



SOCIO-EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Developed by
Donna Rae Clasen

Gifted and talented young people have the same developmental socio-emotional needs as other youth, but they may experience them on a different timeline than their same-age peers and with different manifestations. Giftedness itself will present special needs, and the more extreme the gift, the more extreme the need to be supported. In many instances it is only after socio-emotional needs are met that talent development will flourish. Gifted students may need socio-emotional support in a number of areas, including but not limited to the following:

- awareness and understanding of self
- belonging/acceptance by peers
- acceptance and valuing of gifts and talents
- perfectionism
- acceptance and understanding of others
- interpersonal skills
- dealing with mixed messages regarding giftedness
- underachievement & motivation

Gifted students may receive mixed messages regarding their special abilities; when messages are negative, students begin to feel uncomfortable with whom they are and what they can do. Some hide their gifts; others may withdraw into talent areas, stunting the development of other basic needs such as friendship or group belonging. Whatever the questions and conflicts and whenever they arise, they will evolve around the essence of the individual identity.

Identity. Gifted students of any age confronting the “Who Am I?” question and perhaps wavering between acceptance of gift versus acceptance by others need support. Wondering about the positives and negatives of being “different” is natural. Students are likely to reflect upon how their gifts and talents are viewed and valued by peers, teachers, and community. Is it good to be gifted? Is the pursuit of excellence valued? Is their particular gift valued? The perception that gifted and talented students have of how others view their gift may help determine how they regard the ability as well as the likelihood of fulfillment of potential.

Like all young people, students with gifts and talents seek harmony and balance in their lives and will need adult support and guidance in finding it. Gifted and talented students who have received strong reinforcement from significant others are less likely to question self and gift, but many will wonder about the value of special abilities, especially in adolescence when belonging and acceptance are critical issues and special ability may be perceived as alienating them from peers. It is at this time that a decision may be made to hide or diminish the strength of an ability. Gifted students may also hide or deny their talents when there are family or cultural conflicts associated with "giftedness." Twice-exceptional students may reject special abilities if their concept of self is limited by their disability. Rejection of a gift or talent means rejection of part of self, perhaps leading to a fragmented or incomplete identity forever. All students must confront multiple facets in determining their identity, but gifted students must also consider the interaction of self and society, with their gifts and talents.

What to Do. Students need a safe environment where they can explore what it means to be gifted. This may mean counseling, group discussions, biblio-therapy (using literature to see their issues in the lives of others), appropriate internet interactions in areas of expertise, teacher/peer reinforcement of their pursuit of excellence, out-of-school opportunities, or mentoring. Gifted and talented young people also need opportunities to interact with others who have similar interests and abilities. Out-of-school opportunities can play a major role here: enrichment programs, university offerings, mentoring, community activities such as theater, music, or art.