This booklet provides information on affective characteristics of gifted children, and suggestions and strategies to care for their well-being.
It’s not Just About the Intellect

To nurture the gifted, intellect is not the only aspect parents should be concerned about. Every child needs to be loved, appreciated and cared for; gifted children are no different. Some gifted children develop more intense feelings or emotions towards their surroundings than other children and if the emotional needs of the gifted are not taken care of, negative behaviour may emerge, which can adversely affect both their cognitive and emotional development.

This booklet attempts to illustrate the affective characteristics of the gifted and provides some suggestions on how you could take care of their needs.

There is also a list of Hong Kong and international organisations, which could provide you with more information or even advice to help you further explore the issues in gifted education.
Affective Characteristics of the Gifted Children

Many gifted children are happy, well-adjusted and balanced individuals who do well in school. However, some of them may feel distressed as their learning and affective needs are being neglected, or their affective characteristics are not understood or accepted. The following paragraphs identify and describe common issues faced by the gifted.

For Example:

Child A
- Chronological age: 6
- Intellectual age: 12
- Social maturity: 7
- Emotional maturity: 5

Child B
- Chronological age: 12
- Intellectual age: 15
- Social maturity: 10
- Emotional maturity: 10

Asynchronous Development

Gifted children often have their intellectual, physical, emotional and social abilities develop at different rates and to different extents. This uneven development is called asynchronous development.
Why do some people in the world suffer from hunger? What are the reasons that cause such an unfair situation?

The key of Fundamental Theorem of Calculus is ‘an indefinite integration can be reversed by a differentiation and vice versa’.

Six-year-old children usually have a general opinion on starvation problem, saying ‘they don’t have anything to eat, poor thing!’ A six-year-old child with the intellectual ability of a twelve-year-old would however have a thought about the issue of poverty and fairness – if their social maturity is developed relatively slowly, they may feel unhappy as they may not be able to find peers who share their views.

A twelve-year-old boy with the cognitive ability of a fifteen-year old can understand calculus but still relies on his parents in his daily life.

Mom, Kelly didn’t treat me her snacks today in the recess, so I don’t want to be friend with her anymore!

Wherever I go, I want mom to be my company!
Overexcitability

Overexcitability (OE) describes an intensified ability in responding to stimuli. Five types of OE were suggested by Kazimierz Dabrowski, a Polish psychologist, namely psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, intellectual and emotional.

**Psychomotor OE**

**Characteristics**
- Have a high level of energy, lots of movements and athletic activities
- Talk fast, gesture a lot and may have nervous tics

**Potential Problems**
- Could be disruptive as they are unable to sit still, when nervous, display repetitive actions such as finger tapping

**Sensual OE**

**Characteristics**
- Have heightened sense proclivity to sight, smell, taste, sound and touch

**Potential Problems**
- Feel uncomfortable with some sensory inputs
- Are easily distracted and thus affect concentration

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**Imaginational OE**

**Characteristics**
- Have a heightened sense of imagination
- Strong visual thinkers, use lots of metaphors

**Potential Problems**
- Feel bored with learning in the regular classroom and are easily distracted

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**Intellectual OE**

**Characteristics**
- Are very inquisitive and curious
- Have an urge to solve problems and understand the truth
- Enjoy theoretical and moral thinking

**Potential Problems**
- Develop deep angst toward the moral and ethical problems they see in the world

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**Emotional OE**

**Characteristics**
- Have high sensibility
- Have complex emotions
- Have strong emotional tie and attachment in relationships

**Potential Problems**
- Become intensely sensitive and feel hurt easily, over react behaviorally or emotionally
- Tend to consider the implications of their actions rather than taking action
Perfectionism

Children who adopt healthy perfectionism tend to set high performance goals. When they fail, they are usually able to accept the reality, move on, and learn from their mistakes with the hope of achieving better results in subsequent attempts. Their high performance goals foster both a skill at overcoming disappointment and a zest for improvement.

On the flipside, children who are unhealthy perfectionists tend to be overly concerned about their mistakes. They believe that others will only respect them if they are ‘perfect’. To avoid failure and looking like a ‘loser’ to others, they may opt to withdraw themselves from whatever activities they are asked to engage in.

Potential Problems Caused by Unhealthy Perfectionism

- Spend too much time on a task regardless of time and efficiency
- Refuse to attempt
- Dislike challenges, tend to choose simple tasks
- Set an unreachable goal, which could lead to a loss in confidence when they “fail”
Feeling Being Different

Some gifted children are likely to feel disconnected from their peers because of their different abilities and interests or their thoughts and analysis cannot be well-articulated. So they feel that they are different from others and clueless about getting accepted by their peers. If parents are not aware of the emotional needs of the gifted, the gifted may feel unloved and uncared for, and may in turn refuse to open up, as they think no one will ever understand them.

Potential Problems Caused by Feeling Being Different

- May be rejected by the peers because of their unique interests
- Feel lonely and helpless, as they can’t find peers who share the same interests
- Lose confidence
- Choose not to show their giftedness

Masking Giftedness

Gifted children stand out among their peers because their intellect develops goes far beyond their chronological age. They tend to hide their gifts to avoid being blamed as showing off so as to achieve social acceptance. However, once gifted children establish the habit of hiding, a turnabout attitude would be very difficult. Consequently, their gifts would be wasted and they could not get the intellectual satisfaction they should be able to experience.

Why Gifted Children Mask their Giftedness?

- Achieve social acceptance
- Avoid special attention
- Fear of failure and losing face
- Feel stressed about being different

Potential Problems Caused by Masking Giftedness

- Loss of motivation for learning
- Lack of security
- Academic underachievement
Nurturing Your Children

It is important to continue to encourage and stretch your children OUTSIDE of school. As a parent, you have a critical role to play. What are the principles of nurturing the gifted?

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<th>Behaviour and Discipline</th>
<th>Emotional Needs and Support</th>
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<td>• Teach self-discipline</td>
<td>• Support your children even if the goals and dreams they</td>
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<td>• Establish well-defined standards of discipline and conduct,</td>
<td>would like to pursue are different from your expectations</td>
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<td>do not give in because your children are gifted</td>
<td>• Encourage them by telling them that you are proud to be</td>
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<td>• Follow up with consequences for misbehaviour</td>
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|                                                            |     solve problems from different perspectives                }

**Encouragement and Appreciation**

- Value gifted children for who they are, not just what they can do
- Appreciate and accept their non-academic abilities
- Avoid humiliating or mocking your children

**Communication**

- Enhance your knowledge in gifted education through books and workshops
- Find ways to stay calm when angry, and be willing to apologise
- Understand how your children feel, give them choices, and respect their wishes
- Stay firm and reject unreasonable requests from children, avoid scolding
- Value the opinions of your children
Strategies for Home-School Cooperation

- Keep close contact with teachers; communicate with them
- Join or form a parent support group to share experiences with other parents
- Share any information or resources with teachers and other parents to increase their understanding of giftedness
- Do not just make demands that the school provide specially for your own child but support and encourage the teachers so that the school can develop a more comprehensive gifted education
Are all gifted children emotional and often misbehaved?

Many gifted children have high intellectual or learning ability and unusual interests, which makes sharing their interests, viewpoints and feelings with their peers difficult. Thus, some of them may have emotional problems due to long-term isolation.

Will gifted children become more elitist if they received special attention?

According to some research, gifted programmes do not foster arrogance, conceit and elitism. In fact, gifted children have become arrogant because they often shine in the regular classroom. On the contrary, when placed with others of similar or greater capabilities, at least in certain areas, they are able to see that they will not always be the smartest, and this tends to foster humility.

Are acceleration options, such as early entrance or grade skipping, socially harmful for gifted students?

Research has shown that gifted students often feel bored or out of place amongst their chronological age peers, many of them however get along better with older students and can share their interests with each other. Their social and emotional development will actually proceed naturally if they are around those of a similar intellectual maturity.

Is it a problem for a gifted child to be a loner?

Even though some gifted children enjoy being alone, claiming that they don't need any friends, it is undeniable that everybody needs friends. If gifted children have no friends, they would have no chance to learn how to cooperate, interact and communicate with others, which may lead to even more serious social and emotional problems, especially later in life.

Gifted children may find themselves difficult to fit in with the peers of the same age, so parents have to teach them social skills to make friends with their peers as well as provide some opportunities for them to look for friends, such as joining interest clubs and voluntary groups. On the other hand, give the children personal time to pursue their own interests.

Should gifted children be told about their abilities?

In fact, gifted children realise that they are different from other children even though we do not tell them. The emphasis of this question should not be on whether they should be told or not but how to help them understand their own characteristics, strengths and weaknesses as well as how to handle their stress. As mentioned, gifted children may feel isolated because they find themselves different, and in order to fit in with other peers, they may mask their giftedness. As such, parents should encourage their gifted children to deal with the stress of feeling emotionally isolated and create some opportunities such as joining interest groups and competitions for them to excel in their abilities.
In Search of Balance

To put something into practice is never as easy as saying it.

We all understand that the gifted need to be nurtured and challenged but putting too much pressure on them can have negative consequences. We all realise that we need to take care of their emotions brought about by their affective characteristics but it is somehow difficult to find ‘a fine balance’ between intellectual development and emotional development when parents do not have much knowledge about giftedness or consider cognitive development the most important.

Parents should bear in mind that the affective characteristics may seriously affect the emotions of the gifted, possibly to the extent that it damages their self-concept and well-being. One of the most common problems brought by these affective characteristics is underachievement. Very often, the underachieving gifted will develop a feeling of helplessness and inadequacy, which would affect their confidence, and once they develop such negative feelings, changing these feelings can be very challenging for parents.

An emotional problem does not appear suddenly but develops over time according to circumstances. Similarly, positive values and behaviours grow over time. Thus, consistent effort is important. It is the effort you make every day that counts most.

We hope this booklet has raised your awareness of the affective needs of the gifted and that we can all do our part so that the gifted can be nurtured in a supportive and encouraging environment.
Want to Learn More?

Online Resources
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education
http://hkage.org.hk/en/
Gifted Education Section, Education Bureau, HKSAR
http://www.edb.go.hk/cd/ge_e
Hoagies Gifted Education Page
http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/
National Association for Gifted Children USA
http://www.nagc.org/
SENG – Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted
http://www.sengifted.org/index.shtml
CASEL – Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
http://www.casel.org/home.php

Useful Books

