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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS

GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

Social-emotional needs are needs that gifted and talented students have along with their thinking (cognitive) needs. They may include sensitivity, intensity, high expectations of themselves or others, a strong sense of justice, perfectionism, depression or underachievement.

Gifted students not only think differently than the average person, but also feel differently: their advanced cognitive development is connected with a high level of emotion. This is because an outcome of rapid cognitive development is the ability to think about abstract issues quite early. Consequently, gifted students have a much greater range of emotional experiences, characterised by uneven or irregular development (where chronological, emotional and mental ages are different).

At an early age characteristics such as emotional and moral intensity, sensitivity to expectations and feelings, perfectionism, lofty goals and high standards for themselves and others, and deep concerns about societal problems are often found among gifted and talented students. Gifted individuals who have disabilities or who are from culturally, linguistically, or socioeconomically diverse backgrounds or who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, may have additional social-emotional needs.

It is during the early years of life and adolescence that cognitive development happens most swiftly, and where we see the most dramatic changes in the child's interactions with their environment. Adolescence is another period where children undergo rapid change and development. By the time the child commences formal schooling, developmental changes have slowed down. Consequently, parents and carers can see a much wider range of cognitive and social-emotional behaviours than does the teacher. At school, students often operate in a setting which imposes greater uniformity of conduct upon them. At home, gifted young children have no need to control their behaviour to be accepted. Gifted students may learn to hide their abilities within the first few weeks of school, to 'blend in'.

Cognitive traits and characteristics are easy to recognise when they are manifested through positive classroom behaviours. Often, however, the pace and level of work presented to gifted students does not engage their interest in learning, or attend to their abilities, and they may respond with behaviours which are negative or even disruptive. When a gifted student displays negative or disruptive behaviour, this can be a call for help or at least an indication that some intervention is needed. Often, appropriate provisions can transform negative behaviour to positive behaviour.

Other behaviours may simply be misunderstood. For example, exceptionally and profoundly gifted students can often attend to one problem while thinking about the solution to another. This may be viewed by others as being easily distracted.

Because gifted students differ significantly from others, it is important to respond to the social-emotional characteristics that distinguish them. Furthermore, since significant differences also exist within the gifted population, it is important to respond to individual differences.

Some gifted and talented students, because of their heightened intellectual and social-emotional needs, may experience difficulties that require professional intervention such as counselling. It is important for the school and the parents or carers to work together to recognise, understand and respond to the social-emotional and cognitive needs of gifted and talented students.

Specific Research-Based Characteristics of Gifted and Talented Students Found in Specific Domains of Ability

Gifted learners may ‘fit’ in one or more of the domains of ability.

Domain of Ability/Talent	Characteristics	Affective Needs
Intellectual	Shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High levels of reasoning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o thinks ‘around’ problems o thinks in analogies o is a strong problem finder; – Accelerated cognitive development; – Intense focus/concentration in new learning; – Strong retention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to learn at high level with others of like ability or performance; • Opportunity to socialise with others of like ability or performance; • Support within the education system for self-understanding of own abilities.
Specific Academic	Shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A strong skill set in a specific academic ability, can function beyond grade level in that area; – Intense passion or interest and positive attitude toward learning in a specific area of high performance; – High level of self-criticism; – Intense focus/concentration in specific academic area; – Intense drive to achieve at highest levels and to be known as ‘expert’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support with self-efficacy (belief in own ability to succeed), ‘appropriate self-evaluation’; • Individual recognition by significant adults of student’s prowess and knowledge; • Training in setting realistic learning goals, and time management.
Creative	Demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Flexibility in use of time, structuring of learning environment, structuring of learning tasks; – Risk-taking - intellectually, socially and physically; – Tolerance for ambiguity (openness to different ideas or interpretations); – Positive self-efficacy (belief in own capabilities); – Internal locus of control (responsibility for own outcomes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice in realistic goal setting; • Encouragement of creative thinking; • Quiet periods for creative thinking to emerge; • An open learning environment and acceptance of differences in perspective and originality.
Visual & Performing Arts	Shows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A strong skill set in a specific academic ability, and can function beyond year level in that area; – Intense passion or interest and positive attitude towards learning in specific area of talent; – Intense focus/concentration in specific arts area; – A high level of self-criticism; – Intense drive to achieve at the highest levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support with self-efficacy (belief in own ability to succeed), ‘appropriate self-evaluation’; • Individual recognition by significant adults of prowess and knowledge; • Opportunity to perform or display skill development at regular intervals in school setting; • Training in setting realistic learning goals and time management; • One-to-one tutorship in arts area with ‘true’ artist.
Social/ Leadership	Demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strong social ability; – Strong management and communication skills; – Task analysis and backwards planning; – Information scanning; – Emotional stability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership skills training; • Mentorships in social issues project; • Engagement in conflict resolution, social issues program; • Support in setting realistic learning goals.
Physical/ Perceptual	Demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good general coordination; – Strong tactile and kinaesthetic (hands-on) learning preferences; – Strong visualisation, spatial or perceptual skills; – Discipline to practise and ‘train’ skill set; – Internal locus of control (responsibility for own outcomes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused development on ‘personal best’ goals in practice and achievement; • Visualisation practice in development of skill sets; • General recognition for excellence exhibited; • Opportunity to work with others at similar level so competition is productive; • Motivational support.

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