

The Highly Advanced Gifted Child –

The highly advanced gifted child is a minority even among gifted children. Their capacity to learn is significantly advanced even beyond the average for the intellectually and academically gifted. One strong indicator that a child may be highly gifted is the very early development of speech, coupled with an unusually speedy progression through the stages of speech development. In her study of exceptionally gifted children, Gross (1993) recorded linguistic precocity far beyond even that of moderately gifted. The gifted children were able to link words into meaning earlier and with greater degrees of complexity than were their age peers. Early and fluent speech was also linked to excellent memory, another characteristic of highly advanced gifted children. Children in the study could recite poetry, passages from books, and songs before the age of two. The accelerated development of speech and language reflects not only a quickly growing vocabulary and knowledge base, but rapidly improving conceptual and abstract thinking abilities as well. Comprehension, retention, vocabulary, stored information, and logical abilities are usually superior. The highly advanced gifted child is a quick learner, passionate about learning, self directed, highly energetic and goal oriented.

Parents of highly advanced gifted children typically note that their child catches on to things effortlessly, is insatiably curious and has an extraordinary memory. Their child reads a wide range of books, fiction and non-fiction; and is fascinated with numbers. The highly advanced gifted child is also more likely than other children their age to have collections, especially scientific collections. In addition, these parents usually report their child to be well-rounded, socially adjusted and physically developed.

In early years, the highly advanced gifted child may show signs of unusual alertness and a long attention span. Preference for novelty is seen during infancy in terms of frequent desire for visual and auditory stimulation. They often sit, crawl and walk several months earlier than normal. Even at a young age, these children may be aware of their own problem-solving strategies and use them to approach and solve new challenges. Their friends are often older children or adults. They are aware of and interested in moral and political problems far in advance of other children of the same age and may worry about evil in the world. (Ellen Winner, 1996)

The Gifted Preschooler –

Research on gifted children reveals that even in early childhood they display significant differences from the developmental patterns observable in age-peers of more average ability.

Early development of exceptional verbal ability is often considered to be a sign or characteristic of giftedness. At age two, an extensive vocabulary and agile use of language in a young gifted child will be remarkably evident. Freeman (1985) found young gifted children to be verbally precocious in three skill areas: talking, reading, and writing. This high verbal ability was found to be present as early as 3 years of age.

Gifted preschoolers are able to convey their ideas more easily to adults and peers, to communicate their feelings, and to give directions. Often these children are sought out by peers for companionship, ideas and decisions.

Kitano (1985) found that in addition to demonstrating high levels of accumulated knowledge and thinking abilities, preschool gifted children also showed evidence of logical thinking, discomfort with ambiguity, creativity, and spontaneous incorporation of academic activities into free play. Perhaps as a reflection of the gifted child's greater language fluency, gifted preschoolers also talk about problems, rules, and goals to a greater extent than do their average ability peers.

Berninger and Abbott (1995) found that kindergarten-age children who show signs of math precocity, have more complex reasoning skills and memory skills such as verbal reasoning skills, ability to remember complex information, and ability to decode other symbolic systems such as maps and written language.

Curiosity, concentration, memory, and a sense of humor are seen as areas of differentiation between gifted and nongifted preschoolers. They are likely to respond to riddles and verbal associations because of their ability to think quickly and see relationships more than peers of the same age. One of the most outstanding characteristics of young gifted children is their high level of emotional sensitivity, which allows for the early development of values, empathy, and responsibility. Gifted preschoolers show more than average sharing and helping behaviors, more reactions to others' signs of distress, more sensitivity to the needs of others.

From the Harvard Preschool Project, B. White cited evidence for several intellectual abilities in preschool aged children:

1. sense discrepancies or differences in organized sequences and errors in logic
2. anticipate future events
3. deal with abstractions
4. take on the perspective of others
5. make interesting, original associations
6. plan and carry out complicated activities
7. use resources effectively
8. concentrate closely while still monitoring the surroundings

From CDE Gifted Education Unit, *Reference Series: Early Access for Highly Advanced Gifted Children Under Age Six*, 2008.