The Young Gifted Child: a Guide for Families

Ohio | Department of Education

Office of Early Learning and School Readiness
Office for Exceptional Children

What is giftedness?

Characteristics of young gifted children can include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Advanced use of words and language;
- ✓ Early reading skills;
- ✓ Keen observation and curiosity;
- ✓ Unusual ability to remember information;
- ✓ Periods of intense concentration;
- ✓ Talent in the arts;
- ✓ Sticking with a task longer than other children the same age;
- ✓ Understanding concepts usually grasped at an older age;
- ✓ Seeing relationships between information and concepts better than children the same age; and
- ✓ Thinking beyond the obvious.

A child's physical, social, emotional and language development happens in steps or stages. Children usually progress through these stages in their own unique timeframe, but it is common for young gifted children to be developmentally advanced in some areas and typical in others. For example, a gifted preschool child may be able to read independently but need help tying shoelaces.

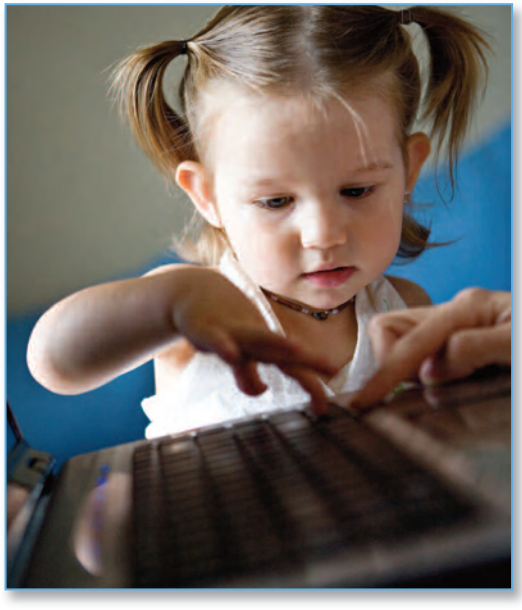
As a result, families can find it challenging to meet the educational needs of their young gifted children. Parents can benefit from working with early childhood teachers to recognize and meet the physical, social and emotional needs of their young gifted children while nurturing their children's intellectual talents.

An appropriate early childhood setting is one that offers children choices, open-ended experiences and opportunities to explore topics of special interest to them – particularly with intellectually similar friends.

Is my preschooler gifted?

Parents are often the first to observe behaviors described below that may indicate giftedness in a young child:

- ✓ Understands the meanings and use of words better than other children her age;
- ✓ Is curious about many things and asks questions often;
- ✓ Is very good at working puzzles or solving problems;
- ✓ Has a great sense of humor and understands jokes more than other children his age;
- ✓ Has a good memory and remembers details of conversations or stories;
- ✓ Is interested in difficult concepts such as time and space;
- ✓ Has an active imagination that may include imaginary friends;
- ✓ Concentrates on certain activities much longer than other children her age;
- ✓ Gets his feelings hurt easily;
- ✓ Reads or figures out math-related problems at an early age; or
- ✓ Shows talent in music, art or drama.



How can I develop my child's gifts and talents?

Parents play an especially important role in developing the special capabilities of a young gifted child. To be effective, parents should:

- ✓ Promote their child's growing need for independence;
- ✓ Set clear limits and guidelines;
- ✓ Communicate clearly and with enthusiasm;
- ✓ Expand vocabulary by using new words;
- ✓ Provide a variety of learning materials, especially books;
- ✓ Help develop special skills;
- ✓ Find playmates who have similar interests (young gifted children sometimes enjoy the company of older children);
- ✓ Promote creativity and encourage the child to try new things that help him value learning and creativity; and
- ✓ Read to, and engage in, creative hobbies with the child.

How do I address my child's social-emotional needs?

Because of their emotional intensity, it is not unusual for young gifted children to achieve academically in preschool, yet be judged "not ready" emotionally or socially to enter kindergarten. When a child's social and emotional needs are understood and met, she will develop a positive self-image and the coping skills necessary for meeting life's challenges. Some common social-emotional characteristics of young gifted children include:

- ✓ Intensity;
- ✓ Perfectionism;
- ✓ Persistence and prolonged concentration;
- ✓ Procrastination;
- ✓ Curiosity;
- ✓ Complexity;
- ✓ Willingness to take risks;
- ✓ Advanced imagination; and
- ✓ Frustration, moodiness and, in a minority of children, depression.

What should I consider when choosing a school?

When choosing a preschool or kindergarten, select a program that:

- ✓ Adjusts teaching methods and curriculum to the needs of gifted and talented children;
- ✓ Involves children in creative-thinking activities;
- ✓ Provides a variety of materials to explore, examine or investigate;
- ✓ Encourages children to speak, question, discuss and be actively involved in learning;
- ✓ Helps children pursue their interests and talents (Smutny, 1999); and
- ✓ Encourages parents to be involved.

Is early entrance the best option?

Parents have the option of enrolling a child in kindergarten before the age recommended by the school district. They should consider early entrance if their child demonstrates behaviors described in this brochure. All Ohio school districts are required to have a policy for "accelerating" or advancing academically gifted children, and such policies include the option of kindergarten early entrance. These policies indicate that school districts:

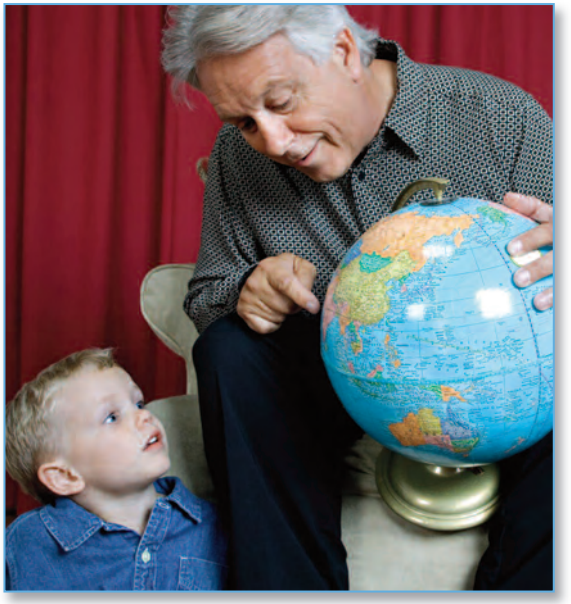
- ✓ Must screen a child for early entrance at a parent's request, if the child is 5 years old before January 1;
- ✓ May screen children for early entrance if they are not 5 years old before January 1.

To learn more about your district's early kindergarten entrance policy, contact the district's gifted coordinator or e-mail an Ohio Department of Education consultant at gifted@ode.state.oh.us.

What are some additional resources?

- ✓ National Association for Gifted Children (www.nagc.org)
- ✓ Ohio Association for Gifted Children (www.oagc.com)
- ✓ Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (www.sengifted.org)
- ✓ National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org)

For more information regarding the contents of this brochure, please contact the Ohio Department of Education at gifted@ode.state.oh.us. Additional brochures may be downloaded from education.ohio.gov, keyword search: *young gifted child*.



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