

**Gifted Adults**

Do you stop being gifted after High School?

A discussion based on the book Gifted Grownups by Marylou Kelly Streznewski and a lifetime of being gifted

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**3 Types of Gifted**

- Strivers= High testers and teacher pleasers. Like structure (I.Q. 115-130)
- Superstars= “Termanites” Great at everything. Stereo-typical Gifted (I.Q. 130+)
- Independents= Creative, “Intellectual”, only interested in their own pursuits. Can become inventors, “serial employees” or dropouts (I.Q. 115+)

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**Gifted Behaviors**

- Speed
- Curiosity and Energy
- Sensitivity
- Sophisticated Humor
- Being Different

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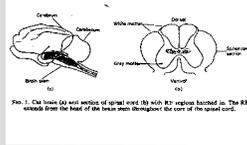
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## How Gifted Brains Work

- Perception based on discontinuities
- Stimulation occurs when there's a difference between what we know and what we've been exposed to
- No "differences", no stimulation, no Learning
- Gifted Brains have more dendrite spines allowing them to work faster and with more complexity
- The Reticular Formation is part of the Brain that focuses attention. It requires minimum of stimulation to function
- Lack of high levels of stimulation can cause physical and psychological damage
- Healthy Brain functions are encouraged by Pleasure and Challenge




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Masking Giftedness: By the age of 6, gifted people have started to decide how much of themselves they will show to the world and how much they will hide behind a "mask"



- Types of Masks
- Conforming
- Being Cute
- Manipulating
- Being Helpful
- Being Nasty
- The Druggie
- Playing Dumb
- Refusing to Mask

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**Gifted as Parents:** A common problem in families with gifted kids is that the parents are gifted but don't know it. Making this worse is the fact that gifted "life cycles" tend to be Rhythmic rather than Linear

- Gifted Fathers
- Serial Employment, High needs for play, Over-excitability, effect gifted males by causing conflict between "family responsibilities" and personal needs. These conflicts impact male children especially



- Gifted Mothers
- Balancing societal expectations and personal needs is major conflict for gifted women. If needs aren't met, mothers often over-control children, living through them rather than dealing with their own issues

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### What can Gifted Parents do?

- The Best Thing Gifted Parents Can Do
- Provide stimulation (verbal and non-verbal)
- Serve as positive role model on meeting your own gifted needs in an often hostile world
- Understand that balance between emotional and intellectual needs must be maintained even if it's unpleasant for Parents or Child
- What Gifted Parents Can't do
- Try to slow down or stifle Childs need for stimulation and expression
- Pull away or disapprove of the child as a person

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### What's Wrong with School?

- Research shows 3 stages in the interaction of the gifted with the educational system
  - Confusion= In K-2 Gifted discovers that their way of doing things is not the way the majority works and the majority runs the show
  - Knowing you're different= Gifted and non-gifted agree that giftedness begins to make a difference for them in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade
    - Frustration Sets In= Active Disillusionment with school system starts to set in by Middle School
    - Rebellion or Withdrawal= In Middle School frustration leads many gifted to rebel against the system and demand that their needs be met or they disengage and "turn off" to their intellect. (This is highest dropout rate for people from TAG programs)

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### Adult Mind/Adolescent Body

- By High School gifted have decided how they will deal with their giftedness and what coping skills they will employ to deal with the world
  - Nonconformity
  - Easy Out
  - Playing Over Your Head
  - Hitting the Brick Wall
- 11<sup>th</sup> grade seems to be the critical time since it is here that decisions are usually made. Having a trusted Gifted advisor is extremely important

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## Making School Better

- Train teachers to understand needs of Gifted for stimulation and independence.
- Give students as much control over curriculum as possible
- Teach Parents to
  - Pay attention to what their kids are saying about school. Especially “I’m not learning anything”
  - Encourage but don’t demand good grades. Instead, be active in asking what your child is learning in class
  - Become knowledgeable about the educational philosophy of your district and your child’s teachers
  - Learn the 4 “P’s” of Parent Advocacy
    - Be Prepared
    - Be Polite
    - Be Persistently Pushy

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## The Turbulent 20’s

- Gifted people take twice as long to become comfortable with themselves as adults (12 years rather than 6)
- Gifted people have 2 types of reaction to environmental surroundings
  - Very narrow focus with stimulation needed only periodically
  - Very broad focus with stimulation needed constantly
- 3 tasks needed to get through transition to adulthood
  - Recognize their giftedness and value it for themselves
  - Give themselves permission to meet their needs regardless of outside pressures
  - Avoid becoming so caught up in the hunt for new things that doors are shut on your options

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## College Life

Picking a College is critical because they can often have the same problems as High School

- Of critical importance
  - Meeting Professors
  - Staying on Campus
  - Broad range of courses, late major selection, and ability to create own major




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### The Serial Employee

The key to a successful worklife for Gifted is finding the kind of work (not job) one needs to do and then finding situations in a job where it can be done



- 3 Keys to Being Gifted and Happy on the job
  - Finding a day-to-day level of stimulation which provides challenge and newness
  - Ability to move to new areas of work when challenge of present area wares off
  - Ability to create own work environment

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### Gifted in the Workplace: Problems and Solutions

- The major problem at work for gifted people is desire to “go beyond” their “place”
- This threatens, embarrasses, and angers bosses and co-workers
- Leads to “dumping” or “dead-ending”
- Research says the best way to use a Gifted worker is
  - Allow them to contribute to any task being asked of them
  - Allow them to “job hop” within the organization
  - Allow “flex time” and “telecommuting”

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### The Dark Side of Giftedness

#### Gifted Criminals

- Estimates place as much as 20% of prison population as gifted (3-5% of population)
- Reasons Non-Conformists choose crime
  - “Fighting against the system”
  - “Thrill of the hunt”
- How to keep the gifted nonconformist from becoming criminal
  - Make sure world view is not distorted
  - Provide positive stimulations
  - Instill realistic understanding of consequences

How to rehabilitate a gifted criminal

- Strong support system of other gifted
- Proper positive stimulation
- Finding meaningful work

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## Finding Friends

- Gifted often struggle with finding meaningful relationships. This struggle is caused by their intense processing differences
- Gifted struggle to connect with their average peers because
  - Hard to explain the difference between how they think and everyone else
  - Dealing with intense sensory/thought input requires “down time” to process which is misinterpreted as withdrawal

Gifted often see “alone time” as positive.

Biggest emotional problem is finding someone who thinks like them and has the same passions

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## Finding Friends 2

- For gifted, relationships hold perils on both sides – They often end them abruptly when the other person proves not to be “interesting” enough or they are dumped as being to “scary” by others
- By adulthood gifted realize they won’t find enough fellow gifted to meet all their needs, so they develop strategies to emotionally survive
  - Develop small, tight group of gifted friends
  - Create different groups of friends for various activities
  - Withdraw emotionally and only maintain “acquaintances”



Cross-generational friendships are one way many gifted meet their emotional/intellectual needs

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## Dating and Marriage



- Often Gifted start dating “late” (18-21) and struggle to find a relationship with a real peer
- Gifted women especially seem to “settle” for non-gifted partners (divorce rate is 2-3 times higher than for non-gifted women)
- The key for a happy marriage for gifted is a partner that wants to help the person grow (especially intellectually and creatively) and is ok with need for “alone-time”
- Five steps to finding true friends and partners
  - Create a support group
  - Understand that most people won’t get your needs and be ok with that
  - Find places and activities that attract other gifted people
  - Contact “Mensa”, a national organization for gifted adults, to get a list of members in your area
  - Be comfortable with yourself

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### Gifted Senior Citizens

- The need for curiosity, stimulation and accomplishment does not die down as gifted age
- Gifted Seniors often seem to start living a 2<sup>nd</sup> life, doing the things they couldn't do before
- "Superstars", because of their fame and success, find this easiest to do
- Gifted Seniors often struggle with non-gifted peers who have no interest in "Big Questions" or "Risk Taking"
- For Many Senior Gifted, the solution to this problem is cross-generational friendships

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### How to be Happy as a Gifted Senior

Gifted Seniors say that knowing and believing in your own special abilities is the key to living a happy senior life

- What to do...
  - Avoid traditional Senior Living Centers, these rarely provide the opportunities Gifted Seniors need
  - Stay as independent as possible
  - Maintain strong family ties
  - Mine Community and Social Agencies for service possibilities
  - Develop Mentorship's
  - Refuse to accept any limitations
  - Use Elder Hostel's to make travel more interesting and affordable




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### And to Close...

- "I feel very strongly that the things we are giving children should be those which increase their Humanity, not their salary." Bertrand Russell
- "Especially must we learn to transcend our foolish tendency to let our compassion for the weak generate hatred for the strong" Abraham Maslow

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