

Tip Sheets

Children Who are Exceptionally Bright or Gifted: Early Signs

Parents, family members and educators wondering whether a child might be exceptionally bright or gifted can use the following basic developmental and behavioral guidelines.

According to the MN Council for Gifted and Talented, the earlier any of these behaviors occur, the more likely the child may be exceptionally bright or gifted.

Birth to 4 months

Children as young as newborns can show signs of high intelligence. Behavior may include making eye contact soon after birth, during feeding, and a continued awareness of others. Other behaviors could include:

- Dislikes being left in infant seat or swing.
- Wants someone interacting with them almost all of the time.
- Extremely alert; others notice and comment on alertness.

Common misconceptions about gifted children

- Don't need support because they can succeed on their own.
- Self-motivated; prefer to teach themselves.
- Enjoy teaching other children what they know.
- Proud to be the center of attention regarding their work or model behavior.
- Natural loners; not many friends.
- When older they get good grades in all subjects; successful in all that they do.
- Cannot be identified as gifted until in third or fourth grade.

4 to 12 months

Similar to newborns, children 4 to 12 months may be extremely alert and attentive, as well as:

- Seldom "mouths" toys.
- Shows purposeful play with toys.
- Pays attention when read to.
- Follows directions; doesn't miss a thing.
- Knows what's next in routine.

12 to 18 months

As infants grow into toddlers, they may show an increased interest in competence and they may throw tantrums when not permitted to do something themselves. Children in this age group may try to please others and their feelings may easily be hurt. They may also have an attention span longer than what is expected for their age group, often demonstrated by:

- Interest in letters, numbers, books and talking.
- Exceptionally good eye-hand coordination when using toys such as shape sorters.
- Uses puzzles and toys that are beyond chronological age level.
- Does not chew on or tear books.

18 months to 2 years

Children this age may know many basic concepts, such as colors, letters and numbers, due to the child's own desire for knowledge and learning (not due to child being coached or trained). They may also demonstrate advanced language skills, both expressive (talking) and receptive (understanding). Other behaviors may include:

- Tenacious; needs to do something in own way and not done until he decides.
- Insists on knowing “why” before complying with requests.
- Not easily distracted.
- Advanced sense of humor.
- Interested in machines and other technology.
- Draws and identifies what adults draw.
- Notices beauty in nature.

2 to 3 years

In addition to showing an interest in printing letters and numbers, exceptionally bright and gifted children 2 to 3 years of age can become frustrated when they do not have the ability to do something and will throw tantrums when they are unable to do a task or activity in their own way. They may also:

- Catch mistakes made by adults.
- Not forget promises or changes in plans.
- Prefer to interact with adults or older children.
- Be very competitive.
- Play with puzzles, games and toys that are designed for children who are two times or more the child’s age.
- Demonstrate early reading skills (recognizes most street and store signs, names, labels, and words in print).

3 to 4 years

Children age 3 to 4 years may be exceptionally curious and inquisitive, as well as extremely talkative and creative. Similar to earlier years, children this age may often be perfectionistic and easily frustrated when not able to do something. Additional signs include:

- Interested in learning from books/reading.
- Enjoys debates, reasoning and arguing.
- Very capable using a computer/tablet.

- Becomes fearful of what is beyond her understanding; thinks ahead, worries.
- Interested in knowing how and why; asks questions, listens to responses.
- Interested in applying rules and strategy to tasks/activities.
- Bossy with other children; tends to be leader in play scenario.

4 to 5 years

Exceptionally bright or gifted children age 4 to 5 years old have begun to read chapter books and have an enormous vocabulary. They may also easily grasp number concepts and mathematical reasoning, as well as:

- Often able to play older children and adults in card and board games.
- Easily remember facts and events.
- Are extremely capable with technology (computers, tablets, video games, etc.).
- May begin to question the meaning of life, own self-worth and other mature topics; can be philosophical/speculative.
- Excellent abstract reasoning ability.
- Have a great desire to engage others in meaningful and intelligent conversation about the child’s interests.

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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