

ABCs of Being Smart: I Is Not for ‘I’

By Dr. Joanne Foster



In this column I implore parents to take the word “I” off the table. Instead of thinking “What can I do for my children?” consider, “What can they do for themselves?”

How can you invoke children’s independence and initiative? Start by inspiring them to investigate, imagine, and use their intellect. Here are some ideas, each one formatted as an inquiry, so as to provide immediate impetus for implementation.

- **Identify**—*What are your children’s interests and learning goals?*

Encourage them to articulate these.

- **Incorporate**—*How might your children incorporate those interests and goals into what’s happening at school?*

Perhaps start by crafting one or two action steps together, then let them build from there.

- **Important**—*What is most important to you when it comes to your children’s education and well-being?*

And, what is most important to them? Is there some way to align these objectives?

- **Intellectual edge**—*How can children develop the edge they will inevitably need—including learning to meet challenges, overcome obstacles, and manage change?*

These are acquired skills. Respect and discuss their concerns, and model how to deal with them successfully.

- **Integrity**—*Did this word come to mind in relation to the earlier question about what’s important?*

Along with honesty, determination, responsibility, and other virtues, integrity builds character and fortifies children’s moral fiber so they’ll act ethically as they forge ahead.

- **Information**—*What kinds of resources do you regularly access in order to be up-to-date on matters having to do with gifted/high-level development?*

Well-informed parents—and teachers—are better positioned to encourage growth in gifted and high-ability children.

- **Insightful**—*How carefully do you listen to your children when they talk about the day’s events?*

Children's perspectives are often far more insightful than we give them credit for. By getting a true understanding of children's daily experiences we can reinforce their efforts and resilience, so they will progress to the next step—all the while knowing they have the support they need if the going gets rocky.

• **Invest**—*In what ways are you invested in your children's education?*

Not just monetarily, but in terms of day-to-day interactions, ongoing communication channels, homework assignments, technological know-how, social networking, and so on.

• **Invite**—*To what extent do you feel welcome in the school?*

If you feel comfortable, think about how to become more involved. If not, think about speaking to the teacher about how to bridge the gap without being intrusive.

• **Identity**—*How well do you know what makes your children tick?*

Throughout childhood and adolescence one's sense of self is a work in progress; kids' capacities, emotions, and identities are in flux. Effective parenting involves knowing when to leave things be, encourage, intervene, discipline, guide, or offer constructive advice or assistance as children grow and develop autonomy.

• **Issues**—*What kinds of concerns do you have, and what's being done to address them?*

If a child is experiencing social, emotional, behavioral, motivational, or academic problem then it may be time for some serious discussions with professionals who can provide assistance. This includes guidance counselors, pediatricians, psychologists, or others who possess the necessary skills and expertise to help.

• **Inclusion**—*Do your children feel "a part of" things or "apart from" things?*

There's a big difference. Belonging is important, and feeling disconnected, different, separated, or pigeon-holed can make or break a child's school experience.

Individualism is good. **Isolation** is not.

• **Influence**—*What sorts of influences affect your children's learning at home and at school?*

Family members? Friends? Activity or peer groups? Teachers? Cultural forces? Books? Social media? Mentors? There also are internal influences such as feelings, aspirations, and motivations. Be aware of the various influences and their possible impact.

• **Inquisitiveness**—*Questions (big and small) are a foundation of learning. Who asks and who answers in your house?*

There's an old adage: "There's no such thing as a stupid question." With that in mind, embrace inquiry-based learning, model and stimulate curiosity, and appreciate children's sense of wonder—all of which can lead to enhanced creativity and accomplishment.

• **Ideal**—*If you could make three wishes for each of your children, what would they be?*

Realistically, consider how you can work together to make them come true.

Author's Note

Joanne Foster, Ed.D. is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart About Gifted Education, 2nd Edition* (2009, Great Potential Press). She is a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist. Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience working in the field of gifted education. She has written extensively about high-level development and has presented on a wide range of gifted-related topics at conferences and learning venues across North America. She teaches educational psychology and gifted education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She can be reached at joanne.foster@utoronto.ca. Visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net

