & creativity	Heightened sensitivity & emotional intensity
Deep empathy & strong moral awareness	Social isolation or asynchrony with peers
Persistence & problem-solving skill	Perfectionism & self-pressure to excel
Curiosity & love of learning	Misunderstood overexcitabilities
Capacity for complex connections across ideas	Risk of depression, anxiety, existential distress

Common Traits

- Asynchronous development: cognitive abilities exceed emotional or social maturity
- Inconsistency: high potential but uneven performance
- Masking: strengths may hide weaknesses (or vice versa)
- Frustration: often aware of their difficulties despite high intellect
- Sensitivity: emotionally intense or reactive to criticism

Emotional & Social Impact

- Difficulty fitting in with age peers
- High frustration due to internal expectations
- Prone to anxiety, perfectionism, or low self-esteem
- Can appear defiant, distracted, or immature
- Often misunderstood by peers and adults



What is “Twice-Exceptional”

Twice-exceptional (2e) individuals are those who:

- Exhibit high intellectual or creative abilities (giftedness)
- Also have one or more disabilities (e.g., ADHD, ASD, dyslexia, anxiety)





**Are 2e learners eligible for
AGP or ESE (sped)?**



Importance of Identification

- Avoid mislabeling or underestimating abilities
- Tailor support plans that balance enrichment and intervention
- Build self-awareness and confidence
- Prevent long-term emotional and academic struggles



Why It's Often Missed

- High IQ may hide underlying challenges
- Disabilities may mask advanced abilities
- Asynchrony is not always visible in testing
- Behaviors are misunderstood as laziness or disrespect



03

Identification & Assessment



General Process

Referral

Typically a referral by a parent or teacher but sometimes it's a self-referral



Purpose

Primary purpose typically AGP or MENSA



Data collection


Screenener or Formal IQ
Other data with less importance



Recommendations

& Placement

Decision is made on supports that could assist individual



**Is Gifted
Identification for
children and
adolescents only?**



Challenges with Identification & Assessment

Identification of gifted students is not an exact science. First, we need an agreed on definition of giftedness.

Process of identification varies by county, state, and programs.

Many people reject the view that giftedness is an exceptionality.

Issues with construct validity



Gifted Evaluations Use Both

Formal tools

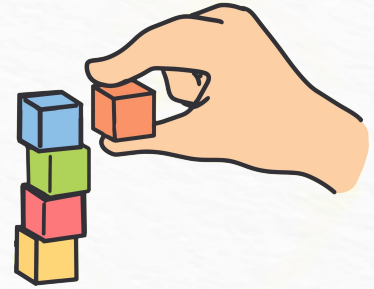
standardized cognitive
individual
group

academic tests

Informal methods

teacher referrals

observations



Standardize measures have received criticism due to cultural and contextual bias
(Gottfredson, 2003).

Best Practices: Multiple Criteria

- Appropriate identification practices should employ a **multiple criteria approach**.
- Evaluation should extend beyond intellectual ability to include:
 - **Motivation (e.g., SMALSI)**
 - **Leadership (e.g., BASC)**
 - **Creativity (e.g., Consensual Assessment Technique [CAT])**
 - **Grit**
 - _____
- This comprehensive approach ensures a **more equitable and accurate recognition** of diverse gifted profiles.

Table 4.4. Examples of Items on the Williams Scales

Observational Topic	Sample characteristic
Fluent	The student who usually has several ideas about something instead of one.
Flexible	The student who shifts and can take another point of view or considers situations differently from others.
Original	The student who enjoys the unusual and dislikes doing things the way everyone else does them.
Elaborate	The student who will want to “jazz up” or embellish upon the work or ideas of others.
Curious/Inquisitive	The student who continually explores books, games, maps, pictures, etc.
Imaginative (Visualize/Dream)	The student who can see things in a picture or drawing that no one else has seen.
Complex	The student who thrives in trying again and again in order to gain success.
Courageous/Risk Taker	The student who is not concerned by disapproval from classmates, teachers, or parents.

Source: Adapted from http://www.hpedsb.on.ca/ec/services/spe/documents/williams_scale.pdf.

Alternative Assessments

Assessments that support a **talent development model** of giftedness (Johnsen, 2003):

- **Performance-based tasks** (e.g., puzzles, auditions)
- **Portfolio reviews** (student work samples)
- **Dynamic assessments** (instruction as a diagnostic tool)
- **Nonverbal measures** show promise for diverse learners but are debated in terms of fairness and scope (Lohman, 2005; Callahan, 2009).
- **DISCOVER** (based on Gardner's multiple intelligences) shows **promise for identifying culturally diverse students** (Sarouphim, 2001).
- **RtI/MTSS** (similar to intervention approaches)

Levels of Giftedness

<i>Level</i>	<i>IQ score</i>	<i>Ratio to total population</i>
Basic	115–129	1:6 to 1:30
Moderate	130–144	1:40 to 1:1000
High	145–159	1:1000 to 1:10,000
Exceptional	160–179	1:10,000 to 1:1 million
Profound	180+	1:1 million+



04

Systemic Barriers



The Underrepresentation of Diverse Individuals

- Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are underrepresented in gifted programs by 50-70%
- Low SES
- English Language Learners (ELLs)
- Cultural diverse lens
- Lower referral rates, less overall recognition



Diverse Groups: Identification & Referral

Teachers/Educators

- Teachers/Educators are **"gatekeepers"** of giftedness
- Children from diverse backgrounds are **underrepresented and under-referred**
 - Cultural competency among educators
 - "Deficit thinking" & Colorblind ideology



Parents/Culture

- Parents are **"first responders"** to giftedness
 - Education/knowledge of giftedness
 - Advocacy
 - Availability to resources
 - Resources of enrichment may be more limited
 - Cultural behaviors vs in-class behaviors

(Milner & Ford, 2007)

Access to Education: Preschool (Pre-K)

- Preschool gifted programs
 - **Benefits** of early gifted services highlight
 - Quality education
 - Teacher competency and increased training opportunities
 - Cognitive development support for students
 - **Challenges & limitations** to implement programs include
 - Financial limitations
 - Lack of awareness of gifted programs
 - Lack of qualified staff



The Role of the Educators & Mental Health Professionals

- The responsibility of identifying culturally diverse gifted students and retaining gifted students in gifted programs is imperative
- Promoting “**dynamic thinking**”
 - Educators are encouraged to maintain **flexibility and adaptability**
 - Administrative support
 - Examination of procedures, policies, for culturally diverse gifted students
- Advocacy for students
 - Reshaping the referral processes, curriculum designs/development, and professional development of educators

Issues with Standardized Testing

- Cultural biases in standardized testing
 - Not culturally responsive
- Cut offs are not reliable or accurately represent functioning
- Access to testing limitations
- Bilingual and ELL students
- Additional comorbid disorders that impact functioning of testing
- Motivation of the student



Culture & Language Factors

- Bilingual 2e learners
- Multicultural 2e learners
 - Parental role/advocacy



Access to Healthcare

- Neuro-affirming language with healthcare professionals
- Increase awareness of 2e students among healthcare professionals
- Eliminate racial, cultural disparities among the diagnostic process
- Socioeconomic disparities contribute to limited diagnostic processes for 2e students
- Specialization of professionals*****



05

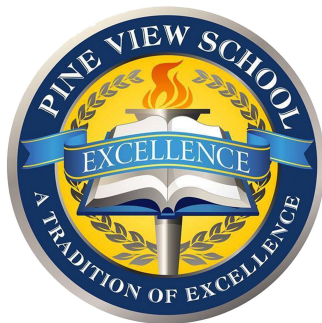
Strategies for Supporting Gifted Individuals

It a major modern tragedy. We're losing our brightest
minds; our most creative thinkers in our society.
(SENG: Misdiagnosis of Gifted Children)



**ORLANDO GIFTED
ACADEMY**

Orange County Public Schools



Inter**g**ifted



galileoschool

FOR GIFTED LEARNING



JOHNS HOPKINS

CENTER *for* TALENTED YOUTH

Four Principles of Evidence-Based Counseling for Gifted

01

No single theory fits all cases - tailor interventions to presenting problems

02

Include parents/families - improves outcomes

03

Use empirically supported interventions

04

Prioritize the therapeutic alliance - trust, empathy, attunement

(Pfeiffer, 2020)

More thoughts on best practices for gifted intervention...



Understand characteristics to reduce misdiagnosis and enhance conceptualization



Learn resources: local, state, national, virtual, etc.



Consider clients not yet identified but that exhibit characteristics of giftedness





Therapeutic Mistakes



When the client is aware of their giftedness:

- Dismissing giftedness as “non-existent”
- All children and people are gifted
- Framing wish to explore giftedness as arrogance or elitism

When the client is *unaware* of their giftedness:

- Assuming a “normal” mind and typical path applies
 - Overlooking *gifted trauma*: alienation, intellectual/emotional deprivation, chronic invisibility
 - Misdiagnosing gifted traits (e.g., excitability, meta-thinking) as ADHD or neurological disorder
 - Misdiagnosing trauma-linked gifted traits as personality disorders (e.g., BPD, NPD)
- 
- 

Counseling Needs of Gifted Students

- Giftedness is a type of neurodivergence
- Not immune to emotional problems: depression, anxiety, bullying, identity issues, attendance concerns, substance abuse, etc.
- Twice-Exceptional (2e): coexisting disabilities (ADHD, learning disorders, mood disorders)
- Risk Factors
 - Overexcitabilities
 - Misunderstanding by peers/adults
 - Underachievement from boredom or masking abilities

"Bright Kids go to school and never encounter anything that makes them extend effort. They grow up thinking being smart means they don't have to work very hard. The first time they encounter something difficult they think they are not smart enough."

-Sally Reis Renzulli



Assumptions About Achievement & Giftedness

Gifted stereotypes are unfair and potentially dangerous:

High achievers: Seen as compliant, motivated, “good kids” with no struggles

Low achievers: Seen as lazy, resistant, uninterested in learning

Risks of Stereotyping

- Masks stress, self-doubt, depression—even suicidal thoughts—in high achievers
- Overlooks giftedness in low achievers, leading to missed support and opportunities

Self-Concept and Giftedness

Reduce self-concept challenges

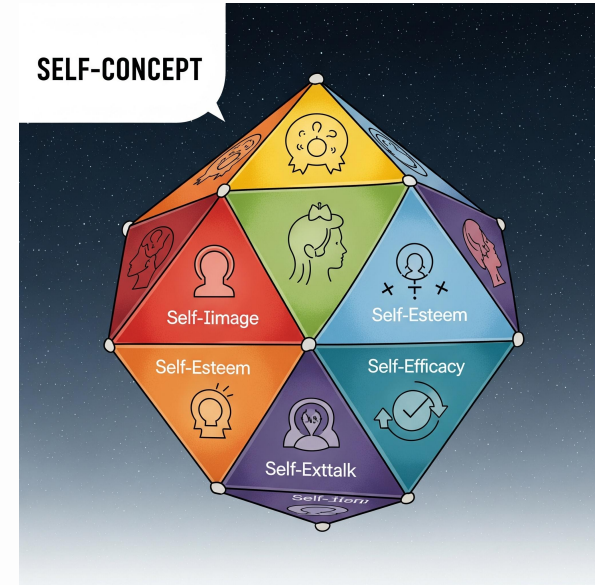
There is a link between competence and self-worth which may lead observers to overlook emotional distress in gifted individuals. Generally, by high school gifted individuals show lower scores on self-concept measures, especially girls (Colangelo, 2003)

Big-Fish–Little-Pond Effect (BFLPE)

A gifted learner may feel better about themselves (“big fish”) in a less competitive environment (“little pond”), compared to being one among many gifted peers (“big pond”).

Social self-esteem and feelings of difference

Gifted students frequently experience asynchronous development—advanced intellectually but not socially—which can foster feelings of isolation or being “different,” thereby eroding their social self-esteem.



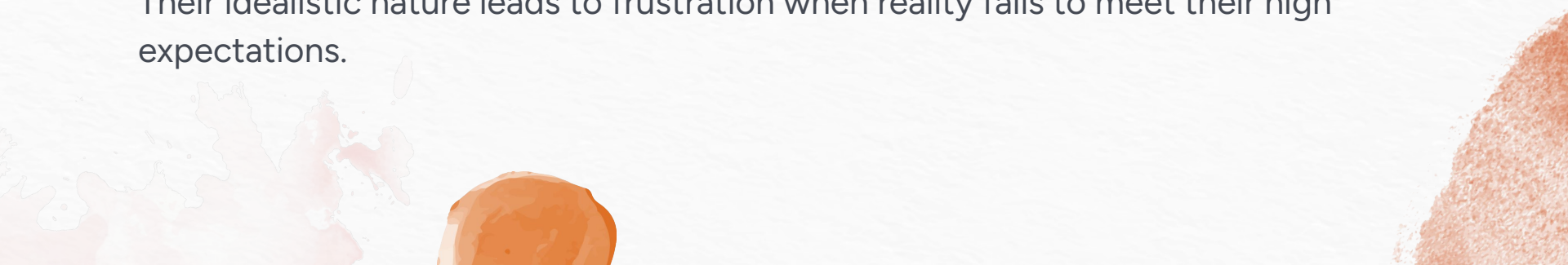


Existential Depression

Existential depression arises when individuals confront core human “ultimate concerns”: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness (as defined by Yalom, 1980).

Highly intelligent people are more likely to ponder life’s profound questions and recognize societal inconsistencies, injustices, and emptiness, enhancing existential distress.

Their idealistic nature leads to frustration when reality fails to meet their high expectations.





Roots of Existential Depression

- Existential depression differs from other depressive disorders and requires unique interventions.
- It arises from reflections on life and can represent a pivotal moment in existence.
- Deep reflections on existence can lead to an existential crisis.
- Questions about life's meaning often arise, leading to anxiety and discomfort.
- The search for definitive meaning is often futile, resulting in feelings of emptiness.
- Awareness of death can trigger existential crises and loss of meaning.
- Authentic understanding of death leads to intense feelings of anguish.
- The inevitability of death can diminish motivation to live.

(Berra, 2021)



Treatment of Existential Depression

- Addresses the meaning of life is crucial in treatment.
- Validate.
- Authentically engagement with existential questions.
- Let them know they are not alone.
- Reframe worldview and meaning.
- Manage feelings of isolation and the burden of choice (freedom).

(Webb, 2011)



AutoPsycho Therapy

Autopsychotherapy is the process of education-of-oneself under conditions of increased stress, as in developmental crises, in critical moments of life, in neuroses and psychoneuroses.

This process helps with developing yourself towards internal and external harmony and to become a better human being.

Shame plays an important role as it can be felt when one is not yet being able to live up to one's own ideal self-image



Academic Needs

- Tailor curriculum to individual student needs
- Offer advanced content and enrichment opportunities
- Provide accommodations without lowering expectations
- Implement strategies for executive function support & processing time
- Address perfectionism
- Grouping & tracking
- Differentiated Instruction

THIS NOT THAT

GIFTED EDITION

Different work NOT More work

Less repetition NOT No practice

Social & emotional supports to manage various social ecosystems	NOT	Expectation that cognitive level & social level will be equal
--	-----	--

Scaffold to help reach highest potential	NOT	Assume that giftedness means no guidance is necessary
--	-----	--

GIFTEDGURU

Strength-Based Approach

- Positive Psychology in Counseling
 - Build on character strengths (curiosity, compassion, love of learning)
 - Foster protective factors (resilience, optimism)
 - Dual Goals: Reduce symptoms and expand personal resources





06

Case Studies

CASE #1: Male, 5.8yo - Testing

Medical and Mental Health History

- Adenoids removed; ear tubes placed twice.
- Family mental health history: anxiety, depression, and ADHD-Inattentive Type.
- Sleep difficulties: trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, and waking early.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Functioning

- Friendly, positive, outgoing, and bright.
- Interests include art, trucks, cars, sports, Legos, trampoline play, and singing.
- Maintains a few friendships; can be bossy with peers but avoids aggression.
- Difficulty listening to directions.
- Rushing through work and needing prompting to review tasks.
- Attention difficulties; boredom when tasks lack interest.
- Resistance to following requests (e.g., cleaning up toys).
- Emotional sensitivity with strong reactions.
- Sleep issues exacerbate behavioral concerns; wakes as early as 4am during school year.
- Responds positively to routines; overstimulated with too many activities.
- Auditory sensitivities to loud noises (e.g., fire alarms, hand dryers).

Educational Functioning

- Academically above peers.
- Tendency to rush through work, affecting quality.


Other

- Occupational Therapy evaluation: sensory processing delays.

Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence–Fourth Edition, (Age-Based Norms)

Composite		Composite Score	Percentile Rank	95% Confidence Interval	Qualitative Description
Verbal Comprehension	VCI	150	>99.9	140-154	Very Superior
Visual Spatial	VSI	115	84	105-122	High Average
Fluid Reasoning	FRI	124	95	115-130	Superior
Working Memory	WMI	107	68	98-114	Average
Processing Speed	PSI	97	42	88-107	Average
Full Scale IQ	FSIQ	133	99	126-137	Very Superior
General Ability	GAI	137	99	129-141	Very Superior
Cognitive Proficiency	CPI	102	55	94-109	Average

Domain	Subtest Name	Scaled Score	Percentile Rank	Age Equivalent
Verbal Comprehension	Information	19	99.9	<7:7
	Similarities	18	99.6	<7:7
Visual Spatial	Block Design	14	91	7:4
	Object Assembly	11	63	6:4
Fluid Reasoning	Matrix Reasoning	13	84	6:8
	Picture Concepts	15	95	>7:7
Working Memory	Picture Memory	13	84	7:7
	Zoo Locations	9	37	5:1
Processing Speed	Bug Search	12	75	6:2
	Cancellation	7	16	4:5



CASE #2: Male, 43yo - Therapy

Occupational and Social History

- Employed at a highly successful and well-known company (e.g., Google).
- Reports satisfaction with work and collegial relationships.
- Describes himself as high-achieving academically, consistently performing at the top of his class.
- Social interactions are generally task- or activity-focused rather than emotionally oriented.

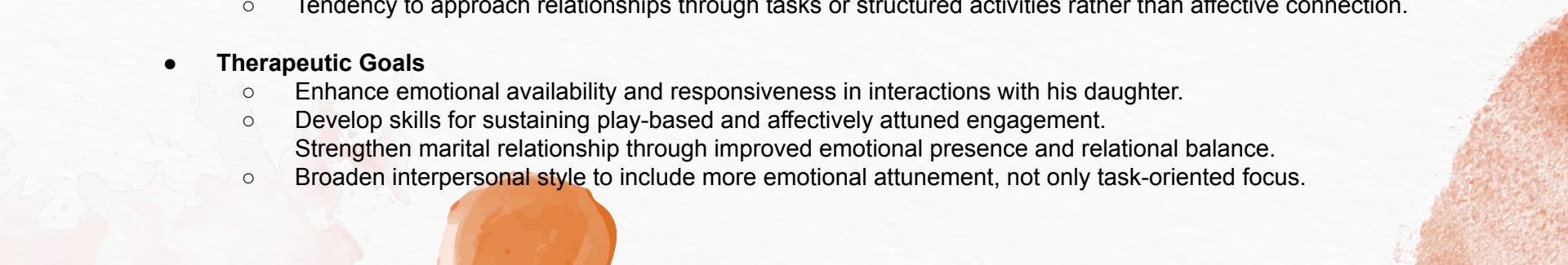
● **Family and Relationship History**

- Married for 5 years.
- Has one child, a 2-year-old daughter.
- History of marital strain, for which he and his spouse previously sought counseling.
- Currently reports challenges with family relationships, particularly with emotional connection at home.

● **Presenting Concerns**

- Difficulty sustaining engagement with his 2-year-old daughter.
- Identifies this difficulty as the primary reason for seeking therapeutic services.
- Tendency to approach relationships through tasks or structured activities rather than affective connection.

● **Therapeutic Goals**

- Enhance emotional availability and responsiveness in interactions with his daughter.
 - Develop skills for sustaining play-based and affectively attuned engagement.
 - Strengthen marital relationship through improved emotional presence and relational balance.
 - Broaden interpersonal style to include more emotional attunement, not only task-oriented focus.
- 



Reflections to Take With You

- How might high academic achievement mask social-emotional struggles in both children and adults?
- What are some risks of overlooking social and relational needs when identifying giftedness?
- What strategies might help gifted individuals build emotional connection and flexibility in relationships, beyond intellectual or task-based strengths?
- How might the social-emotional challenges of a gifted child, if left unaddressed, manifest later in adulthood?
- How do cultural expectations of achievement influence whether gifted individuals receive support for their emotional development?
- What role should schools, families, and clinicians play in identifying and supporting both giftedness and its associated vulnerabilities?

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2e News



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 **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
GIFTED CHILDREN**



WITH UNDERSTANDING COMES CALM



07

Q&A

Thank
You!



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Evaluation Forms




You can fill out the evaluation form using the app.
Look for the evaluation form link at the bottom of
each session. (preferred)

OR

You can fill out the evaluation sheet by hand and
give it to a staff member or the moderator of the
session.

You need to fill this form out to receive full credit for
the session.



Thank you!

