



Tips for parents of intense children

Sharon Lind

Reprinted with permission from the Davidson Institute for Talent Development. <http://www.ditd.org>

Living with emotionally intense children and partners can be turbulent, exciting, challenging, and joyful. Emotionally intense individuals are often accused of “overreacting.” Their compassion and concern for others, their focus on relationships, as well as the intensity of their feelings may interfere with every day tasks. It is often quite difficult and demanding to work and live with intense individuals. Those who are not so, find the behaviors unexplainable, frequently incomprehensible, and often bizarre. Intense people living with other intense people often have more compassion and understanding for each other, but may feel conflicts when all the intense people are intense simultaneously. Finding strategies for helping children (and adults) deal with and take advantage of these innate and enduring characteristics may seem difficult. However, resources may be gathered from varied places: counseling, learning style, special education, and classroom management literature; parenting books; even popular business texts.

Below are some specific strategies for helping gifted children and adults to recognize, cope with, cherish and take advantage of their emotional intensity.

- Jointly discuss the positive outcomes of being emotionally intense—i.e. sensitive to others, caring, loyal, have strong feelings
- Cherish and celebrate diversity and individual differences
- Think about how these traits effect a person’s perception of the world — through a different, perhaps kaleidoscopic, lens
- Accept the individual as is — including “bizarre” descriptions and expressions of feelings and alternative ways of viewing and doing things
- Learn listening and responding skills to help the intense people deal with and respond to their feelings
- Develop a feeling vocabulary — including a continuum of feeling words
- Teach emotionally intense people to share their feelings with others when they are ready — verbally, through movement, art, journaling, music, whatever
- Teach emotionally intense people to be respectful of others’ feelings or seeming lack thereof
- Teach individuals to find ways to change their behaviors and responses, rather than just dwell on personal failures
- Share that intense feelings, depression, are OK
- Teach individuals to anticipate physical and emotional responses and prepare for them
- Consider attachments to people, places, things, when a change is about to occur
- Help individuals to understand how their intense emotions may adversely affect others.
- Encouraging journaling to express intense feelings
- Find physical outlets for emotional energy

RESOURCES

- Cohen, C. (2000). *Raise your child’s social IQ: Stepping stones to people skills for kids*. Silverspring MD: Advantage books.
- Duke, M.P., Nowicki, S., Martin, E.A. (1996). *Teaching your child the language of social success*. Atlanta: Peachtree.
- Faber, A. and Mazlish, E.. (1999). *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk*. New York: Avon.
- Frankel, F. (1996). *Good friends are hard to find: Help your child find, make and keep friends*. Los Angeles: Perspective Publishing.
- Halsted, J. (2002). *Some of my best friends are books, second edition: Guiding gifted readers from preschool to high school*. Scottsdale: Great Potential Press.
- Kurcinka, M.S. (1992). *Raising your spirited child*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Perennial.
- Little, J. (1990). *Hey world here I am*. New York: Harper.
- Watts, J. (1989). *In search of perspective*. Scottsdale: Great Potential Press.