

## Article Summary for "Overexcitability and the Gifted" by Sharon Lind

Overexcitabilities are inborn intensities indicating a heightened ability to respond to stimuli and can be expressed in increased sensitivity, awareness and intensity.

Dabrowski's five areas of intensity:

1. Psychomotor – heightened excitability of the neuromuscular system – includes “capacity for being active and energetic” – demonstrated by rapid speech, zealous enthusiasm, intense physical activity and a need for action. Others may find them overwhelming. Has the potential to be misdiagnosed as ADHD.
  - a. Build activity and movement into their lives
  - b. Ensure activities are not distracting to those around them
  - c. Provide time for spontaneity and open-ended, freewheeling activities
2. Sensual Overexcitability – heightened experience of sensual pleasure or displeasure from sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing – endless delight from tastes, smells, textures, sounds, and sights – may also feel over stimulated or uncomfortable with sensory input.
  - a. Limit offensive stimuli and provide comfort
  - b. Provide opportunities for recognition
  - c. Create environments that are soothing
3. Intellectual Overexcitability – seek understanding and truth to gain knowledge and to analyze and synthesize – active minds, intensely curious, often avid readers and usually keen observers – love theory, thinking about thinking, and moral thinking – may appear critical of and impatient with others who cannot sustain their intellectual pace – so excited about an idea that they interrupt and inappropriate times.
  - a. Show how to find the answers to questions
  - b. Allow to act upon their concerns for world problems
  - c. Help to see how intent may be perceived as cruel or disrespectful
4. Imaginational Overexcitability – heightened play of imagination with right association of images and impressions, frequent use of image and metaphor, facility for invention and fantasy, detailed visualization, and elaborate dreams – may write stories or draw instead of doing seatwork or participating in class discussions
  - a. Realize ideas become blended in their mind so have them place a stop sign in their mental videotape or write the account before it gets embellished.
  - b. Use imagination to function in real world – come up with own systems
5. Emotional Overexcitability – heightened, intense feelings, extremes of complex emotions, identification with others' feelings, and strong affective expression – include physical responses like stomachaches and blushing or concern with death and depression – often accused of “overreacting”
  - a. Accept all feelings, regardless of intensity
  - b. Teach to anticipate physical and emotional responses and prepare for them.

## General Strategies

1. Discuss the concept of overexcitability
2. Focus on the positives
3. Cherish and celebrate diversity
4. Use and teach clear verbal and nonverbal communication skills
5. Teach stress management from toddlerhood on
6. Create a comforting environment whenever possible

## SPAN Discussion Summary

Introductions and discussion of which types of intensity you see in your child or children. Although everyone had different combinations of intensities for their children, all intensities were represented.

Q: Do you limit TV watching with your child?

Discussion on limits on media revolved around intensities toward awareness of world problems and how much gifted kids can be affected by news and world issues. Discussed how you need to expose them to this eventually and have conversations with your child about world events, but every child is able to accept these conversations and issues at different ages. Also discussed the inability to watch relational tension is common among gifted kids. Strategy is to allow your child to walk away from viewing things that make them anxious. This may include a discussion with your child's teacher about what is viewed in class and allowing the child to be excused.

Q: How do you deal with outbursts/inappropriate behavior?

Discussion began on emotional responses to situations, which are inappropriate or disrespectful. It was pointed out that gifted kids can develop asynchronously. Sometimes frustration can be released in an emotional response when ability to understand does not match physical or emotional development. Strategies for this revolve around realizing your child's currency and using this for either use in consequences or rewards. The pros and cons of using consequences versus rewards were discussed. No one seemed in favor of always using one over the other. It seems that using a combination of consequences and celebrating skill development/conquering difficult things – whether as a goal to work toward or as a surprise – seemed to be the most preferred way of changing behavior. With respect to asynchronous development, the ability to be reminded of what is age appropriate versus ability level is helpful. Belonging to parent groups and having discussions like this one remind you that you are not alone. And intensity will change as development evens out and skills are taught.

Another point raised during this discussion is the importance of remembering your long-term goals. Are you raising a champion swimmer or do you want your child to be able to safely swim in a pool? If your goal is the latter, than maybe it is not necessary to continue swim lessons if they are not working for your child right now. Behavior can be challenging when a child is either bored or in an environment that does not work with their intense nature (not strict enough, too strict, etc.). Discussed giving up too soon versus allowing a change when something isn't working and knowing the difference between the two.

Q: Do you yell at your kids and what do you do when you are affected by their behavior?

Parent guilt is real and we all want to do a good job, but there are times we all said we lose it. Although yelling at gifted kids (kids in general) all the time is not productive, you can turn your emotional outbursts into learning opportunities. We discussed the lessons learned when we reveal to our children what it means to be human and the strategies we can and do use to keep our cool in tough times. We also discussed strategies for teaching our children to recognize their emotions getting out of control (from whatever one of these intensities they are receiving too much stimulation from). One strategy suggested is using a moment when you use your cool to discuss with your child the physiological changes that happen in your body (heart rate rises, sweating, or whatever happens) as a warning that you are going to lose it. This can work with showing your child a tense/scary scene from a movie and talk about what happens to them. Then you can work through strategies to help recognize these physiological changes are happening and prevent an outburst.

Resources discussed:

Teresa Boatman known for good strategies and advice on many issues

Book – “Smart but Scattered” by Peg Dawson EdD and Richard Guare PhD (also available in a teen version)

Book – “Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students” by Christine Fonseca