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<https://www.ynetnews.com/magazine/article/rknrvxvth>

The dark side of brilliance: The emotional and social struggles of gifted children

Many parents aspire for their child to join this elite club, often without fully understanding the price that comes with it; What does a gifted individual experience? How do they feel when they outpace everyone around them by five steps? What does their childhood look like, and what kind of adults do they become? It's not all shiny in the Ivory Tower

”An eight-year-old was recently diagnosed as a gifted, sensitive, gentle child. He can't enjoy life at all. Nothing interests him. He has crying fits and doesn't know why. He has suicidal thoughts (“there's no point to life”, “I wish I'd never been born”). Although he expresses a great deal of love, he's never happy. He never plays with friends. As a rule, he's glued to a screen. What can we do? I'm just so sad and lost.”

[...] from 8:10:

The child is very sensitive

“The main source of distress for gifted children is having to spend long hours each day with people when, quite rightly, for fear of being misunderstood, you can't really say what you think about them. This distress is compounded by the need to conceal your true abilities, even from the teachers who - to put it politely – aren't really equipped to address the special needs of gifted children” says **Hanna David** doctor of educational psychology and counselor to gifted, talented and creative and their families.

“Gifted children are bored. Their classmates treat them differently. They're not surrounded by people with similar interests. They need to simplify their

language or at least tone down displaying their knowledge or abilities so as not to appear different. Teachers may frequently ask a gifted child to concede to other students, or at least understand them. Teachers are invariably hostile towards students taking days off to attend enrichment days and only include them in lessons if no other child is joining in.“



The impact of giftedness on emotional and social development:

- 1 Uneven development**
Cognitive development tends to outpace age-appropriate emotional and motor development
- 2 Perfectionism and self-criticism**
Aspiring for perfection can lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointment
- 3 Adult expectations**
Discrepancies between the expected behavior based on intelligence and the actual emotional development may result in avoidance and underachievement
- 4 Heightened sensitivity and intense reactions**
This combination can lead to feelings of vulnerability, frustration and anger, which may result in social rejection or ridicule
- 5 Self-determination**
Gifted children often march to the beat of their own drum and may challenge social norms, sometimes perceived as adjustment disorders
- 6 Alienation**
The disparity between the advanced abilities of gifted children and their peers can make it harder to form friendships
- 7 Unsatisfactory environment**
The mismatch between the needs of gifted individuals and the educational framework can be a source of frustration

What can parents do to alleviate these problems? “As gifted children are usually surrounded by people who cannot provide responses to their sensitivities, the home must provide a safe space. Gifted children cannot expect empathy from their friends. Six-year-olds can’t comprehend that one of their friends knows things they might only know when they’re nine. Gifted children quickly learn not to share their knowledge and

achievements. If no one at home is listening to them either, they'll become increasingly lonely, their mental health and behavior deteriorating.”

“Parents must remember that most, if not all, teachers are not trained in the didactics of gifted children. Most mental health professionals who don't treat gifted children, aren't trained in these fields either. So, gifted children may often find themselves victims of the ignorance of the adults teaching, educating and treating them. Even if the teachers were trained to respond to the child's cognitive needs, curiosity, creativity thirst for learning, schools would not be able to provide these responses. Filling this void requires a lot of work, effort and money. Much of the teaching that the child needs cannot be conducted at home, but rather demands appropriate frameworks.”

'Gifted children are raised to be lazy'

“At a very early age, gifted children realize they're different, that they think differently. They think and comprehend faster and at a deeper level. Very early on, they're hit with the reality that they're more intelligent than their parents - and that's a real problem. I would think that, in some respects, being gifted is not unlike being gay. The sense of otherness starts very young. You don't know what exactly you're different from, but you do understand you're not like everyone else. What you're interested in doesn't interest anyone else” says Yonatan Gilon, diagnosed as a child as gifted.

Were you the smartest kid in your class? “Definitely. Even before the official third-grade diagnosis, even before I was told, I felt a massive gap between myself and the others. I wouldn't say that I was socially lonely, but the boredom was driving me crazy. When they explained something in class for the fifth time, I found myself saying ‘Really? This again?’ I'd catch out the teachers on their mistakes and prove them wrong. I was never arrogant toward other children, but it comes out eventually, even unintentionally. It's enough just being the one answering correctly in class.”

“Teaching gifted children, I felt I had to tell them to know to shut up sometimes because it's annoying. By the time you're 15, you understand that on your own, but not when you're eight. If the teacher asks a question,

you just don't answer. You're doing her teaching for her and you don't realize how much space you're taking up. As far as you're concerned, the teacher asked so you answered. It makes you that irritating kid in the class that no one can stand."

Did you understand that by the age of 12? "Yes. I just grasped that I was looking in the wrong direction. I reached the point where I was lacking vocabulary, that slang had changed and I didn't understand the world outside. Something just wasn't right. The class for gifted children in which I was placed wasn't in my neighborhood, but rather a 45-minute bus ride away. When you're traveling great distances to school, you lose something critical. You don't have friends nearby and you have no one to hang out with in the afternoons. I was very lonely. It was a kind of prison, a positive prison, but a prison nonetheless. I tried keeping in touch with friends in my own neighborhood. I was a kid and I wanted to be with my friends. That's why I left in the end. I wanted to be normal. It wasn't some kind of act of defiance. I stayed friends with some of the kids from the gifted class. I wasn't complaining. I just needed to make a choice."

Would your life have been different if you'd have stayed in the gifted children's program? "Beyond doubt. Yes. I couldn't say whether for better or worse. At the end of the day, I have friends from the gifted children's program who have gotten much further than I have. In some ways that make me sad. That said, I don't know if I could have been like them – do the things they've done. Maybe the social isolation would have been harder for me than for them. I don't tell myself how great it was that I left, but I also don't say it was a mistake.

I'm just saying that this move changed my life. I was failing in the gifted children's class. It's not like that anymore in most of the country. My experiences are not relevant today. What is relevant is not what's going on in the gifted children's classes, but rather in society at large. Being gifted is being marked positively. From the age of eight, your reputation goes before you."

“When they keep telling you you’re the top 1% and you’re treated as the top 1%, you believe it. But what does being in the top percentile mean? It means you’re the smartest kid in your grade. Not the smartest kid in town, not the smartest kid in your area, not the smartest kid in the country, not the smartest kid in the world. Just the smartest kid in your grade. The difference between the best kid at soccer in the grade, and a man who makes a living playing soccer is immense. One in a hundred just isn’t good enough, but everyone’s talking about you like you’re the next Ronaldo. Being treated like this ensures you won’t be the next Ronaldo.”

“Gifted children are raised to be lazy. It wastes almost all of their innate advantages. In my role as headteacher of a school for gifted children, I’ve often asked gifted children if a non-gifted friend of theirs spends ten hours learning something, without defining the subject, how long would it take them to reach the same level of understanding? I.e., what’s their relative advantage? They usually say it would take them one hour – so they believe they have a tenfold advantage. Deciding you’re ten times smarter without knowing at what is crazy. They’d reached this assumption because of what they’re constantly being told. How much faster is Ronaldo than his teammates? By a few percent. There’s always someone breathing down your neck.”

Although a child’s giftedness and special needs are a direct result of their being different, even without this, you’re raising them in a way that makes them have special needs - impotent by choice. You give the child the feeling they’ve already completed pilot’s training – but they’re in third grade. This was my experience. I was constantly reminded of my giftedness. I wasn’t being conceited, but I had the sense that life would take me to great places without trying too hard. The gap between reality and what they make you out to be is too great.“

“I discovered, quite late, that I found it hard to read long texts. I can’t read books at all, whatever the subject. It loses me too quickly. I soon realized that people could read 900-page books and really understand what was going on, and I didn’t possess these skills. When I met my wife, I lied and

told her I read books. I filled bookshelves with books I hadn't read and didn't plan on reading. I realized this very late, because I was constantly being told that I was very talented, successful and wonderful. It was hard for me to believe that I couldn't carry out the simplest of tasks. My problems were manageable and I can conduct a regular, ordered daily life despite this late discovery. It's much harder if you only find out these problems when you're 30."

What is your advice to parents of gifted children? "They should explain to the child that being gifted is 'nice to have' – but no more. If they don't learn how to behave like everyone else, they'll create a gap that you may be unable to bridge. Why should a single childhood diagnosis influence a person's life so much?"

For as long as she can remember, Ruth Zarhi has been surrounded by gifted people. She is the mother of both a gifted son and daughter, and many of her friends are gifted. She holds a master's degree in organizational and educational consultancy and lectures team dynamics in universities and owns a clinic for coaching gifted people.

"I wanted to find out who a gifted person really is, what their abilities are and what of these abilities are manifested and which are not. I also wanted to learn what a person diagnosed as gifted as a child, isn't demonstrating as an adult - while children not classified as gifted may be very successful as adults. "

Could a gifted child grow up not to be a gifted adult? "He'll always remain gifted, but there's a huge difference in the classification of a gifted child and a gifted adult. When we talk about gifted children and teenagers, we're talking about potential, the ability to reach special achievements based on extraordinary talents. When we talk about gifted adults, it's more concrete: It's about the ability to carry out tasks at an extraordinarily high level. "

What challenges do gifted adults face? "Firstly, when they tell themselves they have a natural talent and then they fail, they believe they just don't

have those abilities. They're very hard on themselves. They can't deal with failure. They don't see failure as an opportunity."

"Secondly, gifted adults find it hard to work in teams because those around them don't understand how fast they're thinking. Five minutes into a work meeting, a gifted person knows where the meeting's going and they're five steps ahead. They try to move the meeting along. Other team members can't understand why they're changing the subject, moving on so quickly or being disruptive. They just don't understand each other."

It sounds very lonely. "Yes. It's sometimes very lonely. There are complex aspects to being gifted in the workplace and it can be hard, but the environment must understand that it's a huge boon. Big companies like Microsoft now have human resources divisions assisting the talent – gifted people with outstanding abilities – because they understand it pays off. You have to give these people the supportive structures they need because, at the end of the day, they'll advance the company, provide solutions, shorten procedures and will shine with new, original ideas. Gifted people can do amazing things if you just let them."

"I don't think you need a division made up of just gifted people. Quite the opposite. A gifted person must be integrated into a regular work team. If all the team members are open and patient, it can work wonderfully and can help everyone develop and grow."

Comments

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My favorites parents who prep their kids 4 this test!

And if their kids don't pass...they lobby for retesting or late acceptance. Silly parents setting up their own children for this not so well run program.

07.10.23

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Real giftedness vs. Israeli giftedness

07.10.23

I was born, raised and educated in the United States. I have an IQ of 170, am a member of MENSA, and hold a Master's degree from a USA Ivy league school. I attended ordinary private

school k-12 and along with my other classmates was intellectually challenged and emotionally embraced and supported. In Israel they have no idea what the above sentences mean....this was the reason my children never took the Ministry of Education's ridiculous qualifying test. Trust me that test is designed to assist the Ministry of Education in receiving recognition and more money for irrelevant and generally quite damaging programs. My Israeli children are well adjusted, happy, successful, financially independent home owning Israelis who did skip over the Israeli gifted system...and so their lives are greatly enriched!