Section 9 – Social-Emotional Guidance & Counseling

Educating the whole child is vital to development of potential in all children. The social-emotional needs of the students must be included in the instruction of gifted children.

"To have the intellect of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a child's body is to encounter certain difficulties.

--Hollingsworth, 1942

"**The characteristic most readily identifiable in gifted children, varying both in kind and degree, is sensitivity. Whether the sensitivity is to one or more particular areas of learning, sensitivity to discovering or solving problems, or sensitivity to the feelings of one's fellow man, it is so much a characteristic of giftedness that it can almost be said that the two terms are synonymous."**

--Walter B. Barbe

Section Includes:

- Bibliotherapy

- Depression

- Emotional Intensity in Gifted Children

- Supporting Girls in Early Adolescence

- Helping Adolescents Adjust to Giftedness

- Helping Adolescents with Stress Management

- Helping Middle School Students Make the Transition into High School

- Nurturing Social-Emotional Development of Gifted Children - NAGC Position Paper

- Nurturing Social-Emotional Development of Gifted Children

- Perfectionism

- Preventing Bullying

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ERIC Digests

Bibliotherapy

WHAT IS BIBLIOTHERAPY?

Bibliotherapy generally refers to the use of literature to help people cope with emotional problems, mental illness, or changes in their lives (Pardeck, 1994), or to produce affective change and promote personality growth and development (Lenkowsky, 1987; Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller, 1989). By providing literature relevant to their personal situations and developmental needs at appropriate times (Hebert & Kent, 2000), bibliotherapy practitioners attempt to help people of all ages to understand themselves and to cope with problems such as separation and divorce, child abuse, foster care, and adoption. This Digest will briefly review the history of bibliotherapy, summarize some approaches to its application, outline the basic stages of the bibliotherapeutic process, and will conclude by reviewing the benefits and limitations which have been observed in its application.

Historically, bibliotherapy dates back to the 1930s when librarians began compiling lists of written material that helped individuals modify their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors for therapeutic purposes. Counselors worked in conjunction with librarians to 'prescribe' selected literature for clients experiencing problems (Pardeck, 1994).Â The underlying premise of bibliotherapy is that clients identify with literary characters similar to themselves, an association that helps the clients release emotions, gain new directions in life, and explore new ways of interacting (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). Teenage readers, for example, may feel relief that they are not the only ones facing a specific problem. They learn vicariously how to solve their problems by reflecting on how the characters in the book solve theirs (Hebert & Kent, 2000).

SOME APPROACHES IN BIBLIOTHERAPY

Bibliotherapy practice has varied in approach and focus since it was first used in the 1930s. Traditional bibliotherapy, for example, tended to be more 'reactive' in its approach in that the process focused on getting individuals to react positively or negatively to the reading material. More recent approaches, however, assume that the therapeutic process is actually a more interactive one: the reader becomes part of the unfolding intellectual and emotional process of the story, and in struggling to understand what is being communicated at the deepest levels, the reader responds by making a positive alternation or modification in behavior or attitude (Myers, 1998). In interactive bibliotherapy, participants engage in activities that help them reflect on what they read, such as group discussion and dialogue journal writing (Palmer, et al., 1997; Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Morawski & Gilbert, 2000).

In clinical bibliotherapy and bibliocounseling, skilled practitioners use therapeutic methods to help individuals experiencing serious emotional problems. Classroom teachers are more likely to use developmental bibliotherapy, which involves helping students in their normal health and development. The advantage of the latter approach is that teachers can identify the concerns of their students and address the issues before problems arise. Students can also be guided through

predictable stages of adolescence with knowledge of what to expect and examples of how other teenagers have dealt with the same concerns (Hebert & Kent, 2000).

Whichever approach it involves, bibliotherapy requires careful planning. It seeks to help clients respond directly to the materials they are given, so that change is effected through catharsis (a cleansing of the emotions, primarily through art), insight, or the "copying of character behaviors" (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

BASIC STAGES IN BIBLIOTHERAPY
Generally, activities in bibliotherapy are designed to:
* provide information
* provide insight
* stimulate discussion about problems
* communicate new values and attitudes
* create awareness that other people have similar problems
* provide realistic solutions to problems

The process goes through four basic stages (Pardeck, 1993): identification, selection, presentation, and follow-up.

 During the first two stages, the clients' needs must be identified, and appropriate books selected to match their particular problems. The selection process takes skill and insight, as the books must provide correct information about a problem while not imparting a false sense of hope. The books must then be presented carefully and strategically so that the clients are able to see similarities between themselves and the book characters. Once the clients can identify with the main character, they enter the follow-up stage during which they share what they have gained. They express catharsis verbally in discussion or writing, or nonverbal means such as art (Sridhar & Vaughn, 2000), role-playing, creative problem solving, or self-selected options for students to pursue individually (Hebert & Kent, 2000). Once catharsis has occurred, the clients can be guided to gain insight into the problem.Â The success of the bibliotherapy program depends largely on how well teachers or counselors play their vital role as facilitator throughout the whole process. Sridhar & Vaughn (2000) provide useful ideas on how teachers can get ready for the process, and what they can do before, during and after reading.

BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF BIBLIOTHERAPY
In addition to the "how" of conducting bibliotherapy, practitioners also need to be aware of potential benefits and pitfalls associated with this procedure. Bibliotherapy has obvious value in that it provides the opportunity for the participants to recognize and understand themselves, their characteristics, and the complexity of human thought and behavior. It may also promote social development as well as the love of literature in general, and reading in particular (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). It reduces feelings of isolation that may be felt by people with problems.

The effectiveness of bibliotherapy, however, may be limited by the availability of materials on certain topics, as well as the lack of client readiness and willingness to read. Clients may also project their own motives onto characters and thus reinforce their own perceptions and solutions. In addition, participants may be defensive, thus discounting the actions of characters and failing to identify with them, or even end up using them as scapegoats. Some of these limitations can be

overcome through the continuation of the process itself, role playing, and the use of group discussions (Gladding & Gladding, 1991). Facilitator limitations are also a challenge: facilitators may have limited knowledge of human development and developmental problems, and inadequate knowledge about appropriate literature. Facilitators thus need to be properly trained and exposed to a repertoire of literature suitable for use in bibliotherapy. One other limitation may lie in the bibliotherapy process itself: for example, clients may be unwilling to discuss areas that are uncomfortable, or facilitators may insist on making a point at the client's expense. The process is also limited if both the client and counselor stay on surface issues. These limitations can be addressed by suspending sessions until both parties are ready and willing to work, by taping and critiquing selected sessions so that facilitators can monitor their own reactions to certain clients or problem areas, and by revisiting issues in stories that have been treated superficially in previous sessions (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

CONCLUSION

Bibliotherapy is a potentially powerful method for school teachers and counselors to use on many levels and in every school grade. In order to establish a strong bibliotherapy program in an institution, practitioners must present the procedure as a non-threatening one, starting by calling the process biblioguidance, for instance. They must also solicit the input and advice of colleagues, parents, and administrators. In addition, they must always be alert to the limitations of bibliotherapy.

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Depression can be a serious problem for some gifted children

Depression is a serious problem with which some gifted children struggle, and is quite different from the blues everyone feels from time to time. It is an overwhelming sense of sadness or emptiness combined with a number of other symptoms. Individuals suffering from depression may have a preoccupation with suicide, and they may be plagued by feelings of guilt and worthlessness. They quite often have difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or taking pleasure in anything. They may feel both anxious and lethargic and either have difficulty eating and sleeping or eat and sleep excessively (Nemeroff, 1998).

Two possible contributing factors to depression in gifted children are perfectionism and emotional sensitivity. While striving for perfection isn't necessarily a bad thing, unhealthy or neurotic perfectionism is and may be evidenced by an intense need to avoid failure. This is in contrast to healthy perfectionism where the child derives a sense of pleasure from painstaking effort while accepting his personal and situational limitations. Gifted children who deal with unhealthy perfectionism need help focusing on planning realistic goals, making reasonable commitments and understanding the source of their perfectionism so that they can learn to combat unhealthy tendencies. Gifted children may also be overly emotionally sensitive. This extreme sensitivity may be manifested through strong concerns over death and dying, anxieties, fears, guilt, depression, suicidal moods, intensity of feeling, loneliness and feelings of inferiority or inadequacy (Talent Development Resources, 2001).

What's Wrong with Being Perfect?

Currently, children receive mixed messages when it comes to perfectionism. On one hand, we as a society laud the perfectionism of great individuals. The Olympic games are a good example of this. Only those athletes who perfect their skill after years of hard work win the gold medal. We want our doctors to be perfectionists; especially if they are the ones who deliver our children or perform surgery on us. We esteem excellence, and praise those who strive to be their absolute best. Perfectionism is at the very heart of great accomplishments. On the other hand, perfectionism is seen as an undesirable character trait. Children are told not to worry about doing things perfectly and bookstores are filled with books on how to overcome perfectionism. The term perfectionist is not a positive one. So, which is it? Should we strive for excellence or not? Most would say the obvious answer is that yes, we should all strive to be our absolute best. However, there is a fine line between striving for excellence and an intense need to avoid failure. Many gifted children are perfectionistic to at least some degree. Some, however, are perfectionistic to a fault.

According to Dr. Sidney J. Blatt, Ph.D. of Yale University, there are two types of perfectionism. Normal perfectionism is evidenced when an individual derives a sense of pleasure from painstaking effort while accepting their personal and situational limitations. Neurotic perfectionism is evidenced by an intense need to avoid failure. Individuals struggling with neurotic perfectionism do not derive pleasure from a job well done. They are driven by deep-seated feelings of inferiority. This type of perfectionism has been linked with a higher risk of depression.

Many gifted children are driven and set high standards for themselves. There is nothing wrong

with this. However, if a child sets impossible personal goals, they are setting themselves up for failure.

Dr. Linda Silverman of the Gifted Development Center offers some strategies that may help children cope with perfectionism—healthy or otherwise. They are as follows:

Appreciate the trait.

Don't be ashamed of being perfectionistic.

Understand that it serves a useful purpose.

Set priorities for yourself.

Allow yourself to be perfectionistic in activities that really matter to you, rather than in everything all at once

Maintain high standards for yourself, but don't impose them on others lest you become a tyrant.

Keep striving even when your first attempts are unsuccessful.

Don't quit when the going gets rough. Only allow yourself to quit when you're a winner.

If you would like further information on perfectionism and the gifted child, I encourage you to visit http://www.gifteddevelopment.com. This is the website of the Gifted Development Center that is run by Linda Silverman, one of the nation's top experts in giftedness

General Strategies for Working with Supersensitive Children

Accept the child as is

Welcome alternative ways of viewing and owing things which do not interfere with other people

Use and teach clear verbal and non-verbal communication skills

Help the child become aware of own behaviors

Teach the child to be responsible for his/her behavior

Use natural and logical consequences

Teach about locus of control and how to effect change

Develop signals with selected students to advise them of successful/unsuccessful behaviors and for them to tell you of their needs

Teach about stress and stress management

Teach children to recognize tension in themselves and to anticipate problems or behaviors

Help child to create a comforting environment

Remember that stress will exacerbate these intensities

Use simple management strategies

Talk about your feelings to someone

Relaxation

Exercise and proper diet

Ask for help

Organization and time management skills

Provide places for children to work with fewer distractions

Remember most classrooms are not reflective of the real world. Most people have choices about their environment and mode of working

Allow time to pursue passions

Never remove passions as consequences

Cultivate gifts/talents

Use the expression of tension in positive ways (e.g., make the chatterbox a reporter, etc.)

Accept the child's feelings and their intensity

Teach the child to anticipate physical and emotional responses and prepare for them

Consider attachments when requiring change

Excerpt taken from Supersensitivity in Gifted Children, pp 3-4, by Sharon Lind, 1998.

"What am I in the eyes of most people, a nonentity, an eccentric, or an unpleasant person--somebody who has no position in society and will never have; in short, the lowest of the low. All right, then--even if that were absolutely true, then I should one day like to show by my work what such an eccentric, such a nobody has in his heart."

-- Vincent Van Gogh

Emotional Intensity In Gifted Children

By Lesley K Sword,
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Giftedness has an emotional as well as intellectual component. Intellectual complexity goes hand in hand with emotional depth. Just as gifted children's thinking is more complex and has more depth than other childrens, so too their emotions are more complex and more intense.

Complexity can be seen in the vast range of emotions that gifted children can experience at any one time and the intensity is evident in the "full-on-ness" about everything with which parents and teachers of gifted children are so familiar.

Emotional intensity in the gifted is not a matter of feeling more than other people, but a different way of experiencing the world: vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding - a way of being quiveringly alive.

Emotional intensity can be expressed in many different ways:

• as intensity of feeling: positive feelings, negative feelings, both positive and negative feelings together, extremes of emotion, complex emotions that seemingly move from one feeling to another over a short time period, identification with the feelings of other people, laughing and crying together

• in the body: the body mirrors the emotions and feelings are often expressed as bodily symptoms such as tense stomach, sinking heart, blushing, headache, nausea

• inhibition: timidity and shyness

• strong affective memory: emotionally intense children can remember the feelings that accompanied an incident and will often relive and "re-feel" them long afterward

• fears and anxieties, feelings of guilt, feelings of being out of control

• concerns with death, depressive moods

• emotional ties and attachments to others, empathy and concern for others, sensitivity in relationships, attachment to animals, difficulty in adjusting to new environments, loneliness, conflicts with others over the depth of relationships

• critical self-evaluation and self-judgment, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.

Many people seem unaware that intense emotions are part of giftedness and little attention is paid to emotional intensity. Historically the expression of intense feelings has been seen as a sign of emotional instability rather than as evidence of a rich inner life. The traditional Western

view is of emotions and intellect as separate and contradictory entities.

There is however, an inextricable link between emotions and intellect and, combined, they have a profound effect on gifted people. It is emotional intensity that fuels joy in life, passion for learning, the drive for expression of a talent area, the motivation for achievement.

Feeling everything more deeply than others do can be both painful and frightening. Emotionally intense gifted people often feel abnormal. "There must be something wrong with me.....maybe I'm crazy...nobody else seems to feel like this". Emotionally intense gifted people often experience intense inner conflict, self-criticism, anxiety and feelings of inferiority. The medical community tends to see these conflicts as symptoms and labels gifted people neurotic. They are however an intrinsic part of being gifted and provide the drive that gifted people have for personal growth and achievement.

It is vitally important that gifted children are taught to see their heightened sensitivity to things that happen in the world as a normal response for them. If this is not made clear to them, they may see their own intense inner experiences as evidence that something is wrong with them. Other children may ridicule a gifted child for reacting strongly to an apparently trivial incident, thereby increasing the child's feeling of being odd. Also, sensitivity to society's injustice and hypocrisy can lead many emotionally intense gifted children to feel despair and cynicism at very young ages.
The most important thing we can do to nurture emotionally intense gifted children is to accept their emotions: they need to feel understood and supported. Explain that intense feelings are normal for gifted children. Help them to use their keen intellect to develop self-awareness and self-acceptance.

Parents and teachers need to exercise appropriate discipline as this helps develop a sense of security that leads to the development of self-discipline and a feeling of emotional competency. Appropriate discipline is the consistent application of values, rules and behaviours that are held to be important in the family or the school. Explain the benefit of rules to the child and enforce them through consequences of behaviour.

Discuss feelings openly; the negative as well as the positive. It can be helpful to use an "emotional thermometer" to initiate discussion e.g. "on a scale of 1-10, how are you feeling today?" Take time to listen to childrens' ideas, opinions and feelings. Be non-judgemental: don't interrupt, moralise, distract or give advice.

Appreciate their sensitivities, intensities and passions. Don't try to minimise their emotions because you feel uncomfortable with their pain. It doesn't help to say "you're too sensitive" or "snap out of it" or "it'll be OK".

Reassure them when they are afraid and help them to find ways of expressing their intense emotions though stories, poems, art work, music, journal entries or physical activities. Realise that they become frustrated when their physical capabilities do not match their intellectual ability and help them to deal with this. Reward the process of effort and not only the outcome. Emphasize strengths and don't dwell on shortcomings.

Realize that sensitivity does not mean weakness. Give them responsibility that is age appropriate and do not over protect them from the world and from the consequence of their actions. Remember that they are children first and gifted second. Don't expect them to be little "adults". Play, fun and leisure activities are essential for strong emotional development.

Finally, seek information, advice or preventative professional counselling where appropriate; it is important both to support healthy emotional development and to prevent social and emotional problems.

We can help our emotionally intense gifted children to accept their rich inner world of experience and value it as a strength. This often means we have to accept and value our own emotional experience and feelings so that we can be a positive role model for children. Speaking about and valuing our emotions can be very difficult to do in a society that values rational, logical thinking and sees emotions as the opposite of rationality. However, if emotional intensity is accepted by parents and teachers and presented positively to children as a strength, children can be helped to understand and value this gift. In this way emotionally intense children will be empowered to express their unique selves in the world and use their gifts and talents with confidence and joy.

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ERIC Digests

Supporting Girls in Early Adolescence

Results of national studies suggest that for girls, the middle grades can be a time of significant decline in self-esteem and academic achievement (AAUW, 1991; Backes, 1994). The analysis of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development supports the finding that many girls seem to think well of themselves in the primary grades but suffer a severe decline in self-confidence and acceptance of body image by the age of 12 (Orenstein, 1994).

SELF-CONCEPT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
The development of a positive self-image is critical in the middle grades. Many educators report a general decline in school performance among girls as they enter adolescence (Orenstein, 1994). As a group, for example, girls exhibit a general decline in science achievement not observed for boys, and this gender gap may be increasing (Backes, 1994). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that for 9- and 13-year-olds, gender differences in science achievement increased between 1978 and 1986, with females' academic performance declining (Mullis & Jenkins, 1988). The relationship between a decline in self-concept and a decline in achievement indicates that identifying the special needs of female students at school and at home should be a high priority for parents and teachers.

Reasons for the decline in self-esteem and the accompanying decline in academic achievement are not clearly indicated by research, but it is likely that multiple factors are involved. The AAUW study found evidence that boys receive preferential treatment in school from teachers. The researchers found that boys ask more questions, are given more detailed and constructive criticism of their work, and are treated more tolerantly than girls during outbursts of temper or resistance (AAUW, 1991; Orenstein, 1994). Out-of-school factors probably also play a role: some observers suggest that, as they grow older, girls' observations of women's roles in society contribute to their changing opinions about what is expected of girls. If girls observe that women hold positions of less status than men in society, it may lead girls to infer that their role is less important than that of boys or that they are inferior to boys (Debold, 1995).

A third factor relates to cultural differences in sex role socialization, which are greater in some cultures than others. Parents' actions play a central role in girls' sex role socialization, and parents' choices and attitudes about toys, clothing, activities, and playmates can shape a girl's sense of herself.

It appears that ethnicity, race, and class are differentiating factors in girls' interpretation of in-school and out-of-school experiences (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). For example, the AAUW (1991) study suggests that many African American and Latina girls demonstrate evidence of a decline of self-esteem in early adolescence by becoming disaffected with schooling in general. The study by Orenstein (1994) found that in 1991, Latinas left school at a greater rate than any other group.

SELF-IMAGE AND BODY IMAGE
Researchers have observed other consequences associated with a general loss of self-esteem in preadolescent girls in addition to a decline in actual academic achievement. They have found, for example, that, "compared to boys, adolescent girls experience greater stress, are twice as likely to be depressed, and attempt suicide four or five times as often (although boys are more likely to be successful)" (Debold, 1995, p. 23). Girls' depression has been found to be linked to negative feelings about their bodies and appearance. Poor body image and disordered eating including obesity is much more prevalent in adolescent girls than boys (Orenstein, 1994). While it is difficult to find specific causes for these difficulties, gender stereotypes in television, movies, books, and the toy and fashion industries pose obvious challenges to girls' healthy psychological development (Smutny, 1995).
Researchers (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; McDonald and Rogers, 1995) attribute self-image problems to the "perfect girl" or "nice girl" syndrome. According to these researchers, around the age of 10, many middle-class girls have internalized the messages and expectations they have received into the ideal of the "perfect girl" who is pretty, kind, and obedient, and never has bad thoughts or feelings. They speculate that in trying to keep up with the impossible demands of this unrealistic view of perfect feminine behavior, girls may suppress some of their ability to express anger or to assert themselves, and they may begin to judge themselves through others' eyes and to question their own worth. In preadolescence, girls are also struggling to reconcile their conflicting knowledge of equality and justice, and the demands for compliance placed on them at home and in school (Debold, 1995).

SUPPORT STRATEGIES FOR PREADOLESCENT GIRLS
Parents, teachers, and administrators can provide support and encouragement to preadolescent girls in several ways. According to Smutny (1995), parents can:

* Begin early to nurture freedom from stereotyped expectations. Provide toys that reflect the full range of children's play and allow girls to watch TV programs and movies that provide a balanced mix of stories with men and women characters in positive traditional and nontraditional roles;

* Encourage boys' development of nurturing and caring attributes;

* Take daughters into the workplace in their field of interest, and explain how the work contributes to the good of the community;

* Inquire regularly about their daughters' participation in school and confer with teachers about their strengths;

* Listen to their daughters' questions, complaints, and comments about peers, siblings, and adults, and make an effort to read between the lines to discover where real problems, if any, may lie;

* Be aware that girls receive conflicting messages about their worth and place in our culture from schools, television, and the movies. Counter these messages by engaging in critical discussions of these ideas and by reading and viewing age-appropriate stories and biographies

with strong female characters.
Debold (1995) and Backes (1994) suggest teachers can:

* Find ways to develop gender-fair curricula for middle schools. Consider separate inservice time for male and female teachers to consider questions such as: How can I look from a girl's perspective at what and how I teach? What do I show girls through my actions in the classroom?

* Encourage girls to enroll and participate in all academic courses, especially science and math, and see that their contributions are valued in classroom discourse.

* Deal directly and age-appropriately with issues of power, gender, race, and politics, taking care to include critical perspectives on these issues in the school curriculum. They also suggest that administrators can:

* Develop, support, and enforce policies against gender-related harassment toward girls by students and teachers.

* Take the lead in being sure that teachers and school programs offer equal opportunities to boys and girls in classrooms and extracurricular activities.

* As part of school improvement efforts, acknowledge the need to include a focus on the improvement of self-concept and achievement of girls.

CONCLUSION
At home and in school, adults can shape the lessons taught to girls about themselves, their place in school, and their future in society. Debold (1995) states, "Girls need the support of adults to resist pressures to conform to outdated stereotypes that can limit their expectations and achievement." By assuring that girls' contributions are valued in and out of the classroom, and by creating an environment in which girls can express their opinions, make mistakes, and demonstrate their interest in learning without fear of harassment or of being ignored, parents, teachers, and administrators can make a positive contribution to the development of adolescent and preadolescent girls.

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ERIC Digests

Helping Adolescents Adjust to Giftedness

Young gifted people between the ages of 11 and 15 frequently report a range of problems as a result of their abundant gifts: perfectionism, competitiveness, unrealistic appraisal of their gifts, rejection from peers, confusion due to mixed messages about their talents, and parental and social pressures to achieve, as well as problems with unchallenging school programs or increased expectations. Some encounter difficulties in finding and choosing friends, a course of study, and, eventually, a career. The developmental issues that all adolescents encounter exist also for gifted students, yet they are further complicated by the special needs and characteristics of being gifted. Once counselors and parents are aware of these obstacles, they seem better able to understand and support gifted adolescents. Caring adults can assist these young people to "own" and develop their talents by understanding and responding to adjustment challenges and coping strategies.

Challenges to Adjustment

Several dynamics of giftedness continually interfere with adjustment gains during adolescence. Buescher (1986) has found that, during the early years of adolescence, gifted young people encounter several potent obstacles, singly or in combination.

- **Ownership**: Talented adolescents simultaneously "own" and yet question the validity and reality of the abilities they possess. Some researchers (Olszewski, Kulieke, & Willis, 1987) have identified patterns of disbelief, doubt, and lack of self-esteem among older students and adults: the so-called "impostor syndrome" described by many talented individuals. While talents have been recognized in many cases at an early age, doubts about the accuracy of identification and the objectivity of parents or favorite teachers linger (Delisle & Galbraith, 1987; Galbraith, 1983). The power of peer pressure toward conformity, coupled with any adolescent's wavering sense of being predictable or intact, can lead to the denial of even the most outstanding ability. The conflict that ensues, whether mild or acute, needs to be resolved by gaining a more mature "ownership" and responsibility for the identified talent.

- A second basic pressure often experienced by gifted students is that, since they have been given gifts in abundance, **they feel they must give of themselves in abundance**. Often it is subtly implied that their abilities belong to parents, teachers, and society.

- **Dissonance**: By their own admission, talented adolescents often feel like perfectionists. They have learned to set their standards high, to expect to do more and be more than their abilities might allow. Childhood desires to do demanding tasks **perfectly** become compounded during adolescence. It is not uncommon for talented adolescents to experience real dissonance between what is actually done and how well they expected it

to be accomplished. Often the dissonance perceived by young people is far greater than most parents or teachers realize.

- **Taking Risks**: While risk taking has been used to characterize younger gifted and talented children, it ironically decreases with age, so that the bright adolescent is much less likely to take chances than others. Why the shift in risk-taking behaviors? Gifted adolescents appear to be more aware of the repercussions of certain activities, whether these are positive or negative. They have learned to measure the decided advantages and disadvantages of numerous opportunities and to weigh alternatives. Yet their feigned agility at this too often leads them to reject even those acceptable activities that carry some risk (e.g., advanced placement courses, stiff competitions, public presentations), for which high success is less predictable and lower standards of performance less acceptable in their eyes. One other possible cause for less risk taking could be the need to maintain control--to remain in spheres of influence where challenging relationships, demanding coursework and teachers, or intense competition cannot enter without absolute personal control.

- **Competing Expectations**: Adolescents are vulnerable to criticism, suggestions, and emotional appeals from others. Parents, friends, siblings, and teachers are all eager to add their own expectations and observations to even the brightest students' intentions and goals. Often, others' expectations for talented young people compete with their own dreams and plans. Delisle (1985), in particular, has pointed out that the "pull" of an adolescent's own expectations must swim against the strong current posed by the "push" of others' desires and demands. The dilemma is complicated by the numerous options within the reach of a highly talented student: The greater the talent, the greater the expectations and outside interference.

- Gifted adolescents consistently report dramatic episodes of being pushed to the point of doubt and despair by insensitive teachers, peers, and even parents. Teachers in secondary schools, in particular, have tried to disprove the talents of individual students, saying, in effect, "Prove to me you are as gifted as you think you are." Coping with the vagaries of adolescence while also proving oneself again and again in the classroom or peer group significantly drains energy allocated for the normal tasks of adjustment and leads to frequent frustration and isolation.

- **Impatience**: Like most other adolescents, gifted students can be impatient in many ways: eager to find solutions for difficult questions, anxious to develop satisfying friendships, and prone to selecting difficult but immediate alternatives for complex decisions. The predisposition for impulsive decision making, coupled with exceptional talent, can make young adolescents particularly intolerant of ambiguous, unresolved situations. Their impatience with a lack of clear-cut answers, options, or decisions drives them to seek answers where none readily exist, relying on an informing, though immature, sense of wisdom. The anger and disappointment when hasty resolutions fail can be difficult to surmount, particularly when less capable peers gloat about these failures.

- **Premature Identity**: It appears that the weight of competing expectations, low tolerance for ambiguity, and the pressure of multiple potentials each feed very early attempts to achieve an adultlike identity, a stage normally achieved after the age of 21. This can

create a serious problem for talented adolescents. They seem to reach out prematurely for career choices that will short-cut the normal process of identity crisis and resolution.

Coping Strategies

How can talented adolescents cope with the myriad obstacles to developing their talents? A study of young adolescents who participated in a talent search program Buescher & Higham (1985) suggested various strategies. Table 1 depicts the strategies suggested by the adolescents, arranged according to their assessment of acceptablity for use.

Table 1. Coping Strategies Suggested by Adolescents
(In Order by Weighted Ranking; 0 = Least Acceptable to Students; 10 = Most Acceptable):

(0) Pretend not to know as much as you do.
(1) Act like a "brain" so peers leave you alone.
(2) Adjust language and behavior to disguise true abilities from your peers.
(3) Avoid programs designed for gifted/talented students.
(4) Be more active in community groups where age is no object.
(5) Develop/excel in talent areas outside school setting.
(6) Achieve in areas at school outside academics.
(7) Build more relationships with adults.
(8) Select programs and classes designed for gifted/talented students.
(9) Make friends with other students with exceptional talents.
(10) Accept and use abilities to help peers do better in classes.

The strategies were influenced by such factors as age, sex, and participation in programs for gifted students. For example, over the course of 4 years (ages 11 to 15), "using one's talent to help others" moved from second place to first, by way of third. "Achieving in school in areas outside academics" appeared to rise in popularity until the age of 14 but then dropped to third place. Students participating in special programs for the gifted were less likely, as they grew older, to mask their true abilities. Other studies have indicated that gifted females appear to be somewhat vulnerable to the pull of cultural expectations that drive them toward seeking peer acceptance rather than leadership and the full development of their abilities (Olszewski-Kubilius & Kulieke, 1989).

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ERIC Digests

Helping Gifted Students with Stress Management

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Author: Leslie S. Kaplan
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What Is Stress?

Stress is the body's general response to any intense physical, emotional, or mental demand placed on it by oneself or others. While racing to meet a deadline, dealing with a difficult person, or earning a poor grade are all stressful, so are the excitement of playing a lively game of tennis, falling in love, and being selected to join a special program for gifted students.

How Can a Youngster Experience Stress When Nothing Bad Is Happening?

Anything can be a stressor if it lasts long enough, happens often enough, is strong enough, or is perceived as stress. Working diligently on a project, performing many simple but boring tasks, or earning an "A" grade when one expected an "A+" may all be stressful.

Is a Gifted Student More Likely to Feel Stress than Others?

Many gifted youngsters have a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings, to events, to ideas, and to expectations. Some experience their own high expectations for achievement as a relentless pressure to excel. Constant striving to live up to self-expectations--or those of others-- to be first, best, or both can be very stressful. With every new course, new teacher, or new school questions arise about achievement and performance, since every new situation carries with it the frightening risk of being mediocre. Striving becomes even more stressful when unrealistic or unclear expectations are imposed by adults or peers. The pressure to excel, accompanied by other concerns such as feeling different, self-doubt (the "imposter" syndrome), and the need to prove their giftedness can drain the energy of gifted students and result in additional stress.

Stress occurs even when everything is going well. Youngsters get tired from their constant efforts and may secretly fear that next time they will not be as successful.

What Are Some Other Stresses on a Gifted Student?

Many gifted students accept responsibility for a variety of activities such as a demanding courseload; leadership in school activities, clubs, or sports; and part-time jobs. Even if it were humanly possible, doing everything well would be physically and emotionally stressful.

Vacations may be stressful if students are comfortable only when achieving and succeeding. Taking time off may make them feel nervous and lacking control.

Gifted students need intellectual challenge. Boring, monotonous busy-work is very stressful for individuals who prefer thinking and reasoning activities. Boredom may result in anger, resentment, or, in some cases, setting personal goals for achievement and success that significantly exceed those of parents or school.

Some gifted students value independence and leadership, yet the separation they feel from their peers results in loneliness and fewer opportunities to relieve stress. Finding a peer group can be difficult, particularly for adolescents. Some experience a conflict between belonging to a group

and using their extraordinary abilities.

Gifted students are complex thinkers, persuasively able to argue both sides of any question. This ability, however, may complicate decisions. Students may lack information about and experience with resources, processes, outcomes, or priorities that help tip an argument toward a clear solution. Furthermore, not every problem has one obviously correct answer. Compromise and accommodation are realities in the adult world, but they are not easily perceived from a young person's viewpoint. Thus, decision making may be a very stressful process.

How Can Stress Hurt a Gifted Student's Self-esteem?

During the early years, school may be easy, with minimum effort required for success. If students are not challenged, they conclude that "giftedness" means instant learning, comprehension, and mastery, and that outstanding achievement follows naturally. As years pass, however, schoolwork becomes more difficult. Some students discover that they must work harder to earn top grades and that they have not developed productive study habits. Many suspect they are no longer gifted, and their sense of self-worth is undermined.

Stress can hamper the very abilities that make these students gifted. Stress clouds thinking, reduces concentration, and impairs decision making. It leads to forgetfulness and a loss of ability to focus keenly on a task, and it makes students overly sensitive to criticism. Under these conditions, they perform less well and are more upset by their failures.

Gifted Students Have So Much Potential. How Can That Be Stressful?

Abundant gifts and the potential for success in many different subjects and careers may increase opportunities and lead to complex choices. Limiting options is a confusing and upsetting process because it means saying "no" to some attractive alternatives. A person cannot prepare to become an architect and a financial planner, or an advertising executive and a scientist. At some point, the education needed for one career splits from that needed for the other. To set career goals, students must know themselves well as individuals. They must understand their own personalities, values, and goals and use self-awareness as a guide for making decisions. These activities are all stressful.

How Can Gifted Students Cope with Stress?

Some ways of coping with stress are healthy; others are not. Some healthy ways of handling stress include the following:

- Change the source of the stress. Do something else for a while. Put down those study notes and jog for an hour.
- Confront the source of the stress. If it is a person, persuade him or her to remove the stress. Ask the teacher for an extension on a project. Sit down with the person driving you crazy and talk about ways you might better work together.
- Talk about the source of stress. Rid yourself of frustration. Find a good listener and complain. Talk through possible solutions.
- Shift your perspective. Tell yourself that each new situation or problem is a new challenge, and that there is something to be learned from every experience. Try to see the humorous side of the situation.

- Learn skills and attitudes that make tasks easier and more successful. Practice effective organization and time-management skills. For example, large projects are easier and less overwhelming when broken down into manageable steps. Learn to type and revise assignments on a word processor. Learn about yourself and your priorities, and use the information to make decisions. Learn how to say "no" gracefully when someone offers you another attractive (or unpleasant) task about which you have a choice. Tell yourself that this unpleasantness will be over soon and that the whole process will bring you closer to reaching your goal. Mark the days that are left on the calendar, and enjoy crossing out each one as you near the finish.

- Take time out for enjoyable activities. Everyone needs a support system. Find friends, teachers, or relatives with whom you have fun. Spend time with these people when you can be yourself and set aside the pressures of school, work, or difficult relationships. As a reward for your efforts, give yourself work breaks. Listen to your favorite music, shoot baskets, or participate in some other brief activity that is mentally restful or fun.

- Ignore the source of the stress. Practice a little healthy procrastination and put a pleasant activity ahead of the stressful one. This, is, of course, only a short-term solution.

- Get regular physical exercise and practice sound nutrition. Physical activity not only provides time out, but also changes your body chemistry as you burn off muscle tension built up from accommodating stress. Exercise also increases resistance to illness. Nutritious food and regular meals help regulate your body chemistry and keep you functioning at your sharpest. Eating healthy and attractively prepared food can be an enjoyable activity on its own.

The following are some unhealthy ways students cope with stress:

- Escaping through alcohol, drugs, frequent illness, sleep, overeating, or starving themselves. These strategies suggest a permanent withdrawal or avoidance rather than a time out.

- Selecting strategies to avoid failure. Gifted students closely link their identities to excellence and achievement. Failure, or even the perception of failure, seriously threatens their self-esteem. By not trying, or by selecting impossible goals, students can escape having their giftedness questioned. Only their lack of effort will be questioned.

- Aiming too low. This reduces stress by eliminating intense pressure or possible feelings of failure. Dogged procrastination in starting projects, selecting less competitive colleges or less rigorous courses, or dropping out of school rather than bringing home poor grades allows students to avoid feelings of failure in the short run. Sadly, this sets the stage for long-term disappointment caused by a destructive coping style.

- Overscheduling daily life with schoolwork and extracurricular activities, selecting impossibly demanding courseloads, or fussing endlessly over assignments in vain attempts to make them perfect. With this strategy, it is possible to succeed only through superhuman effort; thus the student can save face by setting goals too high for anyone to achieve.

How Can I Tell Whether or Not a Gifted Student Is Experiencing Burnout?

Not all gifted youngsters are stressed by the same events. Individual responses to stress also differ: Younger students do not tend to respond to stress in the same way that teenagers do. Since

each student is unique, parents and teachers will have to watch carefully to know whether a child is stressed to the point of constructive excitement or to the point of damaging overload.

The following checklist includes many, but not all, symptoms of burnout:

___ Student is no longer happy or pleasantly excited about school activities, but, rather, is negative or cynical toward work, teachers, classmates, parents, and the whole school- and achievement-centered experience.

___ Student approaches most school assignments with resignation or resentment.

___ Student exhibits boredom.

___ Student suffers from sleeplessness, problems in falling asleep, or periodic waking.

___ Student overreacts to normal concerns or events.

___ Student experiences fatigue, extreme tiredness, low energy level.

___ Student exhibits unhappiness with self and accomplishments.

___ Student has nervous habits such as eye blinking, head shaking, or stuttering.

___ Student has physical ailments such as weekly or daily stomachaches or headaches.

___ Student is frequently ill.

___ Student exhibits dependency through increased clinging or needing and demanding constant support and reassurance.

___ Student engages in attention-getting behaviors such as aggressive or acting-out behaviors.

___ Student has a sense of being trapped or a feeling or being out of control.

___ Student is unable to make decisions.

___ Student has lost perspective and sense of humor.

___ Student experiences increased feelings of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion in work and activities that used to give pleasure.

How Can Parents, Teachers, and Counselors Reduce Stress on Gifted Students?

- **Help each gifted student understand and cope with his or her intellectual, social, and emotional needs during each stage of development.** In some ways, the needs of gifted students mirror those of more typical children. Giftedness, however, adds a special dimension to self-understanding and self-acceptance. If gifted youngsters are to develop into self-fulfilled adults, the following differential needs must be addressed: (a) the need to understand the ways in which they are different from others and the ways in which they are the same; (b) the need to accept their abilities, talents, and limitations; (c) the need to develop social skills; (d) the need to feel understood and accepted by others; and (e) the need to develop an understanding of the distinction between "pursuit of excellence" and "pursuit of perfection." VanTassel-Baska (1989) and Delisle (1988) have offered useful suggestions on how to meet these needs.

- **Help each gifted student develop a realistic and accurate self-concept.** Giftedness does not mean instant mastery or winning awards. Parents and teachers need to set

realistic expectations for efforts and achievements and help the student choose appropriate goals. It is important to recognize and appreciate efforts and improvement.

On the other hand, giftedness permits people to learn and use information in unusual ways. Given parental support and encouragement, personal motivation, and opportunities to learn and apply their knowledge, gifted students may enjoy the process of creating new ideas, especially if they believe that it is all right to think differently than age-mates.

- **Help each gifted student be a whole person.** Gifted youngsters are children first and gifted second. While their learning styles may be special, they are individuals with emotions, likes and dislikes, and unique personalities. They will not wake up one day and be "not gifted." They should not feel responsible for solving world problems, nor does the world owe them tribute. It is up to each student to make life meaningful. Understanding these realistic limits to the bounty of giftedness can reduce stress on confused students.

Gifted students have strong emotions that give personal meaning to each experience. Emotions should be recognized, understood, and used as a valid basis for appropriate behaviors.

- **Show patience.** Let students select and strive toward their own goals. Do not compare them or their achievements to others.

Some gifted students are intensely curious and may have less tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability than their age-mates. Help them develop patience with themselves.

- **Show acceptance and encouragement.** Encourage students to work purposefully, thoughtfully, and thoroughly and do the best they can. It is not necessary to excel in every situation. Help them develop priorities to decide which tasks require the best efforts and which require simply "good enough."

Accept and reward efforts and the process of working on tasks. Sincere effort is valuable in itself and deserves reinforcement. The means may be more deserving of merit than the ends. Efforts are within the gifted students' control; the outcomes (high grades, prizes, honors, etc.) are not. Show love and acceptance, regardless of the outcome. These youngsters need to be cherished as individuals, not simply for their accomplishments. They must know that they can go home and be loved-- and continue to love themselves-- even when they do not finish first or best.

- **Encourage flexibility and appropriate behavior.** Curiosity is frequently mentioned as a characteristic of gifted learners. Many individuals agree that gifted students seem to question rules automatically, asking "How come?" Concerned adults can reduce stress on gifted students by helping them distinguish between hard-and-fast rules that should be followed and those that can safely be questioned or altered and helping them understand why rules sometimes change from time to time.

Many people recognize that new ideas come from reshaping and discarding old notions of right and wrong and want students to be inquiring, creative, and resourceful thinkers. But society, schools, teachers, and academic subjects have rules. In our society, flagrant rule breakers may be penalized and shut out of opportunities for further growth and enrichment. Our students will become better thinkers by learning that rules are man-made guides to behavior, not perfect or divine, but they are to be learned, understood, and followed appropriately in certain situations. For instance, not every student will like

every teacher, but showing respect is appropriate behavior even if the student privately thinks otherwise. Wise adults can model problem-solving methods that result in workable solutions and help gifted students learn when and how to use their novel perceptions, creativity, and independent thoughts appropriately and effectively.

- **Understanding and following rules does not mean conforming to every situation.** There are some occasions when gifted students should not be expected to accommodate others. For example, a severe mismatch between a youngster's ability level and a school program may be very stressful. Altering the student's curriculum may solve the problem.

  Some parents unintentionally send mixed messages regarding behavior. When children are rude or uncooperative and offend teachers, other adults, or peers, their parents behave as though giftedness somehow excuses such behavior and the offending actions highlight their child's specialness. Some even seem pleased. These parents do their children a great disservice by denying them the opportunity to learn empathy, teamwork, and tolerance for individual differences.

- **Let students live their own lives.** Caring adults support, encourage, and celebrate students' efforts and successes, but they stand back a bit from these efforts and achievements. They let students select and master activities for personal enjoyment. Unfortunately, some students wonder whether their efforts and gains are for personal satisfaction or to please overly involved parents, teachers, or others. When these students wish to give up an activity that no longer brings pleasure or interest, they fear they will disappoint others, and they are likely to feel trapped.

- **Be available for guidance and advice.** Some gifted students appear to be more mature than their chronological age indicates. They have advanced verbal skills and can talk a good line. Nevertheless, they are still children and need realistic, clearly stated guidelines about limits, values, and proper behavior. These young people may not have enough information or experience to make wise and effective decisions. They may not understand decision-making processes, and they need wise adults to listen and guide as they talk through the problem, the alternatives, and the pro's and con's and try out choices. Knowing that they can be independent and still talk through their thoughts with others without losing face reduces stress for these students.

  Gifted students need to hear adults openly state some of their perspectives to understand expectations and acceptable limits. While these students are very perceptive, they cannot read minds.

  Gifted students may know more facts about their interest area than do their parents and other adults. However, they have not lived longer; they need loving concern and guidance.

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ERIC Digests
Helping Middle School Students Make the Transition into High School

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Young adolescents entering high school look forward to having more choices and making new and more friends; however, they also are concerned about being picked on and teased by older students, having harder work, making lower grades, and getting lost in a larger, unfamiliar school (Mizelle, 1995; Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

As young adolescents make the transition into high school, many experience a decline in grades and attendance (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Trickett, 1991); they view themselves more negatively and experience an increased need for friendships (Hertzog et al., 1996); and by the end of 10th grade, as many as 6% drop out of school (Owings & Peng, 1992). For middle school students, including those who have been labeled "gifted" or "high-achieving," the transition into high school can be an unpleasant experience (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994).

Research has found, however, that when middle school students took part in a high school transition program with several diverse articulation activities, fewer students were retained in the transition grade (Mac Iver, 1990). Furthermore, middle school principals indicated that they expected fewer of their students to drop out before graduation when the school provided supportive advisory group activities or responsive remediation programs (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991).

This Digest discusses how educators can ease students' transition into high school by providing challenging and supportive middle school environments and by designing transition programs that address the needs of students and their parents and that facilitate communication between middle school and high school educators.

MIDDLE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT
Providing young adolescents with activities that relate directly to their transition into high school certainly is important; however, providing young adolescents with a challenging and supportive middle school experience is an equally important factor in their making a successful transition into high school (Belcher & Hatley, 1994; Mizelle, 1995; Oates, Flores, & Weishew, 1998). For example, Mizelle (1995) found that students who stayed together with the same teachers through sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and experienced more hands-on, life-related learning activities, integrated instruction, and cooperative learning groups were more successful in their transition to high school than were students from the same school who had a more traditional middle school experience.

Students also indicated that if their middle school teachers had held students more responsible for their learning, taught them more about strategies for learning on their own, and provided

them a more challenging curriculum, their transition to high school would have been eased.Â Similarly, in a comprehensive program at Sunrise Middle School in inner-city Philadelphia, Oates and her colleagues (1998) found that students who participated in a Community for Learning Program (CFL) were more successful in their transition into high school than students who had not participated in the CFL program. Key components of the CFL program were support and training for teachers, a learning management system designed to help middle school students develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning and behavior, and an emphasis on community and family involvement.

TRANSITION PROGRAMS
According to Mac Iver (1990), a high school transition program includes a variety of activities that (1) provide students and parents with information about the new school, (2) provide students with social support during the transition, and (3) bring middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements

ACTIVITIES THAT PROVIDE INFORMATION TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS.
Middle school students want to know what high school is going to be like, and they and their parents need to know about and understand high school programs and procedures (Phelan, Yu, & Davidson, 1994). In particular, parents need to be actively involved in the decisions their eighth-graders are asked to make about classes they will take in ninth grade and understand the long-term effects of the course decisions (Paulson, 1994).
Some of the ways students can learn about high school include visiting the high school in the spring, perhaps to "shadow" a high school student; attending a presentation by a high school student or panel of students; visiting the high school in the fall for schedule information; attending a fall orientation assembly (preferably before school starts); and discussing high school regulations and procedures with eighth-grade teachers and counselors. In addition to face-to-face activities, another possible source of information is the Internet. High school students might, either as a class or club project, set up a Web page that would provide incoming students information on different high school activities and clubs and offer them an opportunity to get answers to any questions they may have from the "experts."

ACTIVITIES THAT PROVIDE SOCIAL SUPPORT.
At a time when friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, the normative transition into high school often serves to disrupt friendship networks and, thereby, interferes with students' success in high school (Barone et al., 1991). Thus, it is vital for a transition program to include activities that will provide incoming students social support activities that give students the opportunity to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students (Hertzog et al., 1996; Mac Iver, 1990). A "Big Sister/Brother" Program that begins in eighth grade and continues through ninth grade, a spring social event for current and incoming high school students, and writing programs where eighth-graders correspond with high school students are just a few ways that transition programs can provide students social support. Middle and high school educators should also look for opportunities to develop more long-term activities such as peer mentoring or tutoring programs.

ACTIVITIES THAT BRING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATORS TOGETHER.
Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and

high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn about the programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements of their respective schools (Hertzog et al., 1996; Vars, 1998). Activities that create a mutual understanding of curriculum requirements at both levels and of the young adolescent learner will help educators at both levels to develop a high school transition program to meet the particular needs of their students. In addition to the more typical committee or team meetings with representatives from each level, these activities may include K-12 curriculum planning meetings, and teacher or administrator visitations, observations, and teaching exchanges.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT
The importance of parents being involved in their young adolescent students' transition from middle to high school can hardly be overestimated. When parents are involved in their student's transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences (Mac Iver, 1990); and when parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students have higher achievement (Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson, 1994), are better adjusted (Hartos & Power, 1997), and are less likely to drop out of school (Horn & West, 1992).

Parent involvement in the transition process to high school can be encouraged through a variety of activities. Parents may be invited to participate in a conference (preferably at the middle school) with their child and the high school counselor to discuss course work and schedules, visit the high school with their child in the spring or in the fall, spend a day at the high school to help them understand what their child's life will be like, and help design and facilitate some of the articulation activities for students. In planning activities for parents, high school educators will want to remember that parents of students who are already in high school are an excellent resource for other parents and may also help to encourage new parents to be more involved in school activities. At the middle school level, teachers and administrators can inform parents about transition activities and encourage them to participate. Perhaps more importantly, they can work to keep parents involved in their child's education and school activities during the middle school years so that they are comfortable "coming to school" and confident that their involvement makes a difference in their child's academic success.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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NURTURING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Introduction

Gifted students have the same developmental tasks as their less able age peers do (related, for example, to identity, sense of competence, career direction, peer relationships, differentiation, autonomy). However, because of characteristics associated with giftedness in clinical and research literature (e.g., sensitivity, intensity, perceptiveness, overexcitabilites, divergent thinking, precocious talent development, advanced moral development), their needs, concerns, and how they experience development may be quite different. Rapid information processing in itself may contribute to intense emotional responses to environmental stimuli. The characteristics just mentioned may even contribute to difficulties with developmental tasks. In general, it is important that parents, educators, counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists be informed about affective development of gifted children and adolescents and apply their knowledge in their relationships with this population.

Position Statement

Gifted youth deserve attention to their well-being and to their universal and unique developmental experiences—beyond academic and/or talent performance or non-performance. Gifted education programs, teachers, administrators, and school counselors can and should intentionally, purposefully, and proactively nurture socio-emotional development in these students. Gifted children and adolescents are not only developing cognitively; they are also developing socially and emotionally and in career awareness. Even cognitive development and academic experiences have social and emotional implications.

Pertinent Issues

Differences among Gifted Students

Giftedness, as a concept, has a variety of meanings, depending on personal perspective and context. Culture, economic status, and geographic location may contribute to a high valuing of, for example, academic achievement, service to others, creativity, or adaptability. Intellectual ability, as demonstrated in school work, is only one kind of giftedness, but, even for that one area, it is important to consider social and emotional implications. The range of measured intellectual ability among students identified as gifted is as broad as the entire ability spectrum in most heterogeneous classrooms. Although any gifted child may have few available mind-mates at school, an extremely gifted child may be as different from a moderately gifted child in ability as the latter is from a child with low-average ability. Similarly, gifted students differ greatly from each other and from the rest of the school population in psychological and social characteristics. As the level of difference increases, social difficulties can also increase. However, it is important not to make assumptions about social concerns, since gifted children and adolescents at all ability levels vary in interpersonal ease.

Underrepresented Populations in Programs for Gifted Students

The field of gifted education has long advocated use of multiple criteria and multiple assessments for determining need for special programming. Nevertheless, standardized tests are often the gate to further assessment. Such measures can miss highly able students whose nonmainstream cultural values and behaviors, life circumstances, lack of parental support, depression, lack of language proficiency, skepticism about school, disabilities, behavior, or even illness preclude optimal standardized-test or classroom performance. Missing then are

opportunities to affirm and nurture ability and provide social access to intellectual peers. Other circumstances have social and emotional implications as well. Unfortunately, even when identified, children often need to fit a program, instead of the program accommodating and addressing developmental needs of diverse students. Gifted academic underachievers and gifted children from low-income, recent-immigrant, and/or minority-culture families, for example, may feel uncomfortable and frustrated in a one-mode-fits-all program.

Non-Asset Aspects of Giftedness
Several factors have contributed to high intellectual ability and impressive talent being viewed mostly as assets. In general, research samples have often not been inclusive enough across cultural, socioeconomic, or performance spectra to reflect concerns of a broad range of highly able students. Non-asset aspects of giftedness may receive little attention, including when studies and instruments are developed. The fact that there have been relatively few qualitative studies of gifted populations has also contributed to a limited understanding of unexpressed thoughts and emotions of gifted youth. In addition, egalitarian societal attitudes and education mandates have not encouraged attention to social and emotional concerns of gifted students.

Mental Health
Researchers have not determined that gifted youth are more likely than others to have mental-health difficulties. However, if perceptions of this population are based on only positive stereotypes, educators and counselors may not recognize developmental concerns and counseling needs, which then are not addressed. Characteristics associated with giftedness may actually be risk factors. In addition, some behaviors that reflect these characteristics may be inappropriately viewed as pathology by counselors and psychologists who are unfamiliar with literature related to giftedness.

In regard to social and emotional concerns, several studies have found that gifted students are not likely to ask for help, protecting an image of competence and not wanting to disappoint adults who are highly invested in their success. That phenomenon and the possibility that adults may not be inclined to consider non-asset aspects of giftedness suggest that teachers, school counselors, and parents need to be informed about these dimensions and be alert to concerns. Furthermore, like others who are unaware of complex concerns of gifted students, teachers and counselors may have attitudes about high ability that preclude effective work with them. Regardless of gifted students' performance level, it is important that significant adults approach them respectfully, try to understand how they experience their world, and not be in awe. Awed adults may not recognize or acknowledge vulnerabilities and may not be objective.

Because of various characteristics associated with giftedness, scholars have noted a need for differential counseling services. However, with relatively little research attention to pertinent counseling issues and little clinical literature about appropriate counseling approaches, not much is known about the extent counselors should differentiate their services for gifted youth across cultures and socioeconomic, age, and ability levels. Nevertheless, a few models have been described in the literature (see Pertinent Resources).

Recommendations
NAGC strongly recommends that curriculum geared to helping gifted children and adolescents with social, emotional, and career development be part of gifted-education programming both in and outside of the regular classroom. Proactive affective curriculum at all school levels can provide psychoeducational information about the overlay of giftedness on these areas of development. Teachers can make assignments that attend to psychosocial aspects of literature and social science. Semi-structured discussion groups can focus on developmental challenges. Career and talent development, which may be a concern much earlier than in the general population, should be one focus of this curriculum. Even in connection with competitive activities, gifted students can benefit from discussing feelings related to those experiences with an adult who employs active listening skills. Both high achievement and underachievement can be viewed through a developmental lens and approached accordingly. Important also is attention to personal strengths and resilience. Such strengths may be overshadowed by performance or non-performance and not otherwise affirmed. Finally, these affective concerns should be highlighted when advocating for services, funding, and legislation.

Research
Researchers, school counselors, and other helping professionals can be part of a continuing process of exploring social and emotional development of gifted youth and adults— for example, in connection with perfectionism, underachievement, depression, eating disorders, self-harm, substance use and abuse, and response to life events (e.g., loss and grief, divorce, serious illness, accident, relocation). Other areas in which giftedness has been only rarely, if ever, examined are sexual abuse, obsessive-compulsive disorder, extreme parent-child conflict, difficult developmental transitions, Asperger's syndrome, and physical disability. The subjective experience of asynchronous development (e.g., with cognitive outpacing social and emotional) also warrants additional research attention.

Counselor Preparation
Given the salience of giftedness in social and emotional development and the likelihood that career and academic concerns have implications for well-being, school and other counselors need to be prepared to work with highly able students. Giftedness should be considered in case conceptualizations and treatment plans. Counselors in any venue can use information related to giftedness to normalize sensitivities and intensities, put developmental challenges and transitions into perspective, and make sense of classroom or social difficulties.

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ERIC Digests

Nurturing Social-Emotional Development of Gifted Children

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Author: James T. Webb
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What Are the Social-Emotional Needs of Gifted Children?

To a large degree, the needs of gifted children are the same as those of other children. The same developmental stages occur, though often at a younger age (Webb & Kleine, 1993). Gifted children may face the same potentially limiting problems, such as family poverty, substance abuse, or alcoholism. Some needs and problems, however, appear more often among gifted children.

Types of Problems

It is helpful to conceptualize needs of gifted children in terms of those that arise because of the interaction with the environmental setting (e.g., family, school, or cultural milieu) and those that arise internally because of the very characteristics of the gifted child.

Several intellectual and personality attributes characterize gifted children and should be noted at the outset. These characteristics may be strengths, but potential problems also may be associated with them (Clark, 1992; Seagoe, 1974).

Some particularly common characteristics are shown in the table.

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POSSIBLE PROBLEMS THAT MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH
CHARACTERISTIC STRENGTHS OF GIFTED CHILDREN
===

Strengths	Possible Problems
Acquires/retains information quickly	Impatient with others; dislikes basic routine.
Inquisitive; searches for significance.	Asks embarrassing questions; excessive in interests.
Intrinsic motivation.	Strong-willed; resists direction.
Enjoys problem-solving; able to conceptualize, abstract, synthesize.	Resists routine practice; questions teaching procedures.
Seeks cause-effect relations.	Dislikes unclear/illogical areas(e.g., traditions or feelings).
Emphasizes truth, equity, and fair play.	Worries about humanitarian concerns.
Seeks to organize things and people.	Constructs complicated rules; often seen as bossy.
Large facile vocabulary; advanced, broad information.	May use words to manipulate; bored with school and age-peers.

High expectations of self and others.	Intolerant, perfectionistic; may become depressed.
Creative/inventive; likes new ways of doing things.	May be seen as disruptive and out of step.
Intense concentration; long attention span and persistence in areas of interest.	Neglects duties or people during periods of focus; resists interruption; stubbornness.
Sensitivity, empathy; desire to be accepted by others.	Sensitivity to criticism or peer rejection.
High energy, alertness, eagerness.	Frustration with inactivity; may be seen as hyperactive.
Independent; prefers individualized work; reliant on self.	May reject parent or peer input; nonconformity.
Diverse interests and abilities; versatility	May appear disorganized or scattered; frustrated over lack of time.
Strong sense of humor.	Peers may misunderstand humor; may become "class clown" for attention.

Adapted from Clark (1992) and Seagoe (1974).

These characteristics are seldom inherently problematic by themselves. More often, combinations of these characteristics lead to behavior patterns such as:

- **Uneven Development.** Motor skills, especially fine-motor, often lag behind cognitive conceptual abilities, particularly in preschool gifted children (Webb & Kleine, 1993). These children may see in their "mind's eye" what they want to do, construct, or draw; however, motor skills do not allow them to achieve the goal. Intense frustration and emotional outbursts may result.
- **Peer Relations.** As preschoolers and in primary grades, gifted children (particularly highly gifted) attempt to organize people and things. Their search for consistency emphasizes "rules," which they attempt to apply to others. They invent complex games and try to organize their playmates, often prompting resentment in their peers.
- **Excessive Self-Criticism.** The ability to see possibilities and alternatives may imply that youngsters see idealistic images of what they might be, and simultaneously berate themselves because they see how they are falling short of an ideal (Adderholt-Elliott, 1989; Powell & Haden, 1984; Whitmore, 1980).
- **Perfectionism.** The ability to see how one might ideally perform, combined with emotional intensity, leads many gifted children to unrealistically high expectations of themselves. In high ability children, perhaps 15-20% may be hindered significantly by perfectionism at some point in their academic careers, and even later in life.
- **Avoidance of Risk-Taking.** In the same way the gifted youngsters see the possibilities, they also see potential problems in undertaking those activities. Avoidance of potential problems can mean avoidance of risk-taking, and may result in underachievement (Whitmore, 1980).
- **Multipotentiality.** Gifted children often have several advanced capabilities and may be involved in diverse activities to an almost frantic degree. Though seldom a problem for the child, this may create problems for the family, as well as quandaries when decisions must be about career selection (Kerr, 1985; 1991).

- **Gifted Children with Disabilities.** Physical disabilities can prompt social and emotional difficulties. Intellect may be high, but motor difficulties such as cerebral palsy may prevent expression of potential. Visual or hearing impairment or a learning disability may cause frustration. Gifted children with disabilities tend to evaluate themselves more on what they are unable to do than on their substantial abilities (Whitmore & Maker, 1985).

Problems from Outside Sources

Lack of understanding or support for gifted children, and sometimes actual ambivalence or hostility, creates significant problems (Webb & Kleine, 1993). Some common problem patterns are:

- **School Culture and Norms.** Gifted children, by definition, are "unusual" when compared with same-age children--at least in cognitive abilities--and require different educational experiences (Kleine & Webb, 1992). Schools, however, generally group children by age. The child often has a dilemma--conform to the expectations for the average child or be seen as nonconformist.
- **Expectations by Others.** Gifted children--particularly the more creative--do not conform. Nonconformists violate or challenge traditions, rituals, roles, or expectations. Such behaviors often prompt discomfort in others. The gifted child, sensitive to others' discomfort, may then try to hide abilities.
- **Peer Relations.** Who is a peer for a gifted child? Gifted children need several peer groups because their interests are so varied. Their advanced levels of ability may steer them toward older children. They may choose peers by reading books (Halsted, 1994). Such children are often thought of as "loners." The conflict between fitting in and being an individual may be quite stressful.
- **Depression.** Depression is usually being angry at oneself or at a situation over which one has little or no control. In some families, continual evaluation and criticism of performance--one's own and others--is a tradition. Any natural tendency to self-evaluate likely will be inflated. Depression and academic underachievement may be increased.

  Sometimes educational misplacement causes the gifted youngster to feel caught in a slow motion world. Depression may result because the child feels caught in an unchangeable situation.

- **Family Relations.** Families particularly influence the development of social and emotional competence. When problems occur, it is not because parents consciously decide to create difficulties for gifted children. It is because parents lack information about gifted children, or lack support for appropriate parenting, or are attempting to cope with their own unresolved problems (which may stem from their experiences with being gifted).

Preventing Problems

- **Reach out to Parents.** Parents are particularly important in preventing social or emotional problems. Teaching, no matter how excellent or supportive, can seldom counteract inappropriate parenting. Supportive family environments, on the other hand,

can counteract unhappy school experiences. Parents need information if they are to nurture well and to be wise advocates for their children.

- **Focus on Parents of Young Children.** Problems are best prevented by involving parents when children are young. Parents particularly must understand characteristics that may make gifted children seem different or difficult.
- **Educate and Involve Health-Care and Other Professionals.** Concentrated efforts should be made to involve such professionals in state and local meetings and in continuing education programs concerning gifted children. Pediatricians, psychologists, and other caregivers such as day-care providers typically have received little training about gifted children, and therefore can provide little assistance to parents (Webb & Kleine, 1993).
- **Use Educational Flexibility.** Gifted children require different and more flexible educational experiences. When the children come from multicultural or low-income families, educational flexibility and reaching out may be particularly necessary. Seven flexibly paced educational options, relatively easy to implement in most school settings (Cox, Daniel & Boston, 1985) are: early entrance; grade skipping; advanced level courses; compacted courses; continuous progress in the regular classroom; concurrent enrollment in advanced classes; and credit by examination. These options are based on competence and demonstrated ability, rather than on arbitrary age groupings.
- **Establish Parent Discussion Groups.** Parents of gifted children typically have few opportunities to talk with other parents of gifted children. Discussion groups provide opportunities to "swap parenting recipes" and child-rearing experiences. Such experiences provide perspective as well as specific information (Webb & DeVries, 1993).

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Perfectionism in Gifted Children

By Kristie Speirs Neumeister

Perfectionism is a characteristic often noted of gifted children. Parents, educators, and researchers all have different notions about the construct of perfectionism and to what extent it is harmful to gifted children's self-concept and achievement levels. When perfectionism is conceived as pride in one's work and striving for excellence, it can be an adaptive motivator for gifted individuals to pursue their goals. Most often, however, perfectionism also consists of maladaptive tendencies, such as harsh self-blame, procrastination, avoidance of challenges, and overgeneralization of failures. The need for perfection may also result in anxiety, depression, and difficulty forming secure relationships as well.

Since gifted individuals with perfectionistic tendencies may experience some of these negative outcomes, parents and teachers need to better understand the roots of perfectionism and strategies to help children cope. The place to begin is considering different facets of perfectionism. In my research with gifted students, I have examined two types of perfectionism highlighted in Paul Hewitt and Gordon Flett's Multidimensional Model of Perfectionism. This model defines perfectionism in terms of the origin of the standards; do the standards for perfection originate from within the individual (self-oriented perfectionism) or does an individual perceive that others have placed high standards for performance on them (socially prescribed perfectionism)? These two dimensions of perfectionism each develop as a result of different influences, and they also warrant different strategies for intervention.

In my research I have found that gifted students scoring high on measures of self-oriented perfectionism primarily cite three contributors: their personality, their parents, and their school curriculum. The gifted individuals I have worked indicated that personality was a major contributor to their self-oriented perfectionistic tendencies. The need to be perfect came from within them rather than from external sources, such as parents or teachers. Personal characteristics such as this, however, can be shaped by external influences. For example, the self-oriented perfectionists said that they would benefit from parents and teachers reinforcing in them the need to set realistic standards and goals that centered on self-improvement and mastery rather than perfection. They also indicated that they would benefit from talking with school counselors or with other gifted students with the same tendencies. The desire to set unrealistically high standards may still be present in these children; however, support and a "reality check" from parents and teaches can help ground them.

In addition to personality characteristics, the self-oriented perfectionists that I worked with also said their perfectionism developed in part through social learning as they observed their parents model perfectionistic behaviors. Each participant in my study spoke of at least one parent who was a perfectionist. While the participants emphasized that their parents never expected perfection out of them, they adopted these tendencies anyway simply through modeling. This finding has definite implications for parents and teachers alike. Does your house or classroom have to be in "perfect" condition all of the time? Do you get visibly upset with yourself when mistakes are made? Children are watching and internalizing such reactions as their own.

Gifted children need to observe their parents and teachers taking on challenges, making mistakes, and experiencing failures once in awhile. This is how they will learn to appreciate

mistakes and failures in a constructive fashion, rather than feeling crippled by anxiety and self-blame. My husband and I always make a point to highlight our mistakes to our daughter, who is constantly watching our reactions to such events. Whether it's burning dinner, turning white clothes pink in the laundry, or missing a turn and getting lost on the interstate, we point it out, acknowledging our frustrations, but highlighting how mistakes are useful to show us how to improve in the future (next time I'll use the kitchen timer, next time I will make sure to wash this red shirt separately, etc.). By observing parents and teachers make mistakes and cope with them constructively, gifted children will begin to model these behaviors and strategies rather than perfectionistic ones.

Finally, self-oriented perfectionists also contributed the development of their perfectionism to the fact that they never had the opportunity to experience failure in the classroom. As gifted individuals, they explained that their elementary school curriculum was too easy for them, and therefore, it required no effort to make perfect grades. Perfection, then, became the standard to follow. As they progressed to secondary school, and the curriculum became more challenging, they found themselves unable to handle potential failure, and therefore, worked even harder than over to maintain their perfect grades. Each one indicated that they would have benefited from a more challenging curriculum early on, for it would have given them experience with learning how to cope with failure and perceive it as constructive. This finding has implications for both parents and teachers working with gifted students. Teachers need to ensure that the curriculum is differentiated appropriately so that all students are being challenged. When failures do occur (and failure to a gifted student may be a B letter grade instead of an A), teachers need to take advantage of this opportunity to teach students how to learn from their mistakes and to put the experience in perspective.

Parents, likewise, should provide children with the opportunity to "move out of their comfort zone" and try activities that may not come as easily to them. Exposing children to a variety of activities will enable them to realize it is not possible to be perfect at everything one does, nor is it expected. Parents can use these opportunities to monitor their children's attitudes toward challenge and failure as well as their tendencies for self-blame.

Similar to the self-oriented perfectionists that I studied, gifted students with socially-prescribed perfectionistic tendencies also credited an inappropriately easy curriculum as one of the contributing factors to their perfectionism. In addition to this, however, these students also cited perceived high demands and expectations from parents, and a feeling that love and acceptance was contingent upon achievement, as main contributors to their perfectionism. Gifted students with parents who adopt an authoritarian parenting style, characterized by a high demands and expectations, and little demonstration of warmth and acceptance of their children, are more likely to develop socially prescribed perfectionism. These children soon begin to equate their self-worth with their achievements. They strive for perfection so as to please their demanding parents. Parents may need to step back and re-evaluate the standards they have set for their children. Are they realistic, or are they exerting too much pressure on the child? Finally, parents may also need to revisit their style of communication with their children. At the end of the day, parents need to ask themselves what did my child do right today and remember to praise him or her for that. It is much easier to notice and comment on problematic behaviors than it is to remember to complement the good. Children need to hear both, so they do not feel as though they can never please their parents.

Sometimes parents may not view themselves as demanding or setting unrealistic expectations for their children; however, their children may have a different perspective. Communication regarding standards for achievement is critical for parents and children. Open discussions about expectations for achievement will help parents and children set appropriate achievement goals together. Such communication will foster a nurturing relationship in which parents and children perceive themselves as on the same team working toward the same, attainable goal.

Parents and teachers may also need to repeatedly communicate to gifted children that acceptance and love is not contingent upon achievement. The socially prescribed perfectionists I studied worried that if they did not achieve perfection then their parents would not love them and their teachers think less of them as individuals. This is an easy leap for gifted students; people are so excited by their accomplishments it is no wonder they start to believe that these accomplishments determine their self-worth. The socially prescribed perfectionists that I studied described this link between accomplishments and self-worth as resulting in a fear of failure which led them to procrastinate and avoid challenges. Teachers can help ease the fear of failure soically prescribed perfectionists face by offering assignments that are not graded or graded on improvement rather than final product. Parents can help by expressing love and affection for their children more frequently and especially when the child is engaging in a challenging task. This will help socially prescribed perfectionists realize that regardless of their achievements, their parents and teachers still love and support them.

Striving for excellence is a trait parents and educators hope all children adopt. When this trait merges into the need for perfection, however, parents and teachers may need to intervene. Understanding how these dimensions of perfectionism may develop and their differential influences on the achievement and psychologically well-being of gifted students will help guide gifted students toward adaptive thoughts and behaviors that facilitate, rather than inhibit, their academic achievement.

ERIC Digests

Preventing Bullying

School is supposed to be a place where students feel safe and secure and where they can count on being treated with respect. The reality, however, is that a significant number of students are the target of bullying episodes that result in serious, long-term academic, physical, and emotional consequences. Unfortunately, school personnel often minimize or underestimate the extent of bullying and the harm it can cause. In many cases, bullying is tolerated or ignored (Barone 1997; Colvin and others 1998).

When teachers and administrators fail to intervene, some victims ultimately take things into their own hands, often with grievous results. In its recent analysis of 37 school shooting incidents, the U.S. Secret Service learned that a majority of the shooters had suffered "bullying and harassment that was longstanding and severe" (U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center 2000).

This Digest examines the problem of bullying and some of its effects, discusses steps schools are taking, looks at ways peers can discourage bullying, and identifies other strategies that are being pursued.

WHAT IS BULLYING AND HOW PREVALENT IS THE PROBLEM?
Bullying occurs when a person willfully and repeatedly exercises power over another with hostile or malicious intent. A wide range of physical or verbal behaviors of an aggressive or antisocial nature are encompassed by the term bullying. These include "insulting, teasing, abusing verbally and physically, threatening, humiliating, harassing, and mobbing" (Colvin and others). Bullying may also assume less direct forms (sometimes referred to as "psychological bullying") such as gossiping, spreading rumors, and shunning or exclusion (O'Connell and others 1999).

In a recent survey of more than 15,000 sixth- through tenth-graders at public and private schools in the U.S., "30 percent of the students reported bullying others, being the target of bullies, or both" (Bowman 2001). The information, gathered in 1998 as part of the World Health Organization's Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey and released in April 2001, is "the first nationally representative research on the frequency of bullying among students in the United States" (Bowman).

Although the WHO survey queried only students in grades 6 through 10, younger students are also victims of bullying. In a study of fourth- through eighth-graders, about 15 percent reported being severely distressed by bullying and 22 percent reported academic difficulties stemming from mistreatment by peers (Hoover and Oliver 1996).
According to research done by Janice Gallagher, one out of four children is bullied, and one out of five defines themselves as a bully (Schmitt 1999). Approximately 282,000 students are

physically attacked in secondary schools every month (Schmitt).

Many avoid public areas of the school such as the cafeteria and restrooms in an attempt to elude bullies. For some students, the fear is so great that they avoid school altogether. Every day approximately 160,000 students stay home from school because they are afraid of being bullied (Vail 1999).

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF BULLYING ON TARGETED STUDENTS?
Bullying can have devastating effects on victims. As one middle-school student expressed it, "There is another kind of violence, and that is violence by talking. It can leave you hurting more than a cut with a knife. It can leave you bruised inside" (National Association of Attorneys General 2000).

Students who are targeted by bullies often have difficulty concentrating on their school work, and their academic performance tends to be "marginal to poor" (Ballard and others 1999). Typically, bullied students feel anxious, and this anxiety may in turn produce a variety of physical or emotional ailments.

As noted above, rates of absenteeism are higher among victimized students than rates among their nonbullied peers, as are dropout rates. According to Nansel and colleagues (2001), "youth who are bullied generally show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness, physical and mental symptoms, and low self-esteem." When students are bullied on a regular basis, they may become depressed and despondent, even suicidal or homicidal. As a report by the National Association of Attorneys General notes, bullying "is a precursor to physical violence by its perpetrators and can trigger violence in its victims."

The psychological scars left by bullying often endure for years. Evidence indicates that "the feelings of isolation and the loss of self-esteem that victims experience seem to last into adulthood" (Clarke and Kiselica 1997). Studies have found a higher level of depression and lower self-esteem among formerly bullied individuals at age twenty-three, even though as adults these individuals were no more harassed or socially isolated than a control group (Nansel and others).

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO COUNTERACT BULLYING?
According to Froschl and Gropper (1999), a written anti-bullying policy distributed to everyone in the school community can help to send the message that bullying incidents will be taken seriously. Of course, to be effective, the policy must have the support of school staff, and it must be fairly and consistently applied.

To discern the nature and extent of the bullying problem in their school, administrators can distribute surveys to students, school personnel, and parents (Colvin and others). Once baseline data are collected, school personnel will be better able to judge whether any subsequent changes are actually making a difference.

Debra Pepler, director of the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University in Toronto, suggests mapping a school's "hot spots" for bullying incidents (Ruth Walker 2001). Once problematic locations have been pinpointed through survey responses

or a review of disciplinary records, supervision can be concentrated where it is most needed.

Barone points out that providing better supervision is not necessarily costly. For example, principals can ask teachers to stand in the doorways of their classrooms during passing time so that the halls are well supervised.

To achieve permanent changes in how students interact, Colvin and others recommend not only delivering negative consequences to those who bully, but teaching positive behavior through modeling, coaching, prompting, praise, and other forms of reinforcement. Similarly, Ballard and others encourage schools to take a proactive stance by implementing programs that teach students "social skills, conflict resolution, anger management, and character education."

One 15-year-old girl said, "I don't know how you do this, but we need to make acceptance cool" (National Association of Attorneys General).

At Central York Middle School in Pennsylvania, all students sign anti-teasing pledges and are taught how to appropriately manager their anger. Since this practice was started, the school reports a reduction in fistfights. At Laurel Elementary in Fort Collins, Colorado, students undergo "Be Cool" training in which counselors present them with provocative situations and help them recognize the difference between a "hot response" and a "cool response" (Labi 2001).

HOW CAN PEERS DISCOURAGE BULLYING?
O'Connell and others (1999) assert that "peers may actively or passively reinforce the aggressive behaviors of bullies through their attention and engagement. Peer presence is positively related to the persistence of bullying episodes." Similarly, psychologist Peter Fonagy says, "The whole drama is supported by the bystander. The theater can't take place if there's no audience" (Labi 2001).

According to Salmivall (1999), bullying is increasingly viewed as a "group phenomenon," and intervention approaches should be directed toward witnesses as well as direct participants. Salmivall encourages the development of anti-bullying attitudes among peers through awareness-raising, the opportunity for self-reflection and awakening feelings of responsibility, and role-playing or rehearsing new behaviors.

To discourage peers from acting as an "audience" to bullying behavior, Seeds University Elementary School (UES) in Los Angeles has a policy of sending bystanders as well as bullies for after-school mediation. Students and their parents sign contracts at the beginning of the school year acknowledging they understand it is unacceptable to ridicule, taunt, or attempt to hurt other students (Labi). If an incident occurs, it can be used as an opportunity to educate students about alternative ways of resolving similar situations in the future.
Teaching respect and nonviolence should start in elementary school. Some suggest that nonviolence training conducted by older peers can be particularly powerful because, as one high school student put it, younger students "don't look up to old people; they look up to teenagers" (National Association of Attorneys General).

A survey administered by Naylor and Cowie (1999) found positive effects of peer-support systems designed to challenge bullying. Students accessing support, offered in the form of

mentoring, befriending, mediation, and counseling, as well as their peers who provided the support, both derived benefits.

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE?
Some states are beginning to require schools to adopt anti-bullying policies. Colorado, New Hampshire, and West Virginia recently passed legislation that makes it mandatory for schools to have anti-bullying policies. Massachusetts has allocated one million dollars to "bully-proof" its schools.

Students who bully often need intensive support or intervention, so it is important for schools and social-service agencies to work together. Perpetrators are frequently from "hostile family environments" (Ballard and others). They may be victims of acts of aggression at home, or witness aggression among other family members.
Parents can play a role in reducing bullying. William Pollack, a psychologist, says, "Research shows that the success of any program is 60% grounded in whether the same kinds of approaches are used at home" (Labi).

If everyone works together to discourage bullying and respond to incidents, fertile conditions are created for students to develop a greater sense of connection to their peers and for seeds of respect and acceptance to grow.

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ERIC Digests

Violence and Aggression in Children and Youth

As news media detail the increasingly violent acts perpetrated by students, schools and social services throughout the country scramble to respond to the public's horror at these acts and to the widespread fear for the safety of all school children. Part of this response can include the experience and expertise of special educators, who can offer the results of careful research, much of which has been funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), to aid communities in dealing with aggressive and violent students.

A few of the key elements that emerge from much of this research include:
* Troubled students need habilitative services instead of haphazard punishment. A full continuum of educational, mental health, and other services should be available to them.
* Aggressive and violent behaviors do not develop overnight and cannot therefore be ameliorated or eradicated in short periods of time.
* The entire community is better off when troubled students are served more appropriately.
* Schoolwide discipline policies need to be formulated and taught to all students.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
Aggressive behavior is learned and maintained in a manner similar to other behaviors. Three important factors in behavior development and modification are modeling, positive reinforcement, and negative reinforcement. Teachers and peers may be modeling inappropriate or aggressive behavior without being aware of its undue influence on an aggressive student. Similarly, they may reinforce disruptive behaviors either positively (through attention to the student) or negatively (removal of the student from class or similar constraint allows him or her to escape or avoid what is perceived to be an aversive situation).

Aggressive students often exhibit deficits in social information processing; that is, they are likely to misinterpret social cues and misassign hostile intent to others, especially during times of stress. They are more likely than others to have some social skills deficits such as poor impulse control, low frustration tolerance, limited ability to generate alternative responses to stress, and limited insight into the feelings of self and others. Social skills training can be crucial to these students. These students also may be frequently frustrated and yet have fewer skills than others to cope with the frustration. Additional sources of frustration for these students include:

* Disorganized or inconsistent teachers.
* Failure.
* Boredom.
* Lack of positive reinforcement.
* Irrelevant curriculum.
* Overexposure to punishment.
* Feelings of powerlessness.

THE STAGES OF FRUSTRATION AND APPROPRIATE RESPONSES

1. Anxiety: Student sighs or uses other nonverbal cues. Teacher can respond by active listening and nonjudgmental talk.

2. Stress: Student exhibits minor behavior problems. Teacher can use proximity control, boost student interest, or provide assistance with assignments.

3. Defensiveness: Student argues and complains. Teacher can remind student of rules, use conflict resolution, and encourage student to ask for help.

4. Physical Aggression: Student has lost control and may hit, bite, kick, or throw objects. Teacher can escort the student from class, get help, restrain student if necessary, and protect the safety of the other children.

5. Tension Reduction: Student releases tension through crying or verbal venting, or student may become sullen and withdrawn. Teacher can decide whether to use supportive or punishment techniques (or both) and help the student gain insight into feelings and behavior.

HOW TO RESPOND
A nurturing, caring environment is one antidote to frustration and aggression. Teachers who are therapeutic demonstrate a high level of self-awareness and self- confidence, realistic expectations of self, and the ability to exhibit and model self-control in managing stress and frustration. Therapeutic teachers can develop the type of nurturing environment needed to establish trust and rapport with their students.

Many specific strategies are available to educators to help troubled students. However, early intervention is by far the most important predictor for success. Experts agree that if comprehensive intervention is not provided by Grade 3 or 4, success in ameliorating aggression is unlikely.

HOW TO INTERVENE
Intervention depends on many factors including the goals of the intervention. A universal screening procedure can detect signs of antisocial behavior. Once these children have been identified, there are three stages of prevention that influence the intervention strategies:
1. Primary prevention aims at keeping problems from emerging. First Step to Success and other commercially available curriculums can be used to divert antisocial young children from a path leading to adjustment problems.
2. Secondary prevention requires individually tailored interventions applied to students who show at risk status. Individual counseling and one-on-one behavior management plans are hallmarks of this stage of intervention. The Second Step is an example of a commercially available curriculum designed for these students.
3. Tertiary prevention involves intensive "wraparound" services that extend beyond the school building to encompass family and social support services. It is applied to the most severely at-risk students.

HOW TO PLAN
Sadly, today's educators need to be ready for acts of violence and aggression. Some overall strategies to cope with students' with aggressive and violent tendencies include:
1. Practice for a crisis. Prepare students and faculty just as they are trained for the eventuality of a fire.
2. Train all staff to respond to student aggression. Precise methods to be used, procedures to be followed, and role-playing should be a part of this training.

3. Dress appropriately. Low-heel shoes, loose-fitting garments, and the omission of sharp jewelry and dangling earrings are recommended.
4. Move items of value out of reach.
5. Establish trust and rapport with students. Although rapport alone will probably not eliminate violent or aggressive acts, it will enhance prevention and intervention procedures.
6. Define behavioral expectations and apply consequences for rule compliance and noncompliance. Clear identification of rules and other boundaries and consistent application of consequences can help minimize aggressive acts.
7. Remain calm and in control.
8. Maintain a therapeutic attitude. Therapeutic adults are able to maintain a willingness to understand students and to consider their emotional fragility.

WHAT THE LAW MANDATES
The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 require educators to address the behavioral as well as learning problems of students with disabilities. Teams charged with developing an individualized education program (IEP) for students with disabilities are required to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and to implement behavior intervention plans that include positive behavioral interventions and supports.

These and other IDEA mandates reflect awareness by legislators and the education community of the importance of appropriate identification of student problems, accurate assessment, and positive behavior supports. The measures described are aimed at providing students who are at risk for or have committed aggressive acts with the tools to handle their frustration and aggression in alternate and socially acceptable ways.

For students with disabilities, including those who present challenging behaviors, the IDEA also addresses issues such as staff training, students bringing weapons to school, continuum of services, alternate placements, and working with a student's strengths as well as his or her weaknesses.

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