

### Motivation and Underachievement in Gifted Children

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Now, daddy doesn't want to say anything to kill your incentive; however, it is 6 A.M.

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### Frequent Characteristics of High Potential/Gifted/Talented Children

- ▶ Unusually large vocabularies
- ▶ Complex sentence structures
- ▶ Greater comprehension of language nuances
- ▶ Longer attention span, persistence
- ▶ Intensity of feelings and actions
- ▶ Wide range of interests
- ▶ Strong curiosity; limitless questions
- ▶ Like to experiment; puts ideas or things together in unusual ways

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### Frequent Characteristics of High Potential/Gifted/Talented Children (continued)

- ▶ Learn basic skills quickly and with less practice than peers
- ▶ Largely self-taught reading and writing skills as pre-schoolers
- ▶ Unusually good memory; retain information
- ▶ Unusual sense of humor; may use puns
- ▶ Like to organize people and things, and typically devise complex games
- ▶ Imaginary playmates (as preschoolers)

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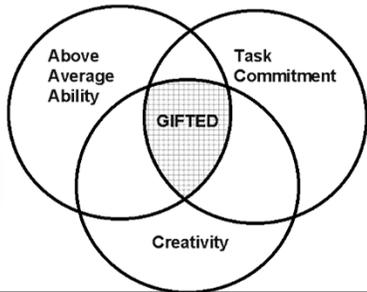
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### Achievement

ACHIEVEMENT




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### Many Factors Enhance and Facilitate Achievement

- ▶ Family encouragement and modeling of learning and reading. (*Cradles of Eminence; Outliers*)
- ▶ Family traditions of (and demands for) achievement (*Cradles of Eminence; Outliers; China's Tiger Mother*)
- ▶ Peer influences
- ▶ Research indicates the importance of practice (10 years or 10,000 hours) to be an expert. (Ericsson, 1996)
- ▶ Deliberate practice (Coyle, 2009), not "drill and kill"
- ▶ Self-efficacy (i.e., intelligence is under our control - Dweck, 2006)
- ▶ Ability to tolerate frustration and to delay gratification (Mischel's "marshmallow experiment")
- ▶ Emotional resilience (Seligman)
- ▶ Educational programs (Horowitz, Subotnik, & Matthews, 2009; Rogers, 2002)

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**Are Gifted Children Really Unmotivated?**

**Or Are they Just Not Motivated Where We Want Them to Be?**

**We know that they are intense!**

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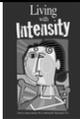
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**Dabrowski Overexcitabilities**



- ▶ **Intellectual** (Avid Reading, Curiosity, Asking Probing Questions, Concentration, Problem Solving, Introspection, Theoretical Thinking)
- ▶ **Imaginational** (Fantasy Play, Animistic and Imaginative Thinking, Vivid Visual Recall, Daydreaming, Love of Drama, Use of Metaphor)
- ▶ **Emotional** (Unusual Sensitivity and Responses; Concern for Others, Timidity and Shyness, Fear and Anxiety, Difficulty Adjusting to New Environments, Intensity of Feeling)
- ▶ **Psychomotor** (Marked Enthusiasm, Rapid Speech, Compulsive Chattering; Surplus of Energy, Nervous Habits, Impulsive Actions)
- ▶ **Sensual** (Heightened Awareness of Senses; Sensory Pleasures, Appreciation of Sensory Aspects of Experiences, Avoidance of Overstimulation)

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**There is no nature/nurture debate about motivation**

- ▶ **Children are not born unmotivated**
- ▶ **As preschoolers, they are curious and have an intense desire to learn**
- ▶ **Underachievement usually begins in the first few grades of school**

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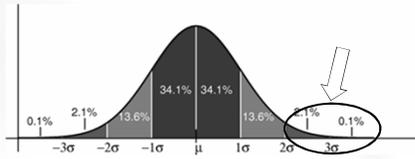
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### How Do We Know a Child Lacks Motivation or Is Underachieving?

- ▶ There is a discrepancy between the child's school performance and some index or estimate of his/her actual ability




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### Despite the Underachievement:

- ▶ The child shows "flashes of brilliance," high test scores, or other indicators of higher potential, but often:

- ▶ Is off task
- ▶ Daydreams
- ▶ Procrastinates
- ▶ Doesn't complete work
- ▶ Refuses to do work
- ▶ Bothers other children
- ▶ Seems "lazy"

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### Why Do Children Underachieve?

- ▶ Physical Reasons
- ▶ Social and Emotional Reasons
- ▶ School Reasons

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**Physical Reasons for Lack of Motivation**  
(often factors in early grades)

- ▶ Vision problems
- ▶ Hearing problems
- ▶ Learning Disabilities - the child is disheartened because of a learning deficit or disability
- ▶ Reading Disorders
- ▶ ADHD - the child is distractible and impulsive, which hinders persistent academic work
- ▶ Asthma, allergies, or reactive hypoglycemia (temporary glucose insufficiency)

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**Social and Emotional Reasons for Lack of Motivation**

- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Complicated families
  - The child is preoccupied with other concerns, such as family conflict; mismatch of parenting styles.
  - The child's energy is focused on survival and self-protection.
  - Families do not value academic achievement.
- ▶ Fear and Depression
  - It avoids risk-taking, since the child can say, "I really didn't try," and thus save face.
  - It's easier to drop out than to fulfill other's expectations.
  - It can get teachers or parents to lower their expectations.
  - The child feels misunderstood or not valued, is discouraged and has a low self-concept or even depression.

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**Social and Emotional Reasons for Lack of Motivation** - continued

- ▶ Dependency and Enmeshment
  - It's a way for the child to get extra attention or manipulate; sibling rivalry; child "specialness" allows absence of responsibilities.
- ▶ Anger and Rebellion
  - It's a way of rebelling in which parents can't win if a child goes "on strike" in a passive way.
  - The child can take control away from parents or teachers, and express anger at them.
- ▶ Friendships and Peer Pressures
  - It is an attempt to fit in with peers who do not value academic achievement.

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**School Reasons  
for Lack of Motivation**

- ▶ The child is in an unsupportive or toxic classroom.
- ▶ The child is educationally misplaced and the curriculum is inappropriate for the level of ability in that area.
- ▶ Insufficient attention is given to asynchronous development.

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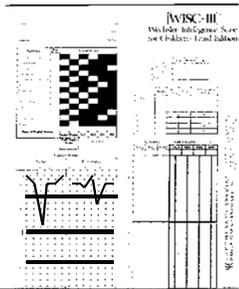
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**Asynchronous Development**




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**School Reasons  
for Lack of Motivation** (continued)

- ▶ The child has poor study habits or has not learned ways to organize material.
- ▶ The child has not learned resilience and persistence.
- ▶ Insufficient attention is given to the child's thinking style.
- ▶ The tasks at hand just do not seem relevant or important to the child's life.

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### Thinking Styles

#### Auditory-Sequential

- ▶ Prefers verbal explanations; uses language to remember
- ▶ Processes information sequentially; deals with one task at a time
- ▶ Produces ideas logically; prefers analyzing activities
- ▶ Prefers concrete thinking tasks; likes structured experiences
- ▶ Prefers proper working materials and proper settings for working
- ▶ Prefers to learn facts and details
- ▶ Approaches problems seriously

#### Visual-Spatial

- ▶ Prefers visual explanations; uses images to remember
- ▶ Processes information holistically; deals with several tasks at a time
- ▶ Produces ideas intuitively; prefers synthesizing activities
- ▶ Prefers abstract thinking tasks; likes open, fluid experiences
- ▶ Improvises with materials available; creates own structure
- ▶ Prefers to gain general overview
- ▶ Approaches problems playfully

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### Summary of Common Reasons for Lack of Motivation

- ▶ It's more important to fit in with peers who do not value achievement.
- ▶ It's easier to drop out than to fulfill other's expectations, and can get teachers or parents to lower their demands.
- ▶ It's a power struggle where the child can take control away from parents or teachers, and express anger at them, and is a way of rebelling where parents can't win if a child goes "on strike" in a passive way.
- ▶ The child can manipulate others or get extra attention, even though it may be negative attention.
- ▶ The tasks at hand just do not seem relevant or important to the child's life.
- ▶ It avoids risk-taking, since the child can say, "I just didn't try," and thus save face.

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### Summary of Common Reasons for Lack of Motivation (continued)

- ▶ The child has poor study habits, has not learned ways to organize material, or has not learned resilience and persistence.
- ▶ The child is distractible and impulsive, which hinders persistent academic work.
- ▶ The child is preoccupied with other concerns, such as family conflict, or is disheartened because of a learning deficit or disability.
- ▶ The child feels misunderstood and not valued, is discouraged, and has a low self-concept or even depression.

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### What Do Achievers Look Like? Characteristics of Achievers - (Seigle & McCoach, 2003)

Achievers are ones who:

- ❖ Find value in their school experiences
- ❖ Believe they have the skills to be successful
- ❖ Trust their environment and believe they can succeed in it
- ❖ Are more likely to have self-regulated behavior

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### Strategies

- ▶ Assess possible reasons for the apparent lack of motivation.
- ▶ Start where the child is.
- ▶ Try to transfer motivations.
- ▶ Use successive successes; catch them doing "something right."
- ▶ Recognize accomplishments; encourage attempts.
- ▶ Use anticipatory praise and expect achievement.

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### Strategies (continued)

- ▶ Frequency is more important than duration or amount.
- ▶ Vary the way you praise (write notes, etc.).
- ▶ Encouragement, not criticism; avoid sarcasm and ridicule.
- ▶ Particularly avoid harsh/inconsistent punishment.
- ▶ Recognize accomplishments in varied ways.
- ▶ Remember, personal relationships are the most important motivators.

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### Strategies (continued)

- ▶ "Special time;" "special place;" share an activity.
- ▶ Though we may start with extrinsic motivators, the goal is intrinsic self-motivation.
- ▶ Nurture self-management skills.
  - Listening to others
  - Time management
  - Patience and tolerance for frustration
  - Completing tasks
  - Goal setting

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### Paul Torrance's study of teachers who made a difference to gifted children:

(From classic research by Professor Paul Torrance)

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### About people who made a difference to gifted children:

(From classic research by Professor Paul Torrance)

- ▶ "She conveyed a powerful feeling of my ability to comprehend and to do things, and it seemed that I was able to share this excitement with her. She understood it, welcomed and enjoyed it herself which left me with a sense that learning is exciting and something that's good to share."

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**About people who made a difference to gifted children:**

- ▶ "She encouraged active participation with others, asked lots of questions, and accepted all answers without humiliating me; she helped me feel competent, even while I was trying something new."

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**About people who made a difference to gifted children:**

- ▶ "He encouraged us to fall in love with something, and some of us are still pursuing it as the center of our future career image."
- ▶ "He gave individual encouragement and focused privately on my own needs; he conveyed that it's important to him that I succeed and that I like myself."

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**Recommended Readings**

- *5 Levels of Gifted: School Issues and Educational Planning*. (Ruf, 2005).
- *Academic Advocacy for Gifted Children: A Parent's Complete Guide* (Gilman, 2008).
- *Being Smart about Gifted Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Matthews & Foster, 2009).
- *Bright, Talented, and Black: A Guide for Families of African American Gifted Learners* (Davis, 2010).
- *Children: The Challenge* (Dreikurs and Soltz, 1991).
- *Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More Than 700 Famous Men and Women* (Goertzel, Goertzel, and Hansen, 2003).
- *Dr. Sylvia Rimm's Smart Parenting: How to Raise a Happy, Achieving Child* (Rimm, 1996).
- *Helping Gifted Children Soar*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Whitney & Hirsch, 2012)

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### Recommended Readings

- *How to Parent So Children Will Learn.* (Rimm, 2008).
- *A Love for Learning: Motivation and the Gifted Child* (Whitney & Hirsch, 2007).
- *Living with Intensity* (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009).
- *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults* (Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005).
- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Dweck, 2006).
- *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Gladwell, 2008).
- *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).

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### Recommended Readings

- *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens: Living with Intense and Creative Adolescents* (Rivero, 2010).
- *Re-forming Gifted Education: How Parents and Teachers Can Match the Program to the Child* (Rogers, 2001).
- *The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families* (Pipher, 1995).
- *Siblings without Rivalry* (Fabert and Mazlish, 1998).
- *Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood, and the Search for Meaning* (Kerr and Cohn, 2001).
- *Smart Girls in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Understanding Talented Girls and Women.* (Kerr & McKay, 2014).
- *The Smart Teens' Guide to Living with Intensity: How to Get More Out of Life and Learning* (Rivero, 2010).
- *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades (and What You Can Do about It.* (Rimm, 2008).

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