



Bumps ALONG THE Way

**COPING WITH UNDERACHIEVEMENT, PERFECTIONISM,
HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY, DEPRESSION, FRUSTRATION
AND INTROVERSION**

Challenges

Children who are gifted may have unique qualities and unequal growth in many areas. They may also experience heightened feelings. While these special traits can be positive, they can also create bumps in the road. Children who are gifted may face a variety of challenges, including underachievement, perfectionism, heightened sensitivity, depression and frustration. Parents need to understand these challenges so they can work with school staff to find successful strategies to help children over these bumps.

Underachievement

The term “underachieving,” in relation to giftedness, describes the performance of children who express their giftedness in extra-curricular activities or at home but their achievement level at school falls far below their actual cognitive ability. This discrepancy is not caused by an underlying learning disability, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or any other disorder that may be affecting their achievement. The most common complaint about underachievers is, “They won’t do their work.”

If you are uncertain whether your child is underachieving, talk with your child’s teacher and consider the following questions. Does your child *usually or often*:

- love doing projects at home, yet seem apathetic about school?

- express their giftedness in extra-curricular activities and at home, but not in the classroom?
- appear frustrated, unsure, complacent, irresponsible, defensive, depressed, distracted or bored?
- daydream, procrastinate or avoid taking risks?
- appear disinterested in school and focus on the negative aspects of learning?
- quit new activities if he or she isn’t having immediate success?
- have difficulty accepting both criticism and compliments from others?
- tend to be inflexible, avoiding new approaches or ideas?

If the answer is yes to several of these questions, underachieving may be an issue for your child. However, it is important to ensure that your child is not demonstrating characteristics of depression, anxiety, or learning or attention disorders. If you are unsure, consult with relevant school staff and/or your physician.

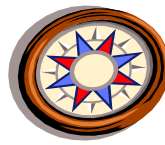
Children underachieve in school for various reasons—poor self-image, a desire to fit in with others, learning disabilities, unusual or unrecognized talents, stress or boredom. For children who are underachieving, the motivation to succeed may be compromised by any number of factors, which can create the illusion that their motivation is simply missing. As a parent, it is important to consider what factors may be

influencing your child's behaviour. Some specific causes of underachievement in children who are gifted include:

- lack of a future vision or dream to work toward
- problems within the family that divert children's thinking and effort
- the desire to fit in with their peer group
- the desire to rebel
- the desire to avoid participating in special programming, such as the International Baccalaureate
- feelings of stress based on the need to please others or their own unrealistic expectations
- disinterest in the curriculum topics and related learning activities
- work that is too easy or too difficult
- work that is meaningless and repetitive to the child, resulting in little effort.

The most common assumption by parents is that boredom with school work is the cause of underachievement, and that school work, teachers' instructional styles, and the curriculum are all at fault. This assumption can lead to the conclusion that a quick solution to boredom is to increase the difficulty and workload for the child. This can be counterproductive for children who are already disengaged. While these can be contributing factors, it is important to fully consider what other factors might be at work.

Students who underachieve can be disruptive or withdrawn in the classroom. They may engage in power struggles with their teachers. Or they may become apathetic, surrendering their passion for learning and not completing tasks. The most serious consequence of underachievement is not graduating from senior high school. It's important that students have meaningful and challenging work to do at school and receive appropriate guidance and support at home.



Strategies for overcoming underachievement

- *Listen and respond to your child's concerns.* Talk with your child about what, specifically, he or she finds difficult or uncomfortable about school.
- *Think about your child's strengths and interests, comparing these with topics and activities he or she is doing at school.* Look over assignments. What might be more challenging or stimulating? Independent projects? More choice of topics? More hands-on activities? More opportunities to be creative? Work with teachers to identify appropriate ways that your child can enrich his or her learning experience and demonstrate knowledge without increasing the workload.
- *Talk to your child's teachers about your concerns.* Explain what you have observed about your child's preferred learning style, interests and talents. Discuss ways to encourage achievement. Be specific about your child's low level of performance and look for possible solutions. For example, "I think Mason will do better on his writing assignments if he has an opportunity to share the assignment with others." Teachers are usually open to suggestions and willing to make adjustments.
- *Minimize anxiety about learning.* Create a non-threatening place for reading, studying and taking learning risks at home.
- *Help your child be comfortable with both wins and losses.* Recognize improvement, and be there in times of disappointment.
- *Provide interesting activities and experiences outside of school.* Look for opportunities to link school-related topics to meaningful experiences in the community. These kinds of related experiences may stimulate your child's interest in current school topics.

- *Speak positively about school and your child's teachers.* Listen to your child's concerns about school, but encourage him or her to see the other point of view. Ask questions like "What do you think the teacher thought?" or "Why do you think the teacher may want you to do that?"
- *Agree on and communicate expectations.* It is important for children to get the same clear message about school expectations from both parents. If one parent shields the child from the other's expectations, the child learns to play the two parents against each other.
- *Ensure your standards are appropriate for your child's abilities, neither too low nor too high.* If you need help identifying reasonable academic expectations, consult your child's teachers, the school counsellor or the district psychologist.
- *Treat all of your child's subjects as equally important and relevant.* Talk about limitations as "things you are working on," rather than "things you are bad at." "Working on" implies that your child can and probably will improve if he or she puts in some time and effort. Although some talents and skills may never be as strong as others, improvement is always possible.
- *Allow your child to experience a feeling of accomplishment for finding his or her way through a difficult task.* Children develop feelings of confidence and competence when they are able to overcome obstacles on their own. If you rush to assist, instruct or direct whenever things get difficult, you are sending a negative message that your child isn't smart enough or competent enough to figure things out for him or herself.
- *If you feel that you need to assist with homework, use questioning to encourage your child to work more independently.* Good questions can activate thinking, and help your child feel more personal success. Consider questions such as the following.
 - Can you think of another way to do this?
 - Can you show me how you got that answer?
 - Where have you seen a problem like this before?
 - What strategy could we use to solve this problem?
 - Where else can we look to get the answer?
- *Provide support and encouragement.* If your child tries and still doesn't understand, coach him or her by talking through the problem, concept or skill, but don't do the problem for your child. Psychologist Sylvia Rimm suggests the following steps:
 1. Model the task.
 2. Your child does it once as you watch.
 3. Then encourage him or her to work independently.
- *Help your child understand the connection between effort and results.* Does your child understand that studying spelling words during the week improves test results on Friday? Or that proofreading an essay for English may positively influence the final mark? Some children seem to think that magic or luck, rather than effort and hard work will remedy an academic shortfall. When your child's effort shows improved results, call attention to this positive change. Discuss examples of how effort and results have worked in other areas of your child's life, such as sports or arts. For example, remind your child of how practising the piano improved his or her skill in playing a particular song, or how shooting baskets at the park improved his or her points per game.

- *Encourage your child's commitment to learning by requiring him or her to spend a designated amount of time each day on academic activities.* Ten minutes of homework per grade per day is a helpful rule-of-thumb. For example, this would mean 20 minutes per day for a child in Grade 2. These activities should include assigned homework, as well as reading, reviewing notes for classes or working on other projects. Allow for some time to unwind after school, but do not let studies wait until the late evening hours. Some children must have the freedom to work on their own schedule so experiment to find out what works for your child and your family.

Perfectionism

What is good and necessary for ultimate high achievement—that is, setting high and demanding (but not unattainable) goals for oneself—can be either a positive or a negative force in a person's life. Children who are gifted often pursue excellence and are concerned about accomplishment. This heightened perception may also apply to failure and what it looks like. The desire to achieve excellence may be intense. If the high standards they set are not met students may feel inferior or defeated. On the other hand, they may feel unfulfilled if they do not strive for the quality of which they are capable.

Students who are gifted may also strive for excellence because they tend to:

- set standards according to their mental age rather than their chronological age
- set standards appropriate for older friends or adults that they tend to socialize with
- come to expect success and fear the failures they have had little experience with
- realize that with easy work the only challenge is doing it perfectly.

The literature suggests that there are two types of perfectionism. “Normal” perfectionists get a sense of pleasure from labours of effort. Where as there are other individuals who suffer from damaging, unrealistic perfectionism. These types of perfectionists seem unable to feel satisfaction because in their own eyes they never do things well enough.

Five characteristics of perfectionists seem to contribute to underachievement:

- procrastination (may be an avoidance tactic)
- fear of failure (may play out as apathy)
- an all-or-nothing mindset
- avoiding failure through complete inertia, or by searching for a perfect solution rather than choosing a “less perfect” possibility
- workaholism (self-identity is tied to external rewards, difficulty delegating or saying “no”).

In particular, young girls who are gifted may believe that they must be perfect in everything they attempt to do as a student, athlete, artist, child and friend, as well as being attractive in appearance. There is also a tendency for girls who are gifted to attribute their accomplishments to external forces, to luck, or being in the right place at the right time, not to their own efforts, resulting in what some people call the “imposter syndrome.” These girls may strive to become even more perfect as they downplay their hard-won achievements and impose impossibly high standards on themselves.

Linda Silverman, a researcher on social emotional dimensions of individuals who are gifted, believes that perfectionism is the least understood aspect of giftedness. It is often perceived as a problem to be fixed. Silverman suggests that perfectionism is part of the experience of being gifted, and is a two-edged sword with amazing potential to bring an individual toward either achievement or despair.

Perfectionism can become an issue for some children who are gifted. Children may set unrealistic standards for themselves based on their advanced reasoning ability even though other skill areas may not be as well-developed. These individuals often believe that they are what they do. Perfectionism is a pattern of characteristics and behaviours, including compulsiveness about work habits, over-concern for details, unrealistically high standards and rigid routines (Kerr, 1991, p. 141). As a parent, you may want to ask yourself: “Are these behaviours barriers for my child?” and, “Do they prevent my child from experiencing success and happiness?”

Use the following questions to identify signs of perfectionism and determine if this may be an issue for your child. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between underachievement and perfectionism. At times, a child can experience both. Some of the questions you asked yourself to decide whether your child is an underachiever also apply to perfectionism.

Does your child *usually* or *often*:

- avoid trying new things for fear of failure?
- quit new activities if he or she is not having immediate success?
- avoid learning situations that may involve risk and the possibility of low grades?
- procrastinate, fret over details and leave work unfinished (or never start it) out of fear it won't be good enough?
- seem less productive than classmates because he or she overworks and overanalyzes everything, and therefore gets less done?
- focus on mistakes, rather than on what was done well?
- set unrealistic goals and then become self-critical when they are not achieved?
- set intentionally low goals, so he or she knows they will be achieved?
- have trouble accepting criticism?
- become discouraged with any mark below an A?
- feel great when she or he is first or best at something and feel terrible when not?
- punish him or herself for not being "the best?"
- fail to recognize improvement?
- have a hard time accepting compliments or feedback from others?
- assume that others do not have the same high standards?
- tend to be inflexible, avoiding new approaches or ideas?
- tend to tightly control emotions, not wanting others to know how he or she is feeling?
- have difficulty separating his or her sense of self from what he or she has accomplished?

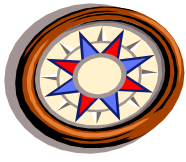
If you answered yes to several of these questions, perfectionism may be an issue for your child.

Perfectionism can develop at various stages for various reasons, but for many children it is simply a part of their personality. Too often, parents are blamed for causing their child's perfectionism. It's assumed that they pressure their children with their own unrealistic expectations. However, many perfectionist children are the product of relaxed, easy-going parents with realistic expectations. It seems possible that certain children are simply born with the type of temperament that leads to perfectionism tendencies.

It would be unwise to try to root out perfectionism completely, for it can be used in a positive way to achieve excellence. Without perfectionism, there would be no Olympic champions, no great artists or writers, no scientific breakthroughs and no great moral leaders.

However, some children may become debilitated by their vision of what they can or should be. These paralyzed perfectionists are so terrified of doing something wrong, they actually accomplish very little. Assignments do not get done and papers do not get handed in. "What if I don't do it right?" becomes a reason not to try at all. In extreme cases, children may develop compulsive behaviours that require professional medical or psychological assistance. Some give up from exhaustion or frustration. Some resort to angry rebellion. Some settle into mediocre levels of work that hide their earlier academic promise.

As parents, be vigilant that your children's perfectionism doesn't take over their lives or drive them to underachieve. Use patience and understanding to positively channel their perfectionism.



Strategies for helping your child cope with perfectionism

- *Be aware of the expectations you may have created for your child.* Ask yourself: Are my expectations reasonable? Am I allowing my child freedom to be an individual, express him or herself, have fun, fool around, make mistakes—be a child?
- *Take a look at your own perfectionist qualities.* Are you too hard on yourself? Are you setting the example for your children that you want to set—of someone who enjoys their own accomplishments and doesn't criticize themselves all the time for not doing better?
- *Assist your child in setting reasonable and reachable expectations.* Help your child to recognize that he or she has areas of greater and lesser talents and interests. It is unreasonable for children to expect that they will perform equally well in all subjects. If an individual has high math ability, he or she can work toward—and probably achieve—an A in math. But he or she may not be able to perform at the same level in creative writing or social studies classes if his or her talents and interests do not lie in these areas. These children need help to recognize when they are expecting too much of themselves, and to choose what does and does not call for perfect results. Which things require the greatest investment of time and energy? Which things simply need to be finished—to be “good enough?” Insist on adequate effort, and reassure them that learning gaps can be addressed, but let them know that it is okay to get less than the best grades in some subjects.
- *Help your child develop a deeper understanding of perfectionism and how it can affect others.* Help your child distinguish between perfectionistic attitudes toward self and others. It is admirable to maintain high

standards for yourself, but it is unfair to expect others to conform to these standards.

- *Help your child develop time management skills.* Many children need help with skills such as planning and time management. Children may set standards for themselves based on their advanced reasoning ability but may not have the necessary skills to reach these standards. For example, a kindergarten child could have the intellectual ability to do a project at the third-grade level, but may still fail to complete the project because he or she has not learned to plan and manage time to complete the project successfully. Teach your child to set priorities and avoid over-committing him or her. Show your child how to manage his or her time and achieve goals by breaking large, long-term projects into small, manageable steps. Introduce a time management log for working on projects that need to be completed in a specific time period.

Time management log		
Date	Goal for this work period	Work completed

- *Refrain from criticism.* Perfectionist children often criticize themselves for their lack of perfection. Therefore, choose your words carefully, and be aware of your body language and facial expressions. A frown or a look of disappointment may cancel out your positive and encouraging statements. However, if your child does not like what he or she did, do not dismiss his or her feelings (“What do you mean you don't like your poster? It's wonderful!”). Listen to what your child says, help him or her identify why he or she is unhappy with the work, express what you appreciated about the work, and if necessary, then explore how things might be done differently in the future.

- *Focus on your child's strengths and successes.* When your child evaluates his or her own performance, help him or her to see what went right rather than “what I did wrong.” Turn your child's attention away from flaws in his or her work and toward what he or she has learned and accomplished. You might say, “You've told me you're disappointed with some parts of your project. Now tell me what's good about what you've done.” Also, point out accomplishments, since perfectionists tend to forget about past successes and see the future as full of opportunities to fail.
- *Use praise discerningly.* Do not lavish praise on your child for excelling or dwell on his or her achievements, especially in your child's presence. Parents can express appreciation of their children's successes without making them feel that these accomplishments alone are what make them special or define their identity. Children who are praised all the time start believing that what they do is more important than who they are. Believing this, they may be unable to accept any praise, since nothing they do meets their own impossible standards.
- *Show that your caring is not based on your child's performance.* Perfectionists tend to believe that they are what they do. They equate themselves with their grades, their skill on the basketball court, or their ability to win roles in school plays. Be careful not to over-celebrate success or overanalyze less than perfect results. Parents need to show perfectionist children that they love and accept them for who they are, not for what they do or achieve. Express as least as much appreciation of your child's interests and individuality (what makes him or her special) as of his or her achievements (high grades and awards). Point out positive actions that have nothing to do with ability. Commend your child for taking risks, even when things do not turn out as planned. Notice appropriate ways of handling failure and thoughtful interactions with other people. Applaud your child's efforts. Encourage *process* over product—what your child *learns* rather than what he or she accomplishes or produces.
- *Introduce your child to new experiences.* Encourage your child to choose activities completely different from what he or she would typically select (perfectionists will often choose the activities that have been successful for them in the past). When your child is about to start something new, help him or her plan for possible challenges. Talk about what might go wrong and what to do if that happens. It might be easier to get your child to try new things if you set a time limit on his or her participation. For example, if you are trying to convince a reluctant daughter to attend day camp, you might say, “I'd like you to go for the first three days. Then we can decide together if you should finish out the week.” Perfectionists often enjoy new activities, if you can just get them through the door. It is also important to involve your child in activities that are not graded or judged. Encourage him or her to try things “just for fun,” and to spend more time doing what he or she loves to do—taking walks, reading mysteries, playing with the dog, or playing board games with friends or siblings.
- *Create a safe environment.* Make your home a place where effort is more important than winning or losing. Make it a place where your child does not fear negative consequences for being average. Let your child know through your words and actions that you support him or her no matter what. Children who are gifted often need to practise the learning cycle: bump into limits, try again, try a different approach, practise, improve and succeed. Encourage your child's sense of humour and teach the value of patience—with him or herself and with the process of learning. Help your child lighten up about things that do not go as planned.
- *Let your child know that mistakes are okay, that everyone makes them, and that they are part of the learning process.* Remind your child that nobody is perfect and nobody is

good at everything. Acknowledge your own mistakes and those of others, including other gifted individuals. The following story may help children understand this: “Thomas Edison tried 1500 different filaments for the light bulb before finding the right one. After the last experiment, an assistant asked, ‘Well Mr. Edison, how do you feel about having 1500 failures to your credit?’ Edison replied, ‘No, they weren’t failures. We now know 1500 light bulb filaments that don’t work!’” (Walker 1991, p. 68). Teach your child that mistakes are for learning, and encourage him or her to ask questions and take intellectual risks. One father said to his children, “Anything worth doing is worth doing wrong because it is only by doing it wrong that you can learn to do it right.”

- *Talk to your child about strategies to help him or her deal with perfectionism.* The following are some ideas you could suggest.
 - *Keep going—do not start over.* Identify parts of your assignment that might need revising, then go ahead and revise them. But don’t throw everything out and go back to the beginning.
 - *Catch yourself trying to be perfect.* Whenever you realize that your perfectionism is showing, stop and think about it. What can you do to change your feelings or behaviours? Maybe you can give yourself an order—“Hey, you, snap out of it!” For example, imagine that you have just finished the illustrations for your social studies report when suddenly you notice a small mistake. Before you start doing the whole thing over again, ask yourself, “Will anyone besides me even notice the difference?” Force yourself to say, “I’m done. This is good enough.”
 - *Get comfortable with feedback.* Creative people want others to tell them about their work. They use that information to improve, or as sources of new ideas. Ask your teachers, parents or trusted friends to review your work or listen to your ideas, then ask them what they think. Try to really

listen to what they say, then sort through the information they give you and act on the advice you believe to be the most worthwhile.

- *Quit making up rules.* Follow your teacher’s guidelines for assignments, and try not to add unreasonable ones of your own. If the teacher has told you what is expected, why make more work for yourself? At home, talk to your parents about their expectations for your performance. Are you in agreement? Or are you writing in extra rules and expectations?

- *Recognize that there are positive and negative aspects to perfectionism.* Discuss how the choice is ours as to how to use it. We can let it paralyze us with fear of failure, or we can use it for unparalleled excellence. We can use this drive to help create a better world.

Heightened sensitivity— Feeling things deeply

Children who are gifted may feel things and empathize with others more deeply than most children their age. This heightened sensitivity may show itself in several ways, including:

- picking up quickly on a person’s feelings
- curiosity about the meaning of life and death
- sleeplessness
- worrying about things that are difficult to change, such as homelessness or the environment
- expressing feelings through the fine arts—music, drawing or dance
- crying and reacting with anger or frustration
- physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches or other ailments
- difficulty handling criticism or rejection
- being overly selective about food and clothing
- difficulty weathering the normal ups and downs of daily life.

The positive side of these heightened feelings is that sensitive children may be more careful with

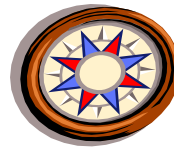
the feelings of others and more likely to stick up for their friends and family members. They may also be more responsive to their environment. They may consider more perspectives when solving problems. However, as a parent, it is important to note whether this heightened sensitivity is interfering with your child's ability to enjoy relationships, school or other important events in their life.

Along with sensitivity often comes intensity. Children who are gifted often have high energy—both physical and psychological. Kazimierz Dabrowski, a renowned psychologist, explored a theory of emotional development that describes an expanded awareness and heightened capacity to respond to various stimuli. He found that gifted and creative individuals often manifest these characteristics more intensely in three areas.

- Intellectual – heightened capacity for concentration, problem solving and learning; tendency toward avid reading, detailed planning and curiosity; a need to ask probing questions; interest in abstraction and moral thinking.
- Imaginational – heightened sense of imagination, inventiveness and magical fantasy (creation of private worlds or imaginary friends); poetic, dramatic or artistic abilities.
- Emotional – heightened capacity for extreme emotions and strong attachments; tendency toward somatic expressions (tense stomach, sinking heart, blushing, flushing) and concern with death; feelings of fear, anxiety and guilt.

Children who are gifted may feel the intellectual, imaginational and emotional areas more strongly than others. Often they need to be assured that these so-called over-excitabilities are normal and come with the territory of being gifted.

Sharing feelings can help you understand what your child is going through and look for solutions, and can also help children gain perspective on their emotions. Because of the high standards they often hold for themselves, these children sometimes suppress their fears and concerns rather than admit to a perceived weakness. Look for ways to encourage your children to share their feelings and emotions.



Strategies for helping your child deal with sensitivity

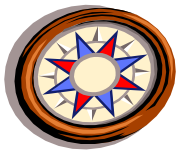
- *Let your sensitive child be who he or she is.* Acknowledge and respect your child's feelings.
- *Look for volunteer opportunities in the community.* If your child feels strongly about the plight of others, such as people who are homeless, do a community service as a family. Help your child understand that individuals can make a positive difference in the world.
- *Assure your child that he or she is not responsible for everything.* Help your child understand that they can change some things but other things must be left to adults to solve.
- *Encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings.* Children need a vocabulary of wide-ranging “feeling words” so that they can identify and describe how they feel.

Examples of feeling words

Anger	Happiness
frustrated	passionate
mad	cheerful
violent	joyful
spiteful	bubbly

Sadness	Guilt
gloomy	humiliated
lonely	embarrassed
discouraged	intimidated
glum	sheepish

- *Talk with your child about your own feelings.* Sensitive children are more aware of their parents' emotional ups and downs, so be prepared to discuss your emotional state or feelings with your child so that he or she realizes that you experience various emotions also. Be selective when doing this and base what you share on your child's emotional maturity, not his or her intellectual level.



Strategies for encouraging your child to express feelings

- *When you are doing an activity with your child, casually bring up school and ask how it is going.* Children often loosen up and express themselves more readily while going for a walk or playing a game.
 - *Ask open-ended questions.* “If you could change anything you wanted to in your life, what would you change?” Encourage your child to answer by sharing your own response.
 - *Take your child for an outing.* Give him or her your undivided attention and you may find yourself having a great conversation. As one parent said, “I feel like I know my child better since we started going out for breakfast together on Saturdays.”
 - *Some children benefit from expressing their thoughts and feelings through art or stories.* Consider how your child’s special talents could help him or her. Depending on your child’s abilities and preferences, you may want to encourage him or her to create a story with you about a character who, for example, is teased, is afraid to talk in class, or has a pet that dies. Stories work particularly well for gifted children who are not able to describe how they feel but who can make the connection between a story and themselves.
 - *Encourage your child to keep a journal.* Encourage writing about what excites, exhilarates, frightens or troubles him or her. Journaling is an effective way for young people to reflect, analyze and strategize about things that concern them.
 - *Seek out books about characters who face different kinds of difficult situations.* Ask a librarian to guide you to books about specific themes or challenges. You might read the book too, or read it with your child, so you can
- talk together about how individuals cope with problems. If the book is a work of fiction, you could also discuss other ways the book might have ended or a character might have behaved.
 - *Informal chatting while sharing a book or watching a television show or movie can sometimes lead to good discussions.* Look for opportunities to discuss what characters might be feeling and why they might be feeling that way.
 - *Create a role-play about a challenging situation.* Ask your child which role he or she would like you to play.
 - *Encourage your child to use the creative arts—writing, dance, drama, storytelling, singing, drawing, sculpting—to show how he or she would like life to be.* Children can depict through art a near-perfect school, the friends they would like to have, the ideal home or bedroom, the places they would like to visit, and so on. Often, such creations will identify parts of life that children have conflicted or unresolved feelings about.
 - *Encourage your child to read biographies as a way to envision the future.* Children have a difficult time seeing beyond the present; learning about the childhoods of distinguished men and women can be inspirational. Stories of accomplished people from diverse backgrounds who failed many times, suffered setbacks, and endured the disapproval of others without giving up can provide powerful role models for children.

Depression

Sometimes underachievement, perfectionism, heightened emotion or other factors can lead students who are gifted to become depressed. Behavioural clues may include a drop in school grades, loss of interest in extra-curricular activities or running away from home. School counsellors, family doctors, and psychologists can be helpful in identifying those students who may require professional assistance.

Depression can result from several sources, including:

- too much pressure
- loneliness
- dependence on extrinsic motivation
- extreme competitiveness
- perfectionism.

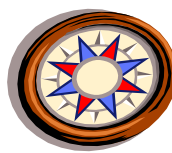
Many children and teens are faced with problems that could lead to depression. However, children who are gifted have added stresses that may make them more vulnerable. Some of these vulnerabilities include:

- feeling unpopular with their peers
- being picked on by peers for being different
- having difficulty making friends because of introversion
- feeling pressure to live up to others' expectations
- difficulties dealing with failure
- attempting unrealistic goals and ending up frustrated.

Also consider if your child has:

- recently dropped in academic performance, or has dramatically fluctuating grades
- expressed general disinterest and lack of enthusiasm in areas that were previously interesting for him or her, such as extra-curricular activities
- begun to experience a change in general behaviour, such as level of appetite, amount of sleep, overall interest in relationships
- begun to experience physiological symptoms, such as stomachaches or headaches, that cannot be explained medically
- demonstrated other unusual behaviours, such as avoidance, aggression, or general lack of energy.

If your child is demonstrating any of the characteristics described above, ask yourself, “Are these behaviours barriers for my child?” and, “Do they prevent my child from experiencing success and happiness?”



Strategies for helping your child deal with depression

- *If your child exhibits symptoms of depression, contact your school counsellor and discuss your concerns.* Identify if your child is demonstrating similar behavioural changes in school or if his or her behaviour changes are environmentally specific (for instance, at home but not at school). If appropriate, involve your child in the discussion to explore possible reasons for how he or she is feeling.
- *Seek treatment and support from your physician and/or a psychologist experienced with children who are gifted if you and your school counsellor feel that the symptoms warrant further investigation.* It is important to work with people experienced in the area of giftedness so that intervention and treatment will consider the unique qualities of a child who is gifted or talented.

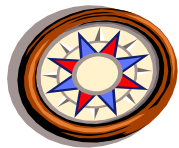
Frustration

Children who experience heightened emotions can often become frustrated at home, at the school and at the world around them. Some frustration may be inevitable if the child's mind may be far in advance of physical and learning skills. Children may get frustrated with inactivity or lack of progress. They may complain that school is too easy, too boring or too slow. They may feel frustrated because others consider them odd or do not appear to understand their ideas and insights.

These children are often eager to find quick solutions to difficult questions, and prone to select difficult but immediate alternatives to complex decisions. They can be intolerant of ambiguous or unresolved situations. They can be impatient with a lack of clear answers even where none really exist. When hasty resolutions to problems fail, they can become frustrated and angry.

Frustration can lead to a sense of powerlessness, sometimes resulting in aggression, withdrawal or depression. Children may demonstrate their anger with deliberate underachievement, lack of interest, apathy and putting down the system.

There are ways parents can help children learn to control their feelings and deal with their emotions in appropriate and productive ways.



Strategies for helping your child deal with frustration

- *Teach your child how to recognize his or her own feelings of frustration.* Help your child in identifying and ways to deal with them, such as counting to 10.
- *Ensure that your expectations for how your child manages emotions are realistic for his or her age.* Expecting gifted children to behave at the same level as their intellectual performance may lead to great frustrations for both parent and child.
- *Guide your child toward finding his or her own solutions to problems.* If his or her efforts are unsuccessful, consider whether your intervention, perhaps by a meeting with a teacher or school administrator, might be helpful.
- *Make sure your child knows that it is okay to express his or her feelings in an appropriate environment.* Help him or her develop strategies for maintaining control in public.
- *Some children may benefit from anger management training.*

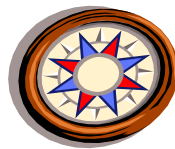
Introversion—It is perfectly normal

The main difference between extroverts and introverts is the source of their energy. Extroverts gain their energy from people and objects outside of themselves while introverts gain energy from within themselves. Extroverts like to be singled out while introverts do not. Extroverts have a

tendency toward impulsivity while introverts are prone to reflection. One personality type is no better or more desirable than the other. However, our society tends to reward extroverted personalities. For example, teachers tend to wait less than one second for students to reply to their questions and tests of intelligence require students to complete tasks as quickly as possible.

Less than 25 percent of North Americans are introverts, but the percentage is much higher among the gifted population—up to 50 percent. If your child is introverted, do not try to make him or her into an extrovert. Introversion is perfectly normal and does not need to be ‘cured.’ However, knowing about these personality differences can help parents to better understand their children and their family dynamics. This knowledge can also help parents find ways to support their children as they are, rather than viewing introversion as a problem.

Of course, there may be some people who demonstrate both introverted and extroverted characteristics, depending on their comfort and interest level in a particular situation or context.



Strategies for supporting your child who is introverted

- *Give your child ample time to reflect on issues and situations.* They often do not feel comfortable responding on the spot; they need time to think about their response. Children who are introverted generally prefer to get advice and information to think about on their own, rather than talking things through.
- *Recognize the difference between aloneness and loneliness.* Loneliness may be a problem for some introverted children, and should be addressed. However, introverts need and enjoy time alone, and should not be forced to spend all their time with others.
- *Teach your child how to react appropriately in typical social situations.*
- *Recognize and appreciate your child’s unique personality, interests and goals.*