

Myths and Realities about Gifted Learners

MYTH: Gifted children do not know they are gifted or different from others.

REALITY: Although a gifted child may not know the word gifted, they often recognize very early that they are different from other children. They may have different interests, more intense interests, larger vocabularies, or an unusual sense of humor.

MYTH: They can succeed without help.

REALITY: This is one of the biggest myths about gifted children. They will not be just fine on their own. Research suggests that a gifted child's adjustment is related to the extent to which the child's educational needs are met.

MYTH: They naturally want to be social isolates.

REALITY: Most gifted children do feel different from their age peers and like to spend some time alone. However, when presented with "true" peers, gifted children often prefer spending time with them rather than being alone.

MYTH: They are more/less mature and stable emotionally than other children.

REALITY: Both of these myths are often heard. The available research shows that gifted children are at least as well adjusted as other groups of youngsters, and that gifted children face risks to their social and emotional development that other groups do not face.

MYTH: Acceleration is detrimental to social and emotional development.

REALITY: Research shows that, when done well, both subject and grade acceleration may provide positive benefits to social and emotional development. There are many other types of acceleration (see www.nationdeceived.org) for more information.)

MYTH: Gifted children are usually gifted in all academic areas.

REALITY: A gifted child may be gifted in only one or two academic areas. While some gifted children are strong in many areas, one does not have to excel in "everything" in order to be considered gifted.

MYTH: Giftedness is wholly inborn; Giftedness is entirely a matter of hard work.

REALITY: Both nature and nurture play a role in developing one's giftedness.

MYTH: All children are gifted.

REALITY: All children are gifts. All children do not have the same ability level in sports or chess, and gifts or talents are no different.

MYTH: Children become gifted because their parents push them.

REALITY: Some children are pushed, but the majority of gifted children “push” themselves to achieve at high levels. They show a keen interest or curiosity, often wanting or needing to know more.

MYTH: Gifted children will become eminent adults.

REALITY: Eminence and giftedness are different. Giftedness is neither necessary nor sufficient for eminence. See books like *Cradles of Eminence* for examples of the many paths toward eminence.

MYTH: Gifted children seldom have learning handicaps.

REALITY: Gifted children are not immune to problems and handicaps, and can be expected to experience them about as frequently as any other child might. ADHD, Learning disabilities, and Asperger’s Disorder, for example, all occur in gifted children.

MYTH: If you tell gifted children they have advanced abilities, they will become egotistical.

REALITY: Gifted children must understand their strengths, which are an important part of them. Increased understanding, not egotism, is the goal of talking about a child’s abilities. “Better at” does not mean “Better than.”

MYTH: Gifted children will show their abilities and talents in their school achievement.

REALITY: They will if opportunities arise. However, if told too often to wait, slow down, stop asking questions, and only color in the lines, they may not.

MYTH: Families always value their gifted children’s advanced abilities, intensity, and sensitivity.

REALITY: Many parents are frightened by their child’s abilities, and often question their own parenting skills. Some families, and indeed some gifted children themselves, wish for “normal.”

MYTH: Parents cannot identify giftedness in their own children.

REALITY: Parents are often very good at recognizing ability. They may actually underestimate talent when they misunderstand giftedness or believe some of these myths.

MYTH: Educators will know exactly how to work with gifted children.

REALITY: Limited teacher training often prevents gifted children from receiving the educational services they need. Funds are limited, regulations are vague, and services in many schools are optional, resulting in a curriculum that does not meet a gifted child’s true educational needs.