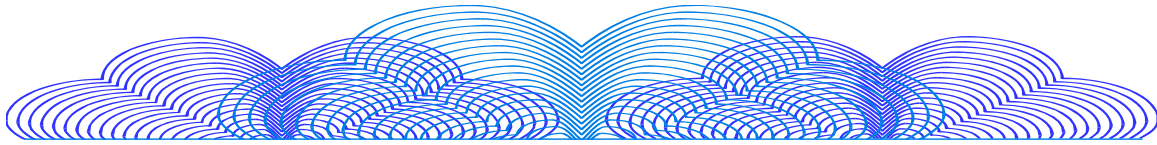


# *Gifted Children with High Developmental Potential: Insights for Parents and Teachers*



## *Introduction*

Your child has been identified as a gifted child with high Developmental Potential (DP). S/he is intellectually precocious and has an extraordinary social/emotional profile. Children with high DP are *exceptionally sensitive*: to environmental cues and stimuli, to obvious and implied meaning in any situation, and to promptings and urges impelled from within.

High DP children have dynamic inner worlds. They most often have a very evident and deep-seated personal will. They have a fertile imaginational capacity operative, in some form, at all times. In optimal circumstances they demonstrate a penchant for sustained focus in any area of intense interest. Their acute emotional sensitivity and awareness can sometimes be unbearable. Their propensity to seek out deeper meaning and their drive *to know*, while exhilarating and deeply compelling, can also be heavy burden.

The highly gifted child's need for communion –that natural human drive for essential connections and reciprocal understanding – prevails. This manifests as longing for friendship, for sustained and meaningful relationship. Due to their high ability, speed of processing and emotional and intellectual acuity the high DP child may not have access to like-minded peers and be unable, therefore, to develop fitting friendship skills. When these vital communion needs are thwarted grave discontent ensues. When a genuine friend is found the highly gifted child will protect that friendship with fervor, cherishing it in the extreme.

It is critical to note that lack of access to true peers may stunt the child's social-emotional growth and be the source of deep anxiety. It is not uncommon for

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the child to (wrongly) blame him/herself for these arrested social skills and to develop protective behaviors as a result. The over-intellectualization or inappropriate social response of some exceptionally bright children needs to be reframed in light of this global developmental understanding. The highly gifted child's multifaceted perceptual field and natural heightened responses create a radically different experience of reality. A seemingly non-responsive high DP child may be painfully shy. A highly gifted child with over-the-top responses in a social setting may be trying desperately to make connections. Their innate capacity for subtle and complex interactions needs room to grow, understanding and guidance.

Parenting or teaching children with high DP is an astonishing challenge. High DP kids rarely experience the world from a middle-of-the-road vantage point. They are intense: mercurial in mood and in thought, challenging in the extreme. A high DP child can register deeply felt emotional response in situations that seem, on the outside, to be entirely neutral. This powerful response may be sustained over time. A high DP child can have an imaginal experience that, to them, is more real than any manifest reality. The contents of their imaginal world is the stuff of their deepest delight. They seek meaning and connections between things at all times. High DP learners are capable of making intuitive connections between ideas at a startling rate which is inexplicable in ordinary terms. They have the answer, are sure of it and have no way of explaining how they got it. As whole to part learners they may become extremely distraught when information is presented to them that lacks connection to a larger order.

To make matters more complicated the high DP child operates on multiple levels. The child's overt behavior may seem, to the uninitiated, incomprehensible, contradictory and excessive. Many high DP children are psychologically introverted. That is, their most authentic and true response in any situation occurs internally. Their deepest reactions may not be externally evident at all. As well they have strong moral compasses and will attempt to gauge the perceived right and wrong of any situation. They may not share their genuine understanding for fear of either hurting others or being repudiated for their differences. In the end they may accurately discern that their audience will have no way of understanding what it is they have to express.

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