

Parenting Gifted Kids:  
Tips for Raising Happy and Successful Children

Presented by:  
Dr. James R. Delisle

Sponsored by  
Boulder Valley Gifted and Talented  
Fairview High School, Boulder, Colorado  
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## Is It a Cheetah?

by Stephanie S. Tolan

The child who does well in school, gets good grades, wins awards, and "performs" beyond the norms for his or her age, is considered talented. The child who does not, no matter what his innate intellectual capacities or developmental level, is less and less likely to be identified, less and less likely to be served.

A cheetah metaphor can help us see the problem with achievement-oriented thinking. The cheetah is the fastest animal on earth. When we think of cheetahs we are likely to think first of their speed. It's flashy. It is impressive. It's unique. And it makes identification incredibly easy. Since cheetahs are the only animals that can run 70 mph, if you clock an animal running 70 mph, IT'S A CHEETAH! . . .

Certain conditions are necessary if it is to attain its famous 70 mph top speed. . . It must be healthy, fit, and rested. It must have plenty of room to run. Besides that, it is best motivated to run all out when it is hungry and there are antelope to chase.

If a cheetah is confined to a 10 x 12 foot cage, though it may pace or fling itself against the bars in restless frustration, it won't run 70 mph. IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah has only 20 mph rabbits to chase for food, it won't run 70 mph while hunting. If it did, it would flash past its prey and go hungry! Though it might well run on its own for exercise, recreation, fulfillment of its internal drive, when given only rabbits to eat, the hunting cheetah will run only fast enough to catch a rabbit. IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah is fed Zoo Chow it may not run at all. IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah is sick or if its legs have been broken, it won't even walk. IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

And finally, if the cheetah is only six weeks old, it can't yet run 70 mph. IS IT, THEN, ONLY A "POTENTIAL" CHEETAH?

A school system that defines giftedness (or talent) as behavior, achievement, and performance is as compromised in its ability to recognize its highly gifted students and to give them what they need as a zoo would be to recognize and provide for its cheetahs if it looked only for speed.

**Giftedness is a greater  
awareness, a greater sensitivity,  
and a greater ability to  
understand and transform  
perceptions into intellectual and  
emotional experiences.**

**--Annemarie Roeper**

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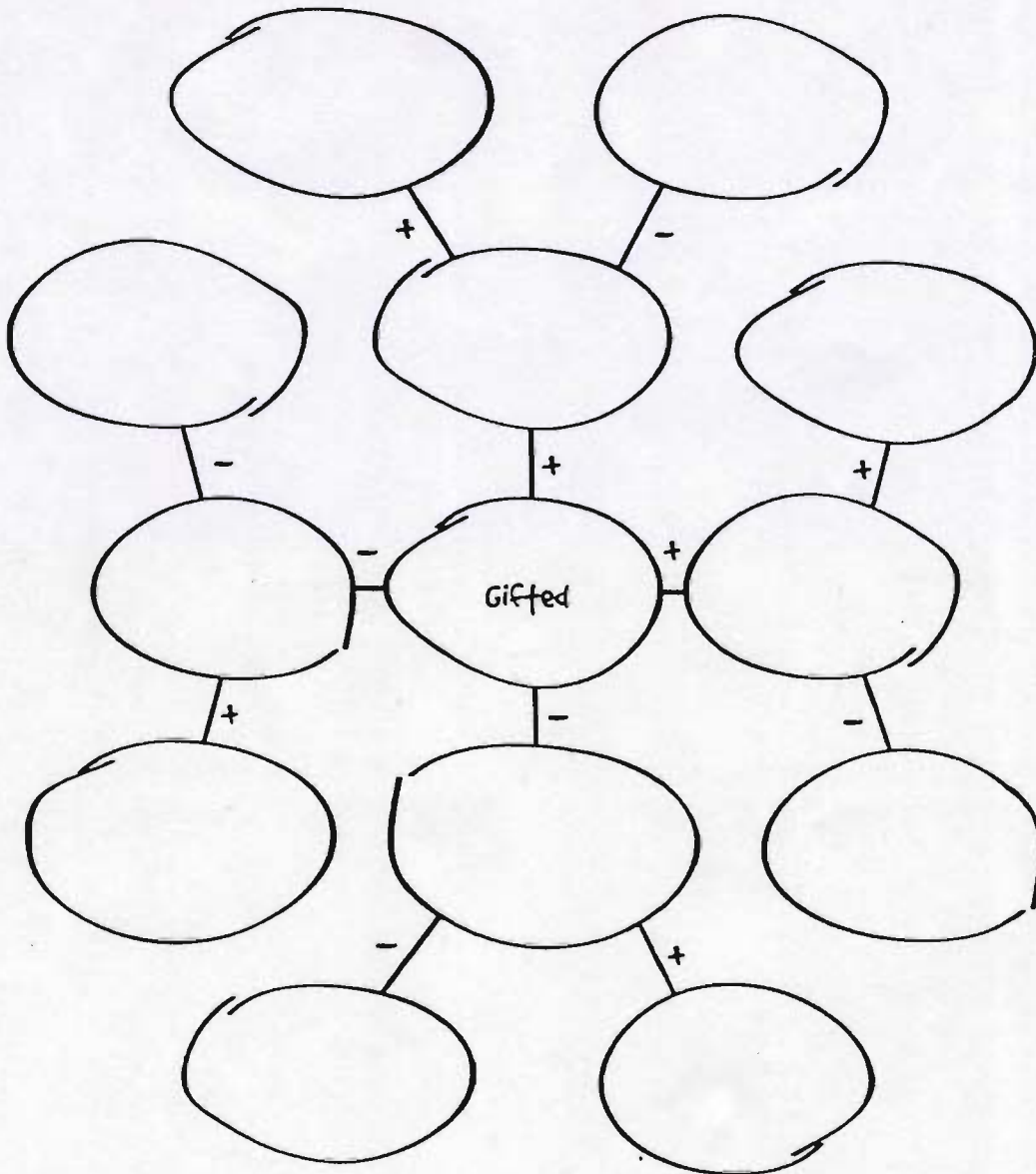
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1. Understand what giftedness is . . .and what it is not
2. Know the distinction between “better at” and “better than”
3. Stop paying interest on a bill you never owed
4. Take charge of your child’s education
5. Appreciate that less than perfect is more than acceptable
6. Live the nuanced life
7. Use the past to understand the present
8. Write your dreams in pencil
9. Make a life, not just a living
10. Understand that life is not a race to see who gets to the end  
the fastest

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# Everything Has Its Ups and Downs!

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_



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# INTENSITY

A salient descriptor that characterizes the personality of a gifted child is intensity. Intensity takes many forms that can be both strengths and weaknesses. Recognizing and understanding these intensities can help toward improving the social and emotional life of the child.

- INTENSITY OF THOUGHT  
“Her mind is always whirring.”
- INTENSITY OF PURPOSE  
“Once he makes up his mind to do something, he’s not satisfied until it’s accomplished.”
- INTENSITY OF EMOTION  
“She internalizes everything anyone says about her.”
- INTENSITY OF SPIRIT  
“He’s always looking for someone less fortunate who needs help.”
- INTENSITY OF SOUL  
“She asks questions that philosophers have asked for centuries and gets upset when we can’t give her definitive answers to them.”

From J.R.Delisle, Once Upon a Mind: The stories and scholars of gifted child education. 2000.  
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## Eight Great Gripes of Gifted Kids

1.

No one explains what being gifted is all about—it's kept a big secret.

2.

School is too easy and too boring.

3.

Parents, teachers, and friends expect us to be perfect all the time.

4.

Friends who really understand us are few and far between.

5.

Kids often tease us about being smart.

6.

We feel overwhelmed by the number of things we can do in life.

7.

We feel different and alienated.

8.

We worry about world problems and feel helpless to do anything about them.

Do you have other gripes that aren't on this list? Write them here:

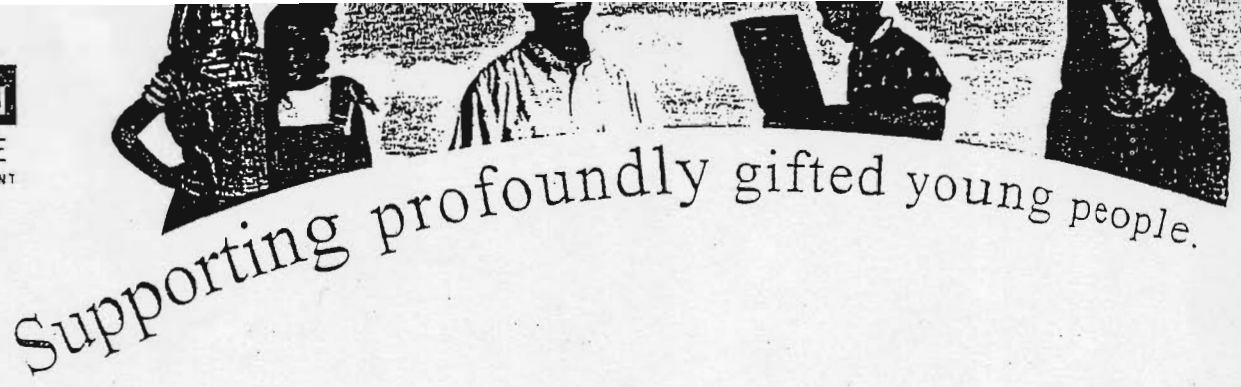
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## Our Mission

The mission of The Davidson Institute for Talent Development is to recognize, nurture and support profoundly gifted young people and to provide opportunities for them to develop their talents in positive ways to create value for themselves and others.

## How We Began

Founded in 1999, The Davidson Institute, a nonprofit operating foundation, was formed out of a concern that our nation's most gifted and talented young people were largely neglected and underserved. While studies indicate that thousands of children make up the profoundly gifted population, few resources exist to support these children and their families' unique needs. Profoundly gifted young people learn at an extremely rapid rate, are seldom provided an education that is appropriate to their abilities, and progress through other developmental milestones differently than their peers. As a result, they face special challenges at school, at home, and in the community.

## What We Do

The Davidson Institute strives to offer much-needed support to this population through services such as individualized support programs, assessment assistance, educational advocates, early college assistance, and online support communities.

## Programs and Services

- *Davidson Young Scholars*  
This individualized program supports the educational and talent development needs of profoundly gifted young people (selected between the ages 4-10 years).
- *Davidson Fellows*  
Students who demonstrate an extraordinary ability to develop their talents with the creation of a significant piece of work are recognized as Davidson Fellows and receive a \$50,000 or \$10,000 scholarship.
- *Services for Talent Development*  
Services to support the talent development of profoundly gifted young people include: Assessment Assistance, Educational Advocates, Early College Assistance, and PG-Online Community for parents to connect with parents, and students to connect with each other and adult role models.
- *Services for Professionals*  
Services for professionals seeking information about the profoundly gifted and their needs include presentations, in-service trainings, expert opinions, and referrals to experts in the field.
- *PG-CyberSource* - [www.pgcybersource.org](http://www.pgcybersource.org)  
A web-based, searchable database of information and resources for and about profoundly gifted young people, with comments and insight from the profoundly gifted kids, their parents, and the professionals who serve them.

[www.davidson-institute.org](http://www.davidson-institute.org)

# Ten Tips for Talking to Teachers

Are you having a problem with a class or an assignment? Can you see room for improvement in how a subject is taught? Do you have a better idea for a special project or term paper? Don't just tell your friends. Talk to the teacher!

Many students have told us that they don't know how to go about doing this. The following suggestions are meant to make it easier for everyone—students and teachers.

- 1. Make an appointment to meet and talk.** This shows the teacher that you're serious and you have some understanding of his or her busy schedule. Tell the teacher about how much time you'll need, be flexible, and don't be late.  
**And they're more likely to be responsive if you remember that the purpose of your meeting is conversation, not confrontation.**
- 2. If you know other students who feel the way you do, consider approaching the teacher together.** There's strength in numbers. If a teacher hears the same thing from four or five people, he or she is more likely to do something about it.
- 3. Think through what you want to say before you go into your meeting with the teacher.** Write down your questions or concerns. Make a list of the items you want to cover. You may even want to copy your list for the teacher so both of you can consult it during your meeting. (Or consider giving it to the teacher ahead of time.)
- 4. Choose your words carefully.**  
Example: Instead of saying,  
"I hate doing reports; they're boring and a waste of time," try, "Is there some other way I could satisfy this requirement? Could I do a video instead?"  
Strike the word "boring" from your vocabulary. It's a buzzword for teachers.
- 5. Don't expect the teacher to do all of the work or propose all of the answers.** Be prepared to make suggestions, offer solutions, even recommend resources. The teacher will appreciate that you took the initiative.
- 6. Be diplomatic, tactful, and respectful.** Teachers have feelings, too.
- 7. Focus on what you need, not on what you think the teacher is doing wrong.** The more the teacher learns about you, the more he or she will be able to help. The more defensive the teacher feels, the less he or she will want to help.
- 8. Don't forget to listen.** Strange but true, many students need practice in this essential skill. The purpose of your meeting isn't just to hear yourself talk.
- 9. Bring your sense of humor.** Not necessarily the joke-telling sense of humor, but the one that lets you laugh at yourself and your own misunderstandings and mistakes.
- 10. If your meeting isn't successful, get help from another adult.** "Successful" doesn't necessarily mean that you emerged victorious. Even if the teacher denies your request, your meeting can still be judged successful. If you had a real conversation—if you communicated openly, listened carefully, and respected each other's point of view—then congratulate yourself on a great meeting. If the air crackled with tension, the meeting fell apart, and you felt disrespected (or acted disrespectful), then it's time to bring in another adult. Suggestions: a guidance counselor, the gifted program coordinator, or another teacher you know and trust who seems likely to support you and advocate for you. Once you've found help, approach your teacher and try again.

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# 86 words of encouragement for children.

If there is any single bit of advice to give parents to improve child behavior, it is positive reinforcement. In order to never run short of appropriate words for this purpose, use this list.

1. You're on the right track now!
2. You're doing a good job!
3. You did a lot of work today!
4. Now you've figured it out.
5. That's RIGHT!!!
6. Now you have the hang of it!
7. That's the way!
8. You're doing fine.
9. Now you have it!
10. That's coming along nicely.
11. That's great.
12. You did it that time!
13. GREAT!
14. FANTASTIC!
15. TERRIFIC!
16. TREMENDOUS!
17. How did you do that?
18. That's better.
19. EXCELLENT!
20. That's a good (boy-girl).
21. That's the best you've ever done.
22. Keep it up!
23. That's really nice.
24. WOW!
25. Keep up the good work.
26. Much better!
27. Good for you!
28. Good thinking!
29. Exactly right!
30. SUPER!
31. Nice going.
32. You make it look easy.
33. Way to go!
34. You're doing much better today.
35. I've never seen anyone do it better.
36. Superb!
37. You're getting better every day.
38. WONDERFUL!
39. I knew you could do it.
40. Keep working on it, you're getting better.
41. You're doing beautifully.
42. You're really working hard today.
43. That's the way to do it!
44. Keep on trying!
45. You're the best!
46. Nothing can stop you now!
47. You've got it made.
48. You're very good at that.
49. You certainly did well today.
50. I'm very proud of you.
51. You're learning fast.
52. You've just about got it.
53. That's good!
54. I'm happy to see you working like that.
55. I'm proud of the way you worked today.
56. That's the right way to do it.
57. You're really learning a lot.
58. That's better than ever.
59. That's quite an improvement.
60. That kind of work makes me very happy.
61. Now you've figured it out!
62. PERFECT!
63. FINE!
64. That's IT!
65. You figured it out fast.
66. You remembered!
67. You're really improving.
68. I think you've got it now.
69. Well look at you go!
70. You've got that down pat.
71. Good work!
72. Outstanding!
73. I like that.
74. Couldn't have done it better myself.
75. Now that's what I call a fine job.
76. You did that very well.
77. Congratulations!
78. That was first class work.
79. SENSATIONAL!
80. That's the best ever.
81. You haven't missed a thing.
82. It's a pleasure to teach you when you work like that.
83. You really make my job fun.
84. You've just about mastered that!
85. One more time and you'll have it.
86. You must have been practicing!



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# High Achievers: What Price Do They Pay?

Learn to Raise High Achievers Without Breaking Their Spirits

BY CARLETON KENDRICK

They come to me with SATs pushing 1600. The valedictorians. The student leaders. The super-jocks. They're applying to Harvard. They're the children you want your kids to become.

For the past 17 years, I've been an alumni interviewer for Harvard. As part of its admissions process, Harvard gives applicants an opportunity to meet with one of its alumni. To personalize the process. To allow its applicants to "come alive," apart from their strategically packaged portfolios.

Acknowledging that most teens walk into these interviews with understandably heightened anxiety, my initial focus is on helping them exhale their fears and worries about impressing me. "We're here so that Harvard can get to know you a little better," I tell them. "There are no right or wrong answers. We're just going to chat for a while."

I try to get beyond their Miss America-like, rehearsed responses. I'm looking for clues as to whether they'd make considerate roommates, inquisitive scholars and generous contributors to Harvard's community. Most often, these frightened, pressured high achievers have trouble finding their own voice. Instead, I hear them speak in the success-oriented words of their parents, teachers and college coaches.

## Running on Empty

He listed cross-country as a sport he took up in his junior year. No athletic endeavors had preceded his high school running. I asked John (all names have been changed) what had drawn him to distance running. He replied, "My school counselor told me it would look good on my transcript. Time was running out, and my junior year was the last

year I could get a sport in before I sent in my applications. I joined cross-country because everyone makes it who tries out." "Do you like running? Does it give you pleasure?" I asked. "No," was his hollow reply.

Peter had scored two 800s on his SATs and was recognized as a National Merit Scholar. I asked whether he had ever challenged any of his English teachers' opinions in class. Looking down at the floor, he spoke softly. "Sure, I used to disagree lots of times. But every time I'd disagree with a teacher or a textbook, I'd get marked down for it. I learned it's better to tell teachers what they want to hear." Sadly, there was no anger or disappointment in his voice.

Sarah, class valedictorian and winner of numerous, prestigious math and science awards, spoke with a dull voice about her academic triumphs and her future. "Math and science have always been easy for me. I don't like them nearly as much as literature, but they're what I do best. I guess I'll major in them in college, get a graduate degree in them and then get an engineering job and get married. That's what my parents expect. Sarah was 17, a broken sparrow, dying to be middle-aged.

## Stressed for Success

Heard enough? I have. Over the past two decades, the children I've interviewed have become progressively more packaged for success. They've been advised and scared into believing that school's only purpose is to get the grades that will gain them admission into an elite college. College must then result in a degree that translates into a high-paying job and a secure financial future. It's no wonder that a recently released

American Council on Education survey of more than 348,000 college freshmen reports that, "Academic credentials, rather than a love of learning, seem to be their motivation." Shame on us all.

## What Parents Can Do

How do you raise kids to be high achievers without their suffering anxiety, dread and abject resignation?

Stop hurrying and stealing their childhood, structuring and scheduling their every waking moment. Read or re-read David Elkind's cautionary book, "The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon" (Perseus Books).

Don't frighten them into believing in your master plan for academic and career success. Begin telling them as preschoolers that you love and admire them for who they are, not for the grades and achievements that they bring you. Encourage their own natural academic and extracurricular interests, regardless of whether they are deemed portfolio-advisable by costly college "handlers."

Urge them to volunteer and to serve others, and do so together as part of your family's values, not because it will look good on their college transcripts.

In short, love and support them as they challenge and search for themselves, fulfill their dreams and become the people they choose to be.

.....  
*Carleton Kendrick is a family therapist and a contributing writer to <http://familyeducation.com>. For more advice about teen stress and raising high achievers, visit [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org).*

**Note to school counselors:** Each issue of *ASCA School Counselor* magazine contains a column targeted to parents. Please feel free to copy this page and send it home with your students to provide to their parents with your compliments.

From your child's school counselor:

# 20 Ways To Show You Care

--Excerpted from the Research Institute of Minneapolis

**1. Hide surprises for them to find.**

2. Contribute to their collections

**3. Clip magazine pictures and articles that interest them.**

4. Help them to become an expert at something.

5. Tell them about yourself.

**6. Admit when you make a mistake.**

**7. Tell them stories in which they are the hero.**

8. Notice when they grow.

9. Help them learn something new.

**10. Be silly together.**

**11. Share a secret.**

12. Help them take a stand, and stand with them.

**13. Look in their eyes when you talk with them.**

14. Tell them their feelings are OK.

**15. Forget your worries sometimes and concentrate only on them.**

**16. Notice when they are acting different.**

17. Send them a letter or postcard.

**18. Ask for their opinion**

19. Give them a special nickname.

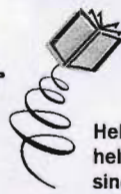
20. Create a tradition with them, and keep it.



## How To Grow Up Creatively Gifted

1. Don't be afraid to "fall in love" with something and pursue it with intensity. (You will do best what you like to do most.)
2. Know, understand, take pride in, practice, develop, use, exploit, and enjoy your greatest strengths.
3. Learn to free yourself from the expectations of others and to walk away from the games they try to impose on you.
4. Free yourself to "play your own game" in such a way as to make good use of your gifts.
5. Find a great teacher or mentor who will help you.
6. Don't waste a lot of expensive, unproductive energy trying to be well rounded. (Don't try to do everything; do what you can do well and what you love.)
7. Learn the skills of interdependence. (Learn to depend upon one another, giving freely of your greatest strengths and most intense loves.)

(Torrance, Murdock and Fletcher, 1996, *Preface*)



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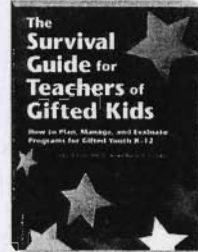
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**About the author:** James R. Delisle, Ph.D., is an award-winning educator, counselor, and author or coauthor of many books and articles for and about gifted children. He is a Distinguished Professor of Education at Kent State University in Ohio and a part-time middle school teacher.

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In these books, Delisle offers parents and teachers practical, down-to-earth advice that will cause them to reexamine the ways they perceive and relate to the gifted children in their lives. Delisle's up-front, conversational, and humorous style make these books favorites you'll want to read again and again.

In *Parenting Gifted Kids*, Delisle puts forth 10 tips to parents of gifted children—ideas that reflect attitude and approach and allow for introspection and change. Some topics of interest include understanding a child's giftedness, working with the school system, dealing with perfectionism in gifted kids, and being adult role models for children.

*Barefoot Irreverence* compiles the best of Delisle's articles and contributions in the field of gifted education over the past 20 years. This book takes on crucial issues such as standardized testing, differentiation, the social and emotional lives of gifted children, and the portrayal of gifted children in the media.

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