

## Guiding Your Gifted Child

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How can you tell if you're the parent of a gifted child?

- You regularly ask your 6-year-old to troubleshoot your computer problems.
- Your 14-year-old speaks and writes a foreign language fluently . . . one of his own invention.
- Your 2-year-old insists on putting together his jigsaw puzzles “color-side down” so it won't be “so easy.”
- At the bookstore you discover your 9-year-old in the checkout line with \$500 worth of science books.
- Your 4-year-old cries when he hears news reports about a famine in Africa.
- Your 5-year-old strikes up a conversation with a stranger on a plane, which results in his deriving a mature grasp of negative numbers.
- Your 10-year-old writes, directs, stars in, and gets all her friends involved in a musical.

Whew! Hanging on!

Does any of this sound familiar? Life with our gifted children can certainly be both a joy and a challenge! Think of it as an amusement park ride—fraught with thrills and screams and the fear of imminent disaster, but when we get off, we just want to hop right back on! Despite opinions to the contrary, we aren't “pushing” our children; we're just holding on for dear life. They drive us crazy one minute and leave us laughing, flabbergasted, and utterly amazed the next.

What does it mean to be gifted?

At the most basic level, the word *gifted* means having the ability to think or do beyond the abilities of average people. When we see someone who understands things more quickly, learns more easily, or performs certain tasks far better than others, we say this person has a “gift for something—a gift for language or music or sports, etc.” We call a person who learns easily and thinks well or differently “intellectually gifted.” Many types of tests and assessments that help to ascertain giftedness are available. This partial list of attributes commonly found in gifted children is a useful starting place. (Few gifted children will exhibit all of these, and some characteristics may be masked by learning disabilities.)

- A developed sense of humor
- Does things earlier and better than peers
- Very different perspective than peers
- Extreme focus on one or two hobbies
- Sees patterns—both concrete and abstract
- Precocious use of language (if verbally gifted)
- Prefers to do math work in head (if mathematically gifted)

- Active imagination—creative
- Extremely competitive
- May show extreme emotional sensitivity
- Original thinker—may be a nonconformist
- Persistent
- Resourceful
- Highly developed abstract reasoning skills
- Intense

The flip side of the coin

Then there are other potential characteristics common to the gifted that can be, shall we say, “a bit more difficult” to live with.

- Perfectionism
- Super sensitivity or heightened senses (can’t stand the toes of the socks to be on “wrong,” requires the tags in shirts to be cut off, or overly sensitive to light or sound or environment, etc.)
- Very intense emotionalism
- High energy levels
- May require little sleep
- Stubbornness (the extreme side of persistence!)
- Unable to finish projects
- Impatient with details
- Manipulative
- Opinionated
- Argumentative
- Organizationally challenged
- Easily frustrated

Parenting gifted kids

I think a parent of gifted children must have coined the phrase “herding cats”! You know what I mean—these kids are always into something and they are seemingly impossible to keep on track (*your* track, that is!). At times, their overwhelming energy, creativity, persistence, and boundary-testing can drive a parent just south of crazy. But please understand this: Gifted children *are* gifts. God intentionally placed your gifted child in your home. When it gets difficult, when you think you can’t keep up with her, don’t despair. You can’t—but God can! Look to Him first for wisdom and encouragement.

Should we homeschool our gifted children?

We may find ourselves wondering if we can really provide these amazing children with an appropriate education at home: surely they would be better off in “gifted programs”?

The good news is that there is a growing amount of support, in terms of services, research, and information available to you. In the fall 2007 issue of *Mensa Research Journal*, Simone de Hoogh writes, “Research results confirm the effectiveness of home-education beyond a doubt: Parents and caretakers who choose home-education create an environment for the child in which it can develop its abilities in both social and intellectual fields, regardless of the educational level or social position of the parents.”<sup>1</sup>

We parents need to search out the best in education, resources, and opportunities for our gifted learners, just as we would for our athletes, musicians, or learning disabled children. With prayer and patience we *can* provide our gifted children an outstanding education, within the sphere of homeschooling.

### Working with their natural bent

Use what you know about your child in order to guide and motivate him. Some students need encouragement to work to their capabilities, while others are perfectionists and need help learning to lighten up and to not take everything so seriously. Our oldest son, JB, was a serious, perfectionist child. He refused to learn to ride a bike until he was sure he could get on it and ride without falling off. (He was *considerably* older than his peers when he finally learned, but he learned on *his* terms.) My husband and I didn’t pressure him to succeed because he was already hardwired to avoid failure at all costs. If anything, we needed to show him that making mistakes is a part of life.

### More to life than academics

Although it is easy to focus on academics, remember to develop other essentials like social skills, spiritual development, character, service to others, fine arts, etc. When our youngest son, Tyler, began high school he was spending more and more time at church—too much time, I thought, to get all his academics completed as well. Plays, choir, orchestra, and mime ministry were all competing for his time. Fortunately, before I did something stupid, God helped me to see that this was His plan for Tyler. No, there wouldn’t be time for Latin, but yes, there would be time for God! Tyler’s desire was to serve the Lord through his musical and theatrical gifts, and God blessed Him. Ironically, I once told Tyler that all this mime and such wouldn’t get him into college or provide him with a livelihood. God must surely have chuckled when Tyler secured a full 4-year academic scholarship to a fine Christian college, in part on the strength of his mime performance! Now that he has graduated from college he is working toward starting a Christian Performing Arts Center. The lesson I learned? Always submit your curriculum plan to the Lord.

### Curriculum for gifted students

In case you are wondering, there is no perfect curriculum designed for gifted children. Additionally, curriculum is not limited to textbooks. In developing your student’s educational plan, think outside the book. Use resources and activities that incorporate

higher-level thinking skills. Provide plenty of imaginative learning opportunities. A student might:

- Volunteer
- Create a board game
- Perform in a play
- Publish a newspaper
- Invent a product
- Start a business
- Pursue a passion
- Travel
- Apprentice
- Write a book
- Enter a competition
- Try Scouts or 4-H
- Learn a language
- Enjoy free time!!!

Finally, relax, dear ones.

Our job as homeschooling parents is not to cram all the available facts into their heads (as if we could!). Although one of our jobs is indeed to teach them how to learn and to inspire them to learn, it isn't our primary job. Our primary job is to raise disciples of Christ, and there is no place, *no place*, better than home to accomplish this goal of eternal importance.

#### Resources

- Mentors—Look to families with gifted children who are older than yours. Pick their brains; find out what worked and what didn't. (Then pass it on—be a mentor yourself.)
- Groups.Yahoo.com/Group/HSGifted—Maggie Hogan's safe haven for Christian parents who want to talk about the joys and challenges of homeschooling gifted children.

#### Nationally Recognized Gifted Programs

- CTY/IAAY: Grade 2 and up. Johns Hopkins University has widely recognized programs for gifted youth. They consist of testing to determine eligibility, camps, workshops, symposiums, and online classes, all created for very gifted kids and/or their parents.

Johns Hopkins University and the Center for Talented Youth (CTY)  
3400 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
1.410.516.0337  
[www.cty.jhu.edu](http://www.cty.jhu.edu)

[www.cty.jhu.edu/imagine/linkb.htm](http://www.cty.jhu.edu/imagine/linkb.htm) (links to academic and artistic competitions)

Duke has a similar program called TIP (Talent Identification Program), which includes a seventh-grade talent search. Duke also publishes a free, quarterly E-Newsletter for parents of gifted students.

Duke University TIP  
Box 90747  
Durham, NC 27708  
919.684.3847  
[www.tip.duke.edu](http://www.tip.duke.edu)

#### *Useful Websites*

- [GiftedDevelopment.com/Index.htm](http://GiftedDevelopment.com/Index.htm)
- [www.UniquelyGifted.org](http://www.UniquelyGifted.org)—Resources for gifted children with special needs (ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities (LD), Asperger syndrome, etc.)

#### Endnotes:

1. Hoogh, Simone de, "Home-education: A successful educational experiment?" *Mensa Research Journal* 38.3 (2007): 35–39.

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### **Biographical Information**

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*Maggie and Bob Hogan live in a (formerly) Amish farmhouse in Dover, Delaware, where they began homeschooling their two (now grown) sons in 1991. She's a nationally known speaker and co-author of The Ultimate Geography and Timeline Guide, Gifted Children at Home, Hands-on Geography, and other resource books. Involved in local, state, and national homeschooling issues, they both serve on boards of home education organizations in Delaware. They're also owners of Bright Ideas Press, publishers of the award-winning The Mystery of History series, Christian Kids Explore series, and All American History series. When not reading or writing, Maggie can be found drooling over scrapbooking supplies and book catalogs.*