

February 1, 2012

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Thank you for participating in the February Brown Bag Lunch. As I've talked with various gifted kids, I've been struck by how much relationships—with parents, with teachers, with peers, with siblings, with strangers—are the center of their concerns and conversations. Although relationships are important to all of us, the sensitivities of gifted kids may raise this into a new realm. What I've gleaned from this is that I need to focus more on this as I work to support my own children. I look forward to learning about your ideas and experiences in this area.

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. This February assignment is not as in depth as some of the others, as our week between lunches still has me "munching" on the stress motif. Please feel free to add your own strategies, stories, ideas, and activities by emailing me or by logging on to the Wiki-space (<http://northerncoloradogtparents.wikispaces.com/>) and posting your thoughts. I'd love to hear from you!

As you work through all or 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 (they are written with a middle school child's development in mind).

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 that can be of assistance.

Finally, if you missed the first three family engagement assignments, you may download them from the Northern Colorado Wiki-space: <http://northerncoloradogtparents.wikispaces.com/>.

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
Thompson School District
(970) 613-5057
jennifer.solt@thompsonschoools.org

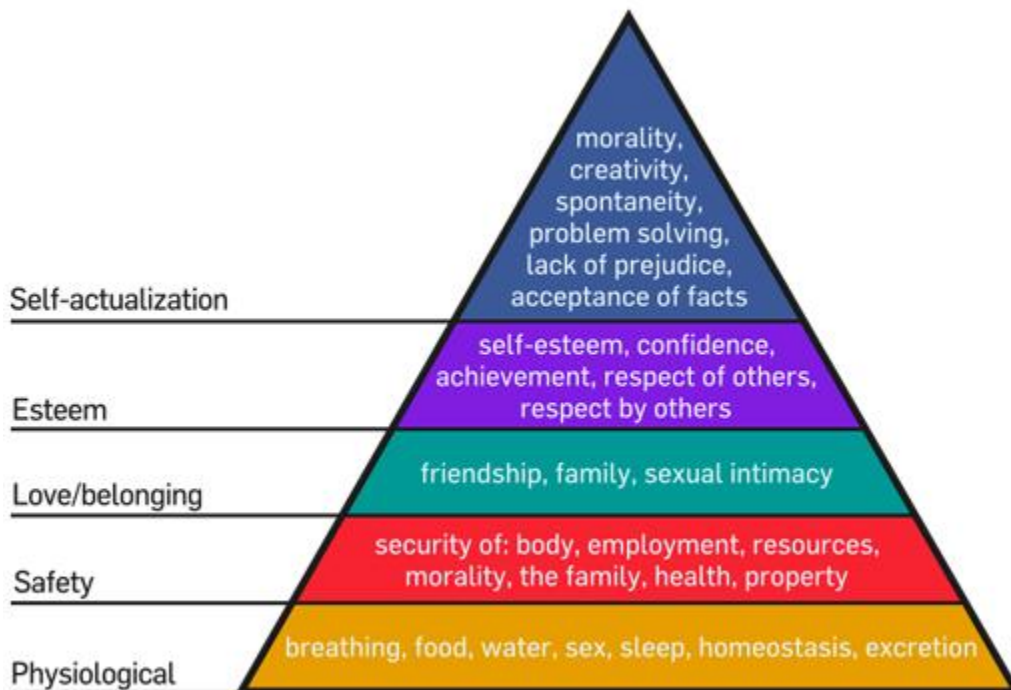
Interactive Family Homework Assignment, February: The GT Kid and Relationships

A Useful Hierarchy

If you have ever taken a basic psychology course, you probably remember Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (pictured below). The idea behind the theory is that humans must have primary, basic needs met before they can move onto higher order needs. If you haven't seen a representation of the needs, usually portrayed in pyramid form, it is worth examining it again before we begin an investigation of the relationships for gifted kids.

Notice that creativity, problem solving, and other intellectual activities are at the top of the pyramid—in other words, these activities, according to Maslow, can only be accomplished if all of the other needs below the "Self-Actualization" need are met.

The issue of how a child relates to the people in his/her world make up both of the two layers below self-actualization, yet most of our focus with gifted kids is firmly planted in the uppermost layer.



Ask your child to complete the following true/false questions with you. **Discuss** why you think each is true or false.

1. If I skip breakfast and I'm very hungry, it does not distract me from reading a text book at school. True False
2. If I begin choking and am having trouble getting air, I suddenly feel very concerned about the science test I have later in the week. True False

3. If I have a bad cold and stayed up all night coughing and am very tired and worn out the next day, I might be grouchy to other people and not behave in the most respectful way. True False
4. If my family lost their home and we didn't have a place to live, I would be more concerned about where we'd sleep each night than whether or not I understood all of my schoolwork. True False
5. Someone is threatening to hurt me after school. I feel really confident and good about myself. True False
6. I have accomplished a lot in my life. I enjoy the things I do and find success often. This makes me confident and allows me to try new things and to be creative. True False
7. My family is in turmoil. Every day there is a lot of arguing and fighting going on. When things are at their loudest, this is the best time for me to work on my math problems. True False
8. I feel good about myself even when my friends are mad at me. True False

Discuss how the layers of need are impacting the answers to these questions. **Ask** your child: Can you think of a time you were asked to do something on the top layers before your needs at one of the lower levels had been met? What was that experience like?

Share some of your own examples to the above questions with your child.

Set Apart From the Crowd

Let's start this discussion with some ideas on gifted socialization described in *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers*, by Jim Delisle and Judy Galbraith:

More than 70 years ago, psychologist Leta Stetter Hollingworth wrote that 'isolation is the refuge of genius, not its goal.' What she meant then remains true today; gifted students don't seek to separate themselves socially from classmates, but sometimes it does happen. Usually it's for one or more of the following reasons:

- Gifted children, from a young age, often prefer complicated, rule-based games that others their age don't understand or care about.
- Gifted children are often concerned with world problems and other 'big issues' that may not interest other kids their age.
- Gifted children's advanced vocabularies inadvertently isolate them from age peers who don't comprehend their words.
- Gifted children seek out others whose minds operate at the same fast pace as their own. Finding few, they may gravitate toward older children or adults, making them appear 'snobby' to their classmates.
- Gifted children who feel distanced from their age peers may resort to solitary play or a world of video-game playmates, making them even less available for social interaction.

Would you add anything to this list? Would your child?

After you consider your child's social abilities and inabilities, consider whether they are impacted by any of the above. If you suspect there is a relationship between the two, or that your child has compensated for his/her isolation by modifying his/her interests in order to go with the crowd, **talk with your child** about this. Talk about some positive ways to increase his/her social aptitude, and figure out together if it is always important. **Ask:**

When is it okay to be different?

When is it okay to be on your own?

What's the difference between being alone and being lonely? Can you give examples from your own life of both?

How important is it to be like everyone else? When is this easy/no big deal? When is this hard?

Share a time that you felt in the minority, lonely, or left out.

Picture books provide great discussion starters, even for older kids. Ask a librarian for suggestions on books about social skills, loneliness, or being different. The Hoagies Gifted Page—under social stuff—(<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/parents.htm>) is a good source for book ideas. Once you've found a few books, **read** them together. Talk back to them. Create alternative solutions to the problem presented. **Make** your own picture book on the topic at www.storybird.com. Warning: this website is addictive.

Sometimes gifted kids inadvertently turn potential non-gifted friends away because of their attitudes about being gifted (of course, as parents, we are sometimes guilty of the same thing).

Discuss: What does it mean to be gifted (go back to the November Interactive Assignment available on the Northern Colorado GT Wiki-space for more discussion on this)? Does it mean that you are *better at* doing some things or does it mean you are *better than* others?

It is important for gifted kids to understand that their brains work *differently* than others' brains. Gifted kids tend to process quickly and conceptualize more readily. However, as discussed in previous Interactive Assignments, gifted learning is often seen as a teeter-totter. A great strength and gift in one area may be counter-balanced with a weakness or deficit in another. We all have the opportunity to learn and grow from interactions with other people. None of us is good at everything.

Basics in Nurturing the Social Child

Parents can play a role in their children's social growth. In the book *Raise Your Child's Social IQ*, by Cathi Cohen, it is suggested that parents do four primary things:

1. Focus on one or two friendships for your child. Find ways to nurture a limited number of relationships.
2. Avoid a full schedule of structured activities in favor of downtime and free play (such as a kid-led play date).
3. Get involved with neighborhood, community, and religious social groups as a family.
4. Before a planned social interaction, role play with your child, ask questions to review some ideas for stretching socially, and review important behavior expectations.

In *Good Friends Are Hard to Find*, by Fred Frankel, it is suggested that parents host play dates (for older kids, read this as allowing friends to hang out at your home) in order to observe and provide gentle guidance for your child in a safe and comfortable environment for him/her. Remember that a single friend at a time should be the focus.

However, it is also important to be realistic in our expectations of our children. In *Problem Child or Quirky Kid?*, authors Rita Smmers-Flanagan and John Sommers-Flanagan give several examples of unrealistic expectations. They state, "For the most part, social skill development in children is so uneven and unpredictable until nearly puberty that it's best not to get too disturbed about your child's social miscues. If your expectations are too high, you'll just end up feeling frustrated, worried, and possibly angry about your child's social immaturity."

Bully Defense

"Bullies are driven by jealousy and envy so it's hardly surprising that gifted children are targeted. Occasionally, exceptionally able children are targeted and bullied by a less-than-gifted teacher. Sometimes this is referred to as the poppy head syndrome, where one especially beautiful flower that stands above the rest has to be cut down to the level of the others." –Bully OnLine (<http://www.bullyoffline.org/schoolbully/gifted.htm>)

If your child experiences bullying, don't ignore it. Take the time to listen to your child's experiences, reassure him/her of his rights, and explain that bullying is never okay. Commit to providing support and getting other adults involved to resolve the situation.

In the meantime, take a few minutes to review the following list together. Do you agree/disagree with these ideas? Would they work in the circumstances you've faced?

101 Great Comebacks: http://www.bullystoppers.com/101_great_comeback_lines.html

All book resources listed in these activities are available for check-out from the Thompson School District Gifted and Talented Enrichment Resource Center. Call Jennifer at 970-613-5057 to have a book sent to your child's school for your pick up or to make an appointment to come browse.