

Peer Relationships/ Social Skills/Bullies



Is being gifted a contributing factor to problems with peer relationships and/or bullying? It's true that gifted children may have problems with peer relationships for many of the same reasons as all children; however, there are obvious areas that are exacerbated by giftedness both in and out of the classroom. As noted in the previous section, gifted children will have moments when they are unavoidably "out of step" with age mates. Parents can do a lot to help with social relationships if they are sensitive, aware, and become knowledgeable about the situation.

To begin, make a list of the concerns you have about your child's social skills. Then separate the list into two columns headed, "Which are within the realm of general social skills?" and "Which points have to do with being gifted?" Some concerns might fit into both columns.

Now, think about some of the general issues of peer relationships. For some children, making friends just doesn't come naturally. Sometimes, within the group at hand, there really isn't anyone who shares the same interests, style, level of knowledge, or sensibilities. Also, children can, without even being aware, commit some of the faux pas of good peer relationships. However, being able to fit in with others is important. And, no matter how brilliant children are, they won't learn how to be in successful peer relationships unless they have safe opportunities to hone their skills. For this reason, it is important for parents to make sure their child is able to spend time with like-minded peers on a regular basis. If it's not possible within the school setting, then look beyond the school walls for "interest peers." Differences in age melt can away when like-minded people share a passion.

Because gifted children are often more sensitive and emotionally aware than other children, they can easily become hurt by unkind comments and/or rejection by others, whether or not they are target. Dr. Thomas Hébert points out that using carefully selected books can be especially useful with gifted boys because it allows them to use their intellectual strength to ease emotional worries or social problems they work to keep disguised from classmates.

Included in points about "How Not to Make Friends" are a number of bullets that may be ascribed to gifted children, who are already set apart from regular learners by their pace and abilities:

- being bossy
- telling others how to play
- telling others they are doing things wrong
- being too intense or serious most of the time
- talking about themselves a lot
- being negative, using ridicule or sarcasm
- bragging

Is your child on the giving or receiving end, or both? It takes a sensitive, careful, and well-informed observer to sort through the dynamics of peer relationship problems. Reading social cues is more an art than a science, which makes it difficult to explain in terms that can be clearly understood by a child who really doesn't understand. It is a real challenge to clearly illustrate when it is okay to be different and when it is best to melt into a group.

Bullies and bullying is currently a big topic in the news. If your child is involved in this type of emotional and volatile situation, you must quickly move to find out the circumstances. If your child is the victim, the situation requires your full attention. In addition, it is important to take immediate action for change within the school environment. Supportive and collegial schools that provide appropriate and exciting learning challenges for their students do not tolerate bullying behaviors.

Dr. Temple Grandin writes that, as an autistic person her social relationships have been learned solely by her intellect and the development of visualization skills. "All my thoughts are in pictures, like videotapes in my imagination. When I encounter a new social situation I can scan my data banks for a similar situation that I can use as a model to guide me in the new situation. My data banks in social skills are also filled with news articles about diplomatic relationships between different countries and an archive of previous experiences. I use these scenarios to guide me in different situations. I then run videotapes in my imagination of all the possible ways to predict how the other person might act. It is all done using my visual mind. I have great difficulty with new social situations if I cannot recall a similar situation to use as a guide."

More Information

"The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide: For Ages 10 & Under" is based on surveys of hundreds of gifted children. There are answers to questions about topics such as how to cope with teasing, and how to make and keep friends.

Parenting for High Potential's "Parenting Column " (Sept. 2005)

The articles, " 'Play Partner' or 'Sure Shelter': What gifted children look for in friendship" by Miraca Gross describes findings from a study about the stages and expectations of friendship in children of average intellectual ability, moderately gifted children, and highly gifted children.

The article, "Tips for parents: Teasing, bullying and the role of friendships" by Fred Frankel gives tips to help parents work with their children when they are being teased and bullied.

Dr. Temple Grandin's complete article, "Social Problems: Understanding Emotions and Developing Talents".

The article, "Introversion: The Often Forgotten Factor Impacting the Gifted" discussed that is not uncommon for gifted people to show introspection, reflection, deep sensitivity, moral development, along with academic achievement, qualities which correlate with introversion. According to Linda Silverman at the Gifted Development Center, the percentage of introverts appears to increase with IQ.