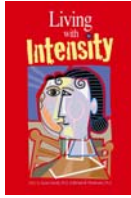
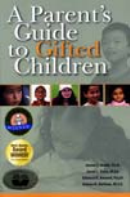


Creating Resiliency to Counteract Unhappiness and Depression



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Idealism, Unhappiness, Depression, and Resiliency

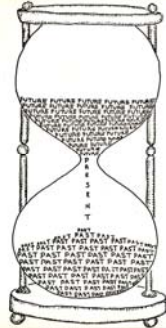
- Most gifted children are intense and quite sensitive (“overexcitabilities”) and their feelings and reactions are intense.
- Most gifted children are idealists, yet their idealism can actually increase the likelihood of depression.
- Gifted children are often frustrated in their idealism and vision of how things should be.
- Their ideals for how things “should” be is not necessarily shared by those around them.
- They are exposed to internal and external stresses that could make them more at risk for unhappiness and depression.
- Some are unhappy and depressed.
- But on the other hand, gifted children are resilient and often are better at coping.

Characteristics of Gifted Children that Make Them More Prone to Stress and Depression

- Curiosity and wide range of interests lead to feelings of being scattered.
- Intensity and sensitivity of gifted children make it difficult to receive criticism, modulate their behaviors, and promote over-commitment.
- High ideals result in feeling of obligation (pressure) to make contributions to the world.
- High ideals/aspirations lead to a need to be “on top” in grades; desire to please parents and teachers.
- Their apparent high potential leads others to expect more of them.
- Perfectionism. Low tolerance of gap between their ideals and their own abilities to perform.
- Sense of space limitations (want to be everywhere at once to do more things).
- Sense of time pressures/limitations (can’t fit in everything they want to do).
- Feeling a lack of fit with environment (school, peers).
- Desire to belong, be accepted; they may camouflage their abilities even though they have a sense of being untrue to themselves.
- Accelerated thought processes, high expectations, and intensity lead to impatience with others.
- Tradition breaking/questioning leads to discomfort, rejection by others.
- Rejection of traditions (e.g., identity as “nerd”) leads to feelings of isolation.
- Their judgment lags behind their intellect.

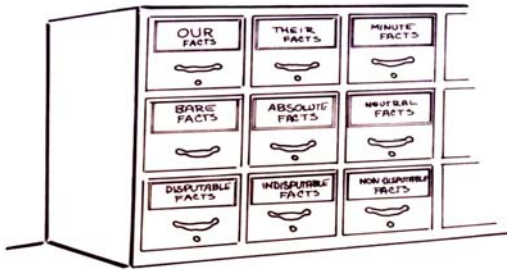
Typical Problem Issues

- Keen awareness and impatience with time and space limitations; frustration with multi-potentiality



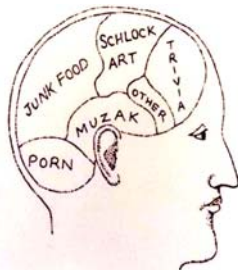
Typical Problem Issues (continued)

- Dissatisfaction with standards of achievement; always looking to improve



Typical Problem Issues (continued)

- Dissatisfaction with others and the world around them



Typical Problem Issues (continued)

- Searching for personal meaning

Typical Problem Issues (continued)

- Relations with others

How Widespread is Depression?

- *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, in its five most recent annual surveys, found:
 - 4% of these high achievers attempted suicide
 - 25% considered suicide
 - 19% knew someone their age who committed suicide
 - 43% knew someone their age who attempted suicide
- These surveys also showed that children seldom shared their thoughts about suicide with their parents.
- **Depression Is Increasing**
 - 2.5 percent of children and 8 percent of adolescents in the United States suffer from depression.
 - The incidence of depression has increased in each generation over the last ten decades—not just in the United States, but worldwide.
- **Suicide**
 - From 1952 to 1992, suicides among adolescents and young adults increased nearly 300%.
 - From 1980 to 1992, the rate of suicide among adolescents ages 15 to 19 years increased by 28%, while suicide among children ages 10 to 14 years increased by 120%.
 - Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15-24 year olds and the fourth leading cause among 10-14 year olds.

Depression and Suicide in Gifted Children

- Gifted children—in general—appear no more likely than others to commit suicide.
- There may be specific types of gifted children more at risk for depression and suicide, however.
- Some professionals have observed that highly gifted children, however, may be more at risk; more research is needed.
- Some controversy exists whether gifted children are more frequently depressed than children in general.
- Depression is not, however, always a bad thing; it reflects dissatisfaction, and can lead to personal growth and commitment toward change.
- On the other hand, depression can lead to cynicism and despair.

Sources of Depression

- Genetics and environment
 - There is genetic predisposition to pessimism and depression
 - Toxic environments because of sarcasm, ridicule, guilt-inducing behaviors, feeling of being trapped and unimportant, etc.
 - Toxic family
 - Toxic classroom
 - Toxic peers
- Idealism, perfectionism, and disappointment
- Interpersonal alienation
- Existential concerns (particularly for highly gifted) about the absurdity of life, values; search for human meaning
- Learned helplessness
- Underlying all of these is anger (“It should not be this way!”) either at oneself or at a situation that seems unchangeable.
- “Where there is anger, there is hurt underneath!”
- Depressive equivalents (truancy, bullying, temper outbursts, poor school performance, vague illness, withdrawal into daydreaming)

Gifted Children at Risk for Suicide

- Particular danger signs:
 - Withdrawal from others
 - Sudden decline in achievement
 - Narrowing or lessening of interests
 - Recent loss of friends or family
 - Changes in eating, sleeping, or social habits
 - Depressed mood
 - Giving away possessions
 - Drug or alcohol abuse
- Evaluate lethality. Does the child have a specific plan and the means?
- Strategies:
 - Ask, “Are you thinking of suicide?” This does not implant the idea in a young person’s mind. If you are concerned enough to ask, it is likely that the thought has at least crossed the child’s mind.
 - Virtually always, the child takes it as a sign that you care enough to ask.
 - If the child denies thinking about suicide, but looks as if he might not be completely honest, you might ask, “Would you tell me if you *were* thinking about it?”
 - Refer to a mental health practitioner if needed.
 - Make a “contract” with the child to stay alive at least until then.

Helping Gifted Children Who Are Depressed

- Teach resilience. "By emphasizing how a child feels, at the expense of what he does—mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom, and meeting challenge—parents and teachers are making children more vulnerable to depression." (Seligman, 1996)
- Don't ignore stress, perfectionism, or depression. They will not just go away by themselves.
- Very often, gifted children feel that they are the only ones who have ever felt this particular way, and they need to be assured that someone understands them.
- Accept their feelings, but state your own different view of them ("I'm sorry you see yourself as being so worthless, because I see you as being very worthwhile in many ways").
- Foster physical closeness; touch them.
- In existential depressions, suggest specific readings. See *Some of My Best Friends are Books* by Judith Halsted (2009).
- You cannot argue or reason people out of being overly stressed, being perfectionistic, or being depressed.

Helping Gifted Children Who Are Depressed

(continued)

- Sarcasm and ridicule do not help; they only make matters worse. The child not only feels belittled, but also may adopt sarcasm and ridicule as ways of interacting with others.
- It is important to avoid accidentally reinforcing non-adaptive or maladaptive stress, perfectionistic, or depressive behaviors.
- Stress, Perfectionism, and Depression have a common basis—"self-talk" combined with "irrational beliefs"
 - idealism with a lot of "shoulds"
 - self-talk with an excess of "shoulds"
 - thoughts and actions that assume that irrational beliefs are reasonable
 - self-talk that incorporates many irrational beliefs
 - Self-talk errors ("bad bookkeeping" and "proportionality")
- Teach Self-Talk, Self-Talk Errors, and Challenges to Irrational Beliefs.
- Highlight the irrational beliefs that people base their lives upon, and the notion that "blame" leaves one helpless.

Some Irrational Beliefs

- You must do perfectly in all respects
- A person who acts badly is a bad person
- You must be liked, loved, and approved of by everyone
- Behaviors that worked for someone else, or which once worked for you, are what must be followed.
- It is terrible, horrible, awful and absolutely catastrophic when things aren't going the way you want them to.
- People and things should be different from what they are, and it is terrible and catastrophic if perfect solutions cannot be immediately found.
- Your individual happiness is caused by other people or events, rather than by how you think or talk to yourself.
- If something is unpleasant, you should be preoccupied and continually upset about it for long periods of time.
- Things that happened in the past are all-important, need to be continually worried about, and limit your possibilities for the future

Teaching Resilience

- Help them understand and accept aspects of giftedness such as intensity and sensitivity.
- Teach them that "self-talk" exists; then teach them how to use it to work for them, rather than against them.
- Point out common errors regarding self-talk
 - "Proportionality" error
 - "Bad bookkeeping" error
- Model your own self-talk, and how you manage it. (Establish partnerships to help manage self-talk).
- Teach them to challenge their self-talk by looking for evidence.
- Avoid catastrophizing by considering:
 - What is the worst possible outcome?
 - What is the best possible outcome?
 - What is the most likely outcome?

Strategies for Parenting Successful Children

- **Nurture the Seven Components of Resilience**
 - Emotion regulation—the ability to stay calm under pressure
 - Impulse control—the ability to delay gratification
 - Empathy and the ability to read nonverbal cues of others
 - Optimism, though not false optimism
 - Causal analysis of adversities that are causing me stress
 - Personal: "me – not me"
 - Permanent: "always – not always"
 - Pervasive: "everything – not everything"
 - Self-efficacy—our belief that we can successfully solve problems we are likely to experience
 - Reaching out—taking risks to solve problems or have relationships

Depression Is Often Related to Idealism, but Resilience Is Needed

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**"Sometimes you get a brainstorm,
sometimes you only get the clouds."**

Recommended Readings

- *Children: The Challenge* (Dreikurs and Soltz, 1991).
- *Living with Intensity* (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).
- *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults* (Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005).
- *The Optimistic Child* (Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham, 1995).
- *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* (Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007).
- *The Resilience Factor* (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).
- *Some of My Best Friends Are Books* (Halsted, 2009).
