

# Giftedness and ADHD

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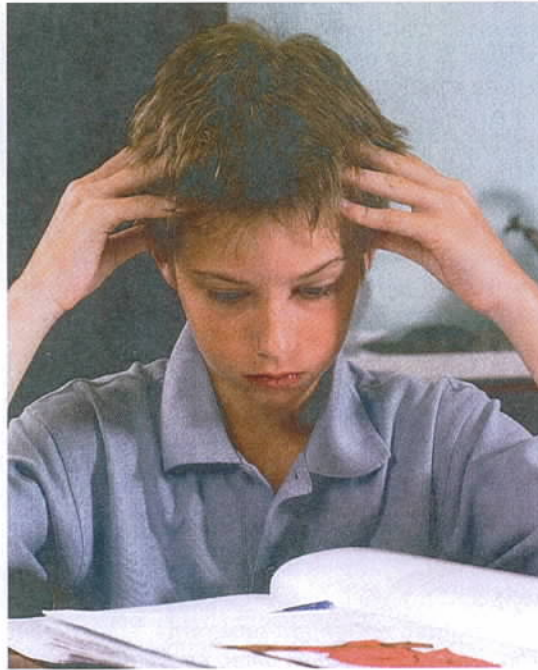
Children who are diagnosed as gifted (typically assessed as an individual with a Full Scale I.Q. above 130) along with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder are faced with unique strengths and difficulties. Despite their high intellectual abilities, gifted children with ADHD may not be able to keep up with accelerated curriculums. Participating in special education classes may even cause them to become frustrated and lead to acting out behaviors.

## A gifted child with ADHD may:

- struggle with homework and classwork while simultaneously performing above grade level on tests and quizzes.
- have difficulty keeping up with advanced curriculums while becoming bored if placed in regular classes.
- have increased self-awareness and may perceive themselves as inadequate if they significantly struggle due to ADHD.
- feel frustrated because they cannot pinpoint why they chronically do not live up to expectations.
- tune out repetitive information or lessons that are below their ability level which could then impact their level of performance.
- be earning average grades and may be significantly under-performing based on their capabilities.

Gifted children with ADHD may come up with creative ways to solve challenging problems. Although they may not be able to "show their work" or complete tasks the way their teachers ask them to, they may be able to figure out the correct answers. This unique way of solving problems can help the individual develop "out of the box" type solutions that could propel them to creative successes. On the other hand, it may also cause them to feel different or abnormal and could lead to them feeling "weird," depressed or anxious. Their unique thinking, hyperactivity and inattention may also lead to peer conflict or feelings of being ostracized from classmates.

A child who is gifted and extremely hyperactive or impulsive may be easily identified. More difficult, however, is the gifted child who is inattentive but well behaved. This child may score very high on standardized examinations and/or classroom tests, but does not turn in their homework and seems to "space out" in class. The explanation for their struggles could be a misdiagnosis, being labeled as "lazy" or



perceived as lacking motivation. Many upper level children, or even adults, are not diagnosed because their advanced intellect and creative solutions allow them to compensate for their poor attention. They may have the ability to cover up any shortcomings due to their higher levels of functioning. It may not be until later in life, when academic or life-events become more challenging, that the true impact of the ADHD is recognized.

Gifted children who are not sufficiently challenged in a classroom may demonstrate symptoms associated with ADHD, therefore, an assessment with a professional who is familiar with both ADHD and giftedness is critical. Once diagnosed with both giftedness and ADHD, a multi-faceted approach to treatment would be recommended. Medication, academic accommodations, therapy and behavioral modification

may be beneficial. Your child's academic placement may be able to provide assistance through an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), 504 Plan or a specialized curriculum. In addition, your child may be eligible for accommodations on standardized testing such as the SAT, ACT, GRE, etc. They may also qualify for financial assistance through the McKay scholarship or the Americans with Disabilities Act. In regard to medication, they may benefit from a long-acting, time released medication to address difficulties with attention and concentration. Psychotherapy may be beneficial to address self-esteem, study strategies, coping skills or other concerns. It may also be helpful to create an Individualized Behavioral Reinforcement Program to provide your child with praise and rewards for positive conduct and school performance. Continued participation in meaningful group activities, such as athletic teams or clubs is recommended to facilitate positive social interactions and self-esteem in multiple areas.

In addition to school-based assistance, parents can provide their children with activities that incorporate movement and experiential learning into intellectually-based pursuits. Identifying your child's particular talents and then choosing extracurricular activities that are in-line with their strengths can help improve their functioning in these areas. Presenting accelerated material in a format that captures your child's attention may then lead to greater interest, participation and advancement. Both ADHD and gifted children may feel different from others, which can lead to out of the box success or feelings of being different and emotional turmoil. Therefore, proper evaluation and treatment is critical to provide necessary accommodations to help them reach their attainable and, oftentimes, lofty potentials.

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