



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
NEEDS OF GIFTED
CHILDREN



A POSITION PAPER

The California Association for the Gifted (CAG) periodically publishes position papers that deal with issues, policies, and practices that have an impact on the education of gifted and talented students. All position papers approved by the CAG Board of Directors are consistent with the organization's philosophy and mission, and the current research in the field.

The position papers support the organization's belief in the value and uniqueness of all individuals, its respect for diversity present in our society, and its commitment to honoring the similarities and differences among all students. CAG encourages the provision of educational opportunities that are appropriate to challenge and nurture the growth of each child's potential. The organization is especially mindful of the need for advocacy for individuals who have developed or show the promise of developing intellectual abilities and talents at high levels.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF GIFTED CHILDREN

Gifted children generally go through the same developmental stages as other children— although often much earlier. Because of their accelerated and more complex intellectual development, they may experience unique, often extreme, social and emotional needs. These may include:

- asynchrony—uneven development such as having their cognitive abilities surpass their motor or emotional development
- perfectionism—sometimes taking the form of unrealistically high expectations of themselves, resulting in limited risk-taking for fear of failure, or feeling that their self-worth is dependent on their high, often unattainable achievement, and a tendency to be highly self critical
- difficult peer relations—sometimes resulting in social isolation or being seen as odd or weird, “know-it-all” or bossy by their same-age classmates
- unusual emotional and physical sensitivity—often accompanied by heightened empathy, deep concern for global issues, such as war and hunger, which may in turn lead to frustration and/or depression due to the students’ perceived inability to effect change.
- Imposter Syndrome—awareness of their differences and believing that, “I’m not as smart as everyone seems to think. If I’m not careful, people will find out that I’m not really gifted.”
- multi-potentiality—often gifted children have several advanced abilities and have difficulty deciding on which idea or ability they wish to pursue. They may immerse themselves in diverse activities to an almost frantic degree. This places stress not only on themselves but also on their families.
- high frustration with unchallenging curriculum—preventing academic or intellectual growth and a loss of essential academic skills that will be needed later to succeed at advanced study.



The first step in meeting the social-emotional needs of gifted children is building awareness and understanding of these needs, on the part of both the gifted students and those who guide them. The education of families and of teachers in the social and emotional needs of gifted learners is critical in helping these children understand themselves and cope with the emotional stress inherent in their lives. Parents and teachers need information on the characteristics and appropriate education of gifted learners. Parents need the opportunity to share their concerns if they are to nurture successfully and be wise advocates for their children. Such information should also be available to those outside the family and school setting and include physicians, counselors, and day-care providers.

To meet their social and emotional needs, the California Association for the Gifted believes it is essential that gifted children have:

- teachers and counselors who are knowledgeable about the emotional and social needs that can result from being gifted
- teachers who give students choice in the ways they can learn and in the products and the evaluation of learning when appropriate
- an educational setting that is flexible and focused on the process of creating and implementing challenging learning experiences
- a learning environment that provides intellectual peer interaction so that gifted students can relate to those of commensurate abilities and interest
- models of risk-taking in supportive environments at home and at school that provide ways for coping with failure and developing appropriate social skills
- safe havens, both at home and at school, where they are understood, and it is safe to discover and reveal who they really are

Only as these needs are met will gifted learners be able to develop to the highest levels of their academic and intellectual potential.



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