

December 1, 2011

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Thank you for participating in the December Brown Bag Lunch. I realize this is a busy time of year, so your willingness to come discuss GT issues for an hour is admirable. Thank you for caring enough about your child's education to attend.

Families have a significant influence on their children's achievement. Your involvement in their education and learning matters: from the day they are born throughout their school year (and beyond). It isn't just a "nice" thing to do, it is necessary. The achievement and affective ability divide between those students with involved families and those without is enormous.

Because evidence shows that students win when families, community, and schools all work together, I'm providing another "homework" assignment to encourage you to engage at a deeper level with your child in the coming month. If you missed last month's assignment called "What is Giftedness?" you may download it from the Northern Colorado Wikispace: <http://northerncoloradogtparents.wikispaces.com/>.

As you work through all of some of the activities in the attached packet with your child, please don't feel limited to the questions and suggestions here. Adjust, go deeper, go broader, and allow the discussion to lead you into new territories. Adjust these to fit the developmental level of your child. The reflection and discussion in these assignments this month focus on achievement issues that are often hallmarks of the gifted child: overachievement and perfectionism, underachievement, and motivation (or the lack of it). If these issues are close to your family, it is my hope that these activities will give you some practical strategies and open the door for continued conversation. If *you* have strategies, stories, ideas you'd be willing to share, log on to the Wikispace and do just that, or drop me an email/give me a call. I'd love to hear from you.

If new questions or concerns arise as a result of these activities, please know that I am available to answer questions and/or to connect you to other people and resources who can be of assistance.

Thank you for being the primary teacher in your child's education. What a powerful life-foundation you're providing your child!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Solt
Gifted and Talented Parent Liaison and Enrichment Coordinator
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Interactive Family Homework Assignment, December: The GT Kid and Overachievement & Perfectionism, Underachievement, and Motivation

A HEAVY BURDEN

“There is no heavier burden than a great potential.”

--Charlie Brown (via Charles Schultz)

Take a moment and individually **ponder** Charlie Brown’s comment above. Do you agree with this? Disagree? Why or why not? **Discuss** this as a family and write down five ideas on which you all agree about potential.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Many gifted students express feelings of pressure to produce and pressure to succeed. Pressure can come from teachers, from parents, from siblings or friends, or internally. This pressure can make them feel that their self-worth is tied to a letter grade or awards in school.

It is important to keep in mind that the goal of education is in the learning, the stretching, the quest. Lloyd Alexander said, “We learn more by looking for the answer and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.”

Talk about a time when you have not succeeded at something but still learned.

Take out the worksheet “Fill in the Blanks” from *When Gifted Kids Don’t Have All the Answers*, by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith (Free Spirit Publishing, 2002).

Read the sentence starters aloud with your child. Have your child complete each thought quickly with the first thoughts that come to mind.

Discuss together what grades mean. Discuss the different expectations people have for your child. Is any of this creating undue pressure or stress? Does your child try to meet these expectations or does he/she follow an internal guide for achievement? Is this internal guide realistic or creating problems?

THE FEAR OF FALLING

"I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can't accept not trying." –Michael Jordan

Legendary NBA superstar Michael Jordan is known for his achievements on the basketball court, but he is also famous for reminding people:

I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over in my life, and that's why I succeed.

Perhaps you've written a story that no one else appreciated. Maybe you created a joke that no one else thought was funny. Maybe a logic problem's solution eluded you. Maybe you were always picked last for the team.

Share some times in your life when you experienced "failure" or made mistakes. How did you feel? What did you do about it? Ask your child to share some "failures" that have bothered him/her.

Share a time in your life when you kept going even though you felt like giving up. What made the difference? What did you get out of trying again? Ask your child to share the same.

Go online and choose some of the "failure" videos you'd like to view at <http://sidsavara.com/personal-development/famous-failures-michael-jordan-abraham-lincoln-and-jk-rowling>.

Discuss why failure doesn't have to define us in negative ways. How can we take failure and do something with it?

Activity: Get out a deck of cards and build a structure. (No cards? Use toothpicks or popsicle sticks.) Remind each other not to be frustrated or afraid of failing. When the cards fall, analyze why and talk about how this problem solving will make your structure stronger. Work together to figure out the best way to assemble the cards for sturdiness and height. Discuss how this can be accomplished if you stick with it long enough. **Discuss:** How is this like and unlike success in school? Success in life?

Additional Resources:

"How to Help Your Child Deal with Failure" article: <http://yourwisdom.yahoo.com/your-family/help-child-deal-failure-article-acid.html>

WHEN THE LEG BONE'S NOT CONNECTED TO THE HIP BONE

“Even the best needles are not sharp at both ends.” –Chinese Proverb

An important developmental phenomenon that is often more prominent in gifted children is something called asynchronous development. Other children have “in sync” intellectual, physical, social and emotional development. It progresses at about the same rate as they age. Many gifted children have out of sync development. For instance, your five year-old might have the intellectual age of a seven year-old, but the emotional maturity of a four year-old. Typically, the higher a child’s IQ, the more out of sync her development.

Draw a picture of a see-saw together. **Talk about** what happens when someone sits on one end of a see-saw when there is no one on the other end. What happens when one person weighs significantly less than the other person? **Explain** to your child that researchers think that the greater your gifts in one area the stronger the deficit in another area, almost like the two sides are trying to maintain a parallel see-saw.

Because of this uneven development we sometimes forget to support our children according to their chronological ages. We must also remember that in highly developed areas, our child may need to seek out peers that are older. In addition, we have to be careful not to assume that a child will be good at everything. What may look like “underachievement” or lack of motivation may, in fact, be one area lagging behind in the child’s development. (Please see the excellent Tolan article in the Resource list below for more information.)

Brainstorm and Discuss: Looking at the see-saw picture, on one side brainstorm with your child all the areas in which they have particular strengths and gifts. On the other, brainstorm areas in which your child struggles or gets frustrated (you may be more aware of these struggles than your child, but allow him to voice what he feels). Assure your child that this is an expected thing. There will be strengths and weaknesses.

Resource: “Giftedness as Asynchronous Development” by Stephanie S. Tolan:

http://www.stephanietolan.com/gt_as_async.htm

“Ten Tips for Talking to Teachers” by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith:

http://www.uniquelygifted.org/talking_to_teachers.htm

DON'T TRY, TRY AGAIN

“They say that nobody is perfect. Then they tell you practice makes perfect. I wish they'd make up their minds.” –Wilt Chamberlain

Even very young kids are often familiar with the adage: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. But if you have a perfectionist in your house, you might at times be tempted to shout, please DON'T TRY AGAIN! Please LET IT BE!

Discuss the following questions:

What does it mean to be perfect?

Is it important to be perfect? Why or why not?

Watch: “Perfectionism vs. Excellence” on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67KigvuwnU>.

Discuss the following questions: What is the difference between perfectionism and excellence? Which is a better goal?

What are some problems with being a perfectionist?

Have you ever avoided doing something because you were worried it wouldn't be perfect?

Complete “Perfectionism vs. the Pursuit of Excellence” worksheet from *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers*, by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith (Free Spirit Publishing, 2002).

Watch: “Getting Good at Life” on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDy4JxD0c0U>.

Discuss:

What “baby steps” can you take now in your life to reach your goals?

Can you name a time when it was difficult to take baby steps because you couldn't wait to achieve something big?

Sometimes it helps to look at the worst thing that can happen to realize how minor a potential mistake is. Look at the thing that was difficult to start because you were afraid of failing. What is the worst thing that could have happened if you had failed? Would that have been devastating? Discuss this together.

Resources:

What does perfectionism look like?

<http://teacher.ocps.net/deirdre.kelly/parents/subtopics/perfect/looklike.htm>

Perfectionism versus the pursuit of excellence

<http://gateresources.blogspot.com/2008/04/perfectionism-vs-pursuit-of-excellence.html>

REKINDLING THE SPARK

“People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing—that's why we recommend it daily.” –Zig Ziglar

Before you begin this section with your child, take some time to look at the National Association of Gifted Children's Middle Matters Newsletter from the summer of 2006. In particular, **read** the sections titled “Specific Explanations for Underachievement Amongst Gifted Children” and “Underachiever vs. Selective Consumer.” (If you'd like to read more on this topic, check out *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers*, by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith. The book is available from the district's GT office's Enrichment Resource Center.) Though this newsletter is designed for middle school teachers, the articles contain helpful information for parents with children struggling with motivation issues.

Together with your child, **share and discuss** times when:

- you have had difficulty “finding” your motivation.
- you have felt bored or wished for more challenge and found yourself ignoring work.
- you have felt rejected by peers or people in authority and didn't want to participate in an activity that included them or was directed by them.
- you have found the work in front of you overwhelming or hard to understand and didn't want to tackle it.

Discuss how these are some of the difficulties in achieving because of motivational road blocks. Are there others? Discuss.

What is the difference between underachievers and selective consumers, as described by Delisle and Galbraith in *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers*. The authors define a selective consumer as “a student very much in touch with both himself and the world of learning but unwilling to do much of his assigned work because he sees little purpose in doing so.” They explain that this is different than a true underachiever who is “a lost soul in the academic miasmas called school. She desperately wants to do better—and feel better—but is at a loss about how to begin (pp. 187-188).”

Interestingly, research has not been able to find a consistently defining cause of underachievement. However, strategies do exist for both underachievement and selective consumerism. Please contact your school's GT teacher or the District GT Office (Jennifer.solt@thompsonschoools.org or 613-5057) for resources if underachievement is an issue (or see the resource list below).

Resources:

“Underachiever vs. Selective Consumer” (plus other articles on Underachievement and Motivation):
http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/About_NAGC/Division_Pages/Middle_Matters_July_06.pdf

Battling Academic Boredom:

<http://www.brighthub.com/education/special/articles/48494.aspx>

Tips to Help Underachievers:

<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=20021019&slug=achievetips19>

Resources for check out from the Enrichment Resource Center: *Dreamers, Discoverers, & Dynamos: How to Help the Child Who Is Bright, Bored, and Having Problems in School*, by Lucy Jo Palladino

Breaking the Learning Barrier for Underachieving Students: Practical Teaching Strategies for Dramatic Results, by George D. Nelson

Motivating Underachievers: 172 Strategies for Success, by Carolyn Coil

How to Help Your Child with Homework: Every Caring Parent's Guide to Encouraging Good Study Habits and Ending the Homework Wars, by Marguerite C. Radenchich and Jeanne Shay Schumm

Genius Denied: How to Stop Wasting Our Brightest Young Minds, by Jan & Bob Davidson

Upcoming "Homework" Assignments:

January: Stress management

February: Relationships (peers and family) and bullying

March: Statistics and realities in gifted education

April: Advocating so no child is left behind

Email the following responses to me or mail them to: Thompson School District, ATTN: Jennifer Solt at LS/GT, 2890 N. Monroe, Loveland, CO 80538.

Dear Families,

Please provide some feedback and reactions to this assignment. Write YES or NO for each statement.

____1. As a family, we have a more thorough understanding of motivation and achievement issues in gifted education.

____2. We enjoyed completing the assignment together.

____3. This assignment engaged us in discussions that helped us gain new insights into one another and/or helped us formulate important questions or discussion points for one another.

____4. I would like to participate in another interactive family assignment.

Any other comments: _____

Thank you for your feedback and for participating in this family activity.

Perfectionism vs. the Pursuit of Excellence

There is a healthy alternative to perfectionism. It's called the Pursuit of Excellence. Here are three ways in which the two differ:

1. **Perfectionism** means thinking *less* of yourself because you earned a B+ instead of an A. **The Pursuit of Excellence** means thinking *more* of yourself for trying something new.

2. **Perfectionism** means being hard on yourself because you aren't equally talented in all sports. **The Pursuit of Excellence** means choosing some things you know you'll be good at—and others you know will be good for you or just plain fun.

3. **Perfectionism** means beating yourself up because you lost the student council election. **The Pursuit of Excellence** means congratulating yourself because you were nominated, and deciding to run again next year—if that's what you want.

How can you become a Pursuer of Excellence? By:

- determining the sources of your perfectionism
- reassessing your feelings about failure and success
- standing your ground against people who pressure you to be perfect
- learning ways to be easier on yourself so you're free to take risks and try new things

What other ideas do you have for pursuing excellence? For avoiding the perfectionism trap?

Fill in the Blanks

Name: _____

When I get an A . . . _____

When I don't get an A . . . _____

When I bring my report card home . . . _____

If I forget to do my homework . . . _____

My parents expect me to . . . _____

Most of my teachers expect me to . . . _____

Most of my friends expect me to . . . _____

No one expects me to . . . _____

From *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers: How to Meet Their Social and Emotional Needs* by Jim Delisle, Ph.D., and Judy Galbraith, M.A., copyright © 2002. Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN; 800/735-7323; www.freespirit.com. This page may be photocopied for individual, classroom, or small group work only.