

Ten Suggestions for Parents of Gifted Children

Dr. James Webb, clinical psychologist and senior author of *Guiding the Gifted Child*, offers a list of ten suggestions for parents of gifted:

- **Treat them as children. They are still children.** They need what all other children need: love but controls; attention but discipline; your involvement, yet training in self-reliance and responsibility. Even though they are gifted, they have a thorough understanding of adult problems such as death, sickness, job loss etc. They may need reassurance in these areas.
- **Maintain a consistent system of values and a happy, healthy home.** Maintaining harmony in the family is important for their optimum development. As gifted children may have a greater sensitivity to the world around them, they may be more affected by family disruption. If there is a breakup within the family, be honest with the child in a kind and gentle manner.
- **Give them a special gift: Time.** Children need an understanding parent and/or role model, and they need to spend time with this person. The child needs your attention in order to discuss values and ideas. These children often love the unconventional. You need to spend time helping them to understand the importance of behaving in a socially acceptable way.
- **Don't stifle the gifted child.** Gifted children are known for their curiosity and parents should be especially careful not to stifle the gifted child who asks questions. In particular, the child should not be discouraged for asking questions about what seems to be an improper or forbidden subject. The parent may, however, insist that questions not be asked at inappropriate times, and it may be necessary to ask the child to clarify or rephrase a question. Questions don't need to be answered completely, but parents or significant adults should provide a clue, guidance or even a question, which sends the child into some productive direction. When the parents cannot answer the questions, they should direct the child to a resource, which is likely to have the information.
- **Intellectually stimulate the gifted.** Pushing and intellectual stimulation are different. Some parents seem to feel pressured in many activities, such as reading, problems solving, etc. to push for greater achievement. Rather, you should seek in every way to stimulate and broaden the child's mind and enhance research skills through exposure to books, encyclopedias, collections, charts, travel, technology, the arts, and active experiences. It is important to take your child to libraries and resource centers. Let them browse and read, let them use the computer to explore. Often children who never get out of their home environment need to see what the city core is like. Expose them to museums and art galleries, educational institutions and historical places to enhance their background learning and feed their curiosity.
- **Encourage friendships and discover hobbies.** Children need friends who are like themselves, to play games with and to share ideas. Encourage friendships, talk to their

friends and show your child the value of a real friendship. Parents should encourage their children's hobbies and help them share their interests with their peers and friends.

- **Avoid discouraging unusual questions or attitudes.** Parents should avoid direct, indirect or unspoken attitudes that fantasy, originality, unusual questions, imaginary playmates, or out-of-the-ordinary mental processes are bad, or different. Gifted children's imaginations shouldn't be discouraged. Instead of laughing at your child, laugh with your child and seek to develop a sense of humor and *balanced outlook*.

- **Don't over-schedule your child's life.** Many parents feel that all of the child's spare time must be filled up with extra lessons of all kinds. They are afraid that the child may become bored for a short time. Allow your child to become bored and let them find a way to use time unscheduled by adults. Sometimes parents are concerned if gifted children spend their time watching TV or reading comic books. While they should not spend all their time doing so, children cannot be expected to perform at the challenge level at all times. Remember, TV and comic books have their own place in a child's growth and development and help a child develop connections with their less gifted peers and understand popular culture. Use common sense!

- **Respect the children and their knowledge.** Sometimes, it may be better than your own. If you feel that a child has made a mistake, start with the assumption that the child did not intend to do wrong. If your child wishes to follow his or her own methods for problem solving, interfere only if the child is in jeopardy of physical or emotional harm. When you have a task you want your child to do, give general instructions to be carried out in the child's way, rather than specific commands that do not take into consideration your child's personality.

- **Get involved in school efforts and community programs to plan for gifted children.** Support the schools efforts to plan programs and activities for these children. Help to interest the Parent/Teacher Association; solicit their help. Support study groups. Be active in the community and advocate for special education programs. Work to construct greater community understanding and appreciation of the special education needs of gifted children and collaborate with all parents in an effort to improve schools for all children.