

香港資優教育學院
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

Factsheet

FRIENDSHIPS AND GIFTED CHILDREN

Summary

Often gifted children feel different to other children in their peer group and can have a very small circle of friends. Frequently, gifted children are more comfortable relating to older children and adults; sometimes they get on very well with younger children as well. This factsheet explores friendships in the context of giftedness.

Friendships

Friendships can be difficult for everyone for a wide range of reasons. There are many types of friendship, best friends, acquaintances, family, colleagues, to name but a few. Some of these people will stay in our lives for a very long time, some a short while and some will come and go several times. And, of course, no matter what age we are or where we are in the world we can all be hurt by any one of our friends or acquaintances.

Making friends can be difficult in many ways, whoever we are. Age, personality, maturity and life experiences play a big part in determining how we respond to certain people and certain situations and we are all different. Accepting people for who they are, no matter what, is a huge challenge for most of us. We all have differing viewpoints and can so easily make assumptions and judgments about others before we have given them a chance to prove themselves.

We are not born with mature coping mechanisms, skills and strategies for dealing with all the situations that arise out of friendships. We need guidance and support to help us with fitting in and integrating successfully with many of the people we come into contact with, and even then we don't always cope or get it right. As we develop, we learn social skills and this over time helps to mould and shape us into the socially acceptable adults that we endeavour to become.

Friendships and Gifted Children

Not all gifted children have difficulties with friendships, but many of them do. There are many who spend much of their lives isolated and lonely, unable to make that vital connection. These children will tend to avoid events like school trips, discos and meeting in town, feeling out of place. Intellectually they may be high flyers, possibly achieving high grades and accolades in most areas of the school curriculum, but socially and emotionally they often struggle to have positive and fulfilling relationships with their peers. Some are more comfortable with much older or younger people, others more comfortable with adults. This could be, in some part, due to their asynchronous development. They can discuss and debate difficult and complex issues or play complex, imaginative games and consequently, in many cases, become socially isolated from their peer group. In other areas they can be immature or awkward and thus not fit in to certain social situations.

Sometimes gifted young people can come over as arrogant and precocious, appearing to know everything, acting at times much older than their chronological age. Some often don't have any interest in playing the "normal" playground games, which does them no favours when establishing friendships. Many of the issues these children and young people face can cause frustrations and anger and this can lead to arguments and bad feeling between friends and within families. Some gifted young people will need guidance with anger and behaviour management.

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Bullying or being picked on for looking or behaving differently can be a problem and this needs to be taken seriously and nipped in the bud. Being referred to as a “geek”, “boff” or “nerd” or being told you cannot play with what you call your friends when you are 5 or 6 years old is hard to hear and deal with alone. It is important that bullying is taken seriously by the adults close to the situation and that a positive ethos where everyone is valued and accepted is encouraged.

From a very early age, (possibly much younger than many of us are aware of), gifted children need parents, carers and professionals to teach, role model and nurture the social and emotional development of the gifted child, in order to pre-empt some of the future difficulties that we know many of them encounter and suffer from. The asynchronous development many gifted children and young people experience at certain times of their development, operates at a level above their chronological years, and it is at this stage in their development that parents/carers need to be aware and ready, to try and guide the children through the obstacle course that is social and emotional development. Today, parents and carers are busy people, finding difficulty in setting time aside to fully engage and support the very important social and emotional development of their gifted child or children. However, by teaching these invaluable life skills to our children we are endeavouring to ensure that many of the young gifted children of tomorrow have the skills and coping mechanisms to find a place in society and hopefully live happy and fulfilled lives.

Manners, social skills, positive communication, interaction, kindness, respect, empathy and compassion are all essential ingredients for any well rounded human being. These skills have to be learnt because we are not born with them. Encourage, where possible, your child or young person to join activities or clubs where they may meet like-minded friends. Tap into what interests them or what they are particularly gifted in and try to encourage them to take part in activities associated with these interests.

Young people today prefer to communicate via Messenger, My Space or Face Book and many older gifted children may find this preferable due to their difficulties/awkwardness with social situations and encounters. This is fine, but make sure you teach safety guidelines and monitor very young children's use of the internet carefully. Teach them not to give out real names, phone numbers or addresses and never to meet anyone without letting an adult know about it. Pen Pal type communication over the internet or by good old fashioned letter is an alternative option for friendships for children and young people who struggle with other types of social integration.

Related Information

The Social & Emotional Lives of Gifted Kids by Tracy L. Cross
The Social & Emotional Development of Gifted Children by Maureen Neihart
Stand up for Your Gifted Child by Joan Franklin Smutny
The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids by Sally Yahnke Walker

Incentive Plus – resources to promote social, emotional and behavioural skills in children and young people - www.incentiveplus.co.uk

Trust for the Study of Adolescence - www.tsa.uk.com

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