

Parental Attitudes

Encyclopaedia of Giftedness, Creativity, and Talent. (2009) Sage Publications. 2:668-670

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Parental attitudes about giftedness, which differ from one family to the next, are often affected by the many questions and concerns parents may have about how to best nurture and support their children's optimal growth. There is an ever-increasing wealth of information as people come to understand more and more about intelligence and giftedness, and ways to identify and address individual learning needs. Ongoing research in such domains as child development, neurological science, educational psychology, and other related fields continues to inform attitudes and perspectives about how children learn, how educators teach, and how parents can support their children both at home and at school.

Underlying Factors

Feelings about a child's giftedness—and its many possible implications—can range from pure anxiety to confusion to unparalleled excitement, with infinite possibilities in between. For example, parents may wonder how to navigate the school system when dealing with matters that are seemingly complex. There are inevitably questions about individual developmental differences, identification measures, exceptional learning needs as they change over time, school-based programs, practices and policies, assessment methods, and advocacy channels. What kinds of answers are parents receiving?

The research says that high-level ability comes in many forms, that there is no single gifted profile, and there is no educational or parenting approach that is suitable for every child. That means there are no easy answers. Moreover, in the whole scheme of things, there is still a lot to learn.

Whether a child is formally identified as gifted or not, and regardless of age, parents may perceive a mismatch between their child's diverse needs and the various learning opportunities being provided. Sometimes, those learning opportunities require adjusting, whereas at other times what is warranted is a more thorough re-evaluation and restructuring of the educational landscape. Finding a proper "fit" between a child and the educational system requires planning, time, solid information-gathering, effort, collaboration, and thoughtful and targeted decision-making on the part of many people.

Initiatives

Parents can begin by finding out all they can about child development issues, the nature of intelligence, and giftedness. It is important for parents to both proactively and reactively access pertinent and current information. It can be difficult to zero in on what is most essential to one's own particular needs or concerns because of the great proliferation of resource material to sift through, read, consider, and then apply. As such, it is helpful to work in concert with a child's teachers and, if necessary, with professional psychologists, determining needs based on the lived experience of the child, and then building a framework from which to address them. For example, parents may want to know what to do in relation to their child's achievement and aptitude; social and emotional well-being; school programming and placement; and domain-specific areas of strength and weakness. Parental attitudes about giftedness will be influenced by the type and accuracy of the resource material they acquire, reflect upon, and apply; the kinds and extent of support they are given by educators, counsellors, and other professionals; the degree to which

they network and share useful information with one another; and the extent to which they are open-minded, flexible, and sensitive when confronting all the smooth and rough patches encountered over time at home, in school, and within society.. Children’s own attitudes, uncertainties, tendencies, assumptions, excitabilities, cognitive levels, concerns and questions about giftedness are also some of the matters at the forefront of parents’ investigative and advocacy efforts.

Support and Responsibility

Parental attitudes tend to be invigorated and made more positive when their understandings of giftedness and high-level ability are clarified, and when parents perceive success in finding and providing appropriate educational opportunities for their child’s optimal development. Ultimately, parents who appreciate their children’s uniqueness (including their different interests, experiences, learning preferences, and ways of functioning)— who, ideally, embrace familial teamwork, and also recognize that every person has an active role in creating his or her own intelligence—are better positioned to provide the right influences and guidance along the way. Nevertheless, misinformation and controversy about giftedness can be confusing, daunting, and even overwhelming. When parents (and others) understand “being gifted” as the identification of exceptional learning needs at a particular point in time, this serves to remove some of the elitism, mystery, and confusion often associated with the label, and much of the stigma frequently attached to it and to gifted education. Parents who cultivate inquiry, regularly access community support systems, and who have informed and positive mindsets and understandings about giftedness from multiple reliable sources are attitudinally stronger and thereby better equipped to respond to their children’s needs. This kind of acquired competence involves increasing one’s familiarity with adaptive learning opportunities and environments; being attuned to children’s abilities as they mature; helping them take some responsibility for their learning and to feel good about their accomplishments; learning about effective advocacy processes; and recognizing that one cannot categorize individual development, and that thus there is no predetermined path for any one child.

Parents of gifted/high-ability learners are positioned to help their children overcome difficulties that may come along with being perceived as “different” or “exceptional. Nurturing efforts should rest upon solid understandings of gifted-level development, open communication, love, and acceptance—and, most importantly, and unconditionally—an attitude that conveys respect for the intellectual and other domain-specific abilities and individual intricacies of the child, and all that he or she may come to be.

Further readings on Parental Attitudes:

- Cross, T. (2005). *The social and emotional lives of gifted kids: Understanding and guiding their development*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Delisle, J. & Galbraith, J. (2002). *When gifted kids don’t have all the answers*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.
- Matthews, D. J. & Foster, J. F. (2005). *Being smart about gifted children: A guidebook for parents and educators*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Rogers, K. (2002). *Re-forming Gifted Education: Matching the Program to the Child*. Scottsdale, AZ.: Great Potential Press.
- Van Tassel-Baska, J. & Stambach, T. (2006). *Comprehensive curriculum for gifted learners (Third Edition)*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc.

See also *Attitudes toward Gifted; Labeling; Parenting; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes*