



Parenting Gifted and Talented Kids

There are a number of ways that parents can be involved in the academic lives of their children.

These may include providing supplemental learning resources, overseeing homework, attending school-related events, and volunteering in the classroom.

But what about then parents of kids who are gifted and talented? Can the role of parents and parenting styles help to promote or impede motivation and development in these children?

A team of US researchers set out to ascertain if parents of children with gifts and talents face additional challenges that are less commonly faced by parents of average-ability learners whose needs are more readily met in the school

setting. Included in the broad category of 'gifted and talented' were students formally identified as such in the school setting as well as those who showed evidence of high potential in one or more specific academic or non-academic areas relative to other children of similar age and experience.

As a student's level of academic motivation is shaped by both personal characteristics (values, attitudes, and self-perceptions) and social environmental factors (parents, teachers, and classroom climate), researchers identified the concerns of parents of talented and gifted kids as to how to simultaneously acknowledge that their child does possess higher levels of ability than other children, while also stressing the importance of effort in learning.

Researchers also sought to ascertain what cultivates a child's talent without over-managing his or her development and how to set appropriate goals for a gifted child while maintaining a flexible approach that is responsive to the child's individual differences.

KEY FINDINGS

- Parents of students with gifts and talents often are highly motivated and successful themselves, and also may be likely to believe that they know what is best for their child.
- Mothers of gifted and talented children were more likely to use an authoritarian style of parenting when their children were resistant to doing homework or when they did not complete assignments in accordance with the mothers' preferred timeline.
- Authoritarian parents are highly involved in the academic lives of their children and often set achievement goals that may not align with the preferred goals of their child.
- The manner in which parents view the abilities of their gifted and talented children can influence the parenting practices they implement. Fixed views of extraordinary abilities can lead to extreme parenting practices.
- When learners have strong feelings of competence, they are more likely to be active in the learning process and better able to adapt to changing and challenging environments.
- Parents who are able to acknowledge and accept their child's point of view toward educational experiences can build a learning environment that supports relatedness.
- Gifted and talented children should be rewarded for effort (not grades), persistence, choosing challenging tasks, self-initiation, academic risk-taking, improvement, learning mastery, and deep levels of processing.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ **Run a quick self-check on your parenting style.** Are you too authoritarian when it comes to the home learning environment?
- ✓ **Create an open line of communication.** Foster self-initiated behaviour (even when they make mistakes) in areas of learning interests and disinterests.
- ✓ Talk to your child about the value of certain subjects **they may not view as interesting**

and help identify how these subjects fit into their other learning goals.

- ✓ **Accept the negative emotions** that children will naturally experience during uninteresting activities rather than dismissing them.
- ✓ **Provide your child with clear boundaries and expectations** about learning in the home environment.
- ✓ **Allow your child** a voice in setting rules and expectations for learning. Make suggestions, give hints, provide resources when they're stuck with homework, give choices within an agreed structure.
- ✓ **Reinforce talent development instead of focusing on the 'natural gifts'.** This is one strategy to help foster greater feelings of competence.
- ✓ **Rewards provide kids with information about what is deemed important in learning environments.** Recognise the importance of both the process and products (grades) of learning and reward both appropriately.

Source: Carn, et al., Parents' Role in the Academic Motivation of Students with Gifts and Talents, Psychology in the Schools, Vo. 49(7), 2012.

TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
FOUNDER, YOU CAN DO IT! EDUCATION

Regardless of a child's abilities, the degree to which a family creates an atmosphere where children are free to develop a unique identity and have their own individual thoughts and express them freely, means kids are more likely to be very creative and competent in their school work. Allowing meaningful learning choices, providing resources and reducing achievement pressure, are all ways we as parents can support learning autonomy at home. Gifted and talented children should be given opportunities to self-direct their learning experiences at home.