

Are you a gifted parent?



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Dr David Lewis studied the parents of children who were developing exceptionally well in all areas. He found that these parents have certain parental attitudes common. We have summarized some of his findings.



Gifted parents find their own way.

They have sufficient confidence in themselves not to have to fall back blindly on the methods and responses learned from their own parents. They are open to all kinds of ideas - whether ancient or modern. They don't regard any method, except extreme harshness or total indifference, as good or bad in itself, but rather make their judgments based on the effects of the method on their own child. They understand: what helps one child may hinder another.



Rigid parents say, 'I *know* that my methods are right and I am not open to advice. I will raise my child in exactly the same way as I was raised. It didn't do me any harm. Good old days - best old ways. My parents didn't know about any of these modern things and I'm just fine.'



They are comfortable with diversity.

Gifted parents focus on developing their child's character and personality. As a result they believe that he will display the inner wisdom needed to formulate his own opinions and develop his own preferences. The child must enjoy, as early as possible and as often as possible, the widest possible access to different viewpoints. These parents expose their child to their interests and deeply-felt beliefs with passion and honesty, but not to the exclusion of all else and never in such a way that alternatives are held up as being unworthy of his attention or interest.



Prejudiced parents say, 'Many of the good feelings I have about myself are based on the fact that I was born into a superior culture. I am not ashamed to say that I have better taste in music and dress, that I am more refined and that my interests and hobbies have more meaning than those of many other people. It concerns me that my child won't develop a sense of pride if he doesn't realize that he is better than certain other kinds of people. Anyway, what can he possibly learn from them? What if he experiments with their ideas? That would humiliate me.'



They don't favour one child.

Gifted parents know that children are largely shaped by their parents' expectations, so they give each child his fair share of opportunities and encouragements. They refuse to believe that one child is more likely to succeed because he is better looking, of a certain sex or displaying special talents early on in life. Some are late-bloomers.



Short-sighted parents say, 'One of my children is more gifted and confident and better able to take advantage of special opportunities, so I encourage him more.'



They are comfortable with excellence.

Gifted parents are informed enough to know that children with fully developed mental abilities are not less stable than others but in most cases more emotionally balanced. Researchers have found them to be happier, more sociable, more restrained in their conduct and more aware in their judgments. Instead of being bored or 'nerdy', they are more likely to set the pace and lead the pack.



Anxious parents say, 'I'm not going to encourage my child to reveal talents and skills which the world may regard as exceptional. I want him to be normal! What if I create a monster? What if he doesn't fit in with other 'normal' people? What if he's bored in school?'



Gifted parents encourage independence.

They don't view a child as some kind of pet; amusing to the parents. Instead, he is encouraged to grow up and act as competently and intelligently as he can. They allow him to make choices appropriate to his age and they don't do things for him that he is able to do for himself. When he politely asks for something or voices his opinion, they don't view him as demanding or arrogant, but rather as assertive. He is a separate human being who has rights as an individual.



Insecure parents say, 'I don't want my child to be clever. I want him to be cute. I see myself as an exceptionally loving parent. Children shouldn't grow up too quickly. I need my child to continue needing me. Fact is, doing things for my child is my way of demonstrating my love for him, so the more independent he becomes of me, the less valued I feel.'



They don't rely on what they can buy.

Gifted parents know that an enriched environment provides a multitude of stimulating possibilities, but effective learning takes place by *doing*, not by merely owning educational toys, or by looking and listening. A young child struggles to learn by passive absorption. He needs a loving adult who interacts with him one on one; answering his questions and interpreting his experiences for him. ('Amen!' says everybody at Practical!) A child who hasn't been taught how to use his mind is like a beggar who doesn't know how to use a tin-opener: he starves although he has a tin of food and an opener in his hands.



Short-cut parents say, 'I am successful and can afford the very best toys. I pay for the best group experiences for my child that money can buy. It's a pity that my success comes at a cost and that I won't be able to spend as much time with my child as my parents did with me, but it doesn't worry me. Times have changed. My child will have an advantage over other children because he has inherited my intellect and because I can pay for things that other parents cannot afford.'

How do you rate as a gifted parent?

by Dr David Lewis

In the course of my research into gifted children I have received help from many thousands of parents. Amongst the information they provided were descriptions of their approach to child-rearing. From these a clear pattern of responding emerges which seems to typify the most successful approach to encouraging favorable mental development. You can rate yourself on the same scale by ticking those statements below which reflect your own approach to bringing up your children. If you are really interested in learning how you compare to the parents in my survey then it will be essential to respond honestly. Only tick those statements which refer to responses you normally make, not those you sometimes employ. If your child is less than three years old a number of the statements will not be appropriate. In this case tick them if you truly *intend* to carry out those particular responses when the child is older.

1. I answer all questions from my child as patiently and honestly as possible.
2. I take serious questions or statements from my child seriously.
3. I provide a display board where my child can show off his/her work.
4. I am prepared to tolerate an untidy work area if my child has not yet completed some creative task (i.e. painting, model making etc.).
5. I provide my child with a room, or part of a room, exclusively for his/her own use.
6. I show my child he/she is loved for own sake, not for achievements.
7. I give my child responsibilities suitable to age.
8. I help him/her make *own* plans and decisions.
9. I take my child on trips to places of interest.
10. I teach my child how to improve on the tasks he/she does.
11. I encourage my child to get along with children from different backgrounds.
12. I set a reasonable standard of behavior and see my child follows it.
13. I never compare my child unfavorably to other children.
14. I never denigrate my child as a form of punishment.
15. I provide hobby materials and books.
16. I encourage the child to think things out for himself/herself.
17. I read regularly to my child.
18. I teach my child early reading habits.
19. I encourage my child to invent stories and fantasies.
20. I give careful consideration to the individual needs of each child.
21. I provide a time each day when the child can be alone with me.
22. I allow my child to have a say in planning family programs or trips.
23. I never mock my child for making a mistake.
24. I encourage my child to remember stories, poems and songs.
25. I encourage my child to be sociable with adults of all ages.

26. I devise practical experiments to help my child find out about things.
27. I allow my child to play with all kinds of junk objects
28. I encourage my child to look for problems and then solve them.
29. I look for specific things to praise in my child's activities.
30. I avoid general praise which I do not really mean.
31. I am honest about my emotions with my child.
32. I do not have any subjects which I would totally refuse to discuss with my child.
33. I provide opportunities for real decision-making by my child.
34. I encourage my child to be an individual.
35. I help my child find worthwhile programs on TV.
36. I help my child to think positively about his/her abilities.
37. I never dismiss failures by my child with the comments: 'I can't do it either!'
38. I encourage my child to be as independent of adults as possible.
39. I have faith in my child's good sense and trust him/her.
40. I would sooner my child failed by himself/herself than succeeded because I did most of the work.

What the Score Tells You

Work out your score by adding up the ticks. If you find that you frequently, but not invariably, carry out some response then award yourself half a mark.

The parents of gifted child in my study obtained an average score of 30 ticked statements. If you had between 25 and 35 then you are certainly carrying out most of the responses found in families where the children are exceptional in their abilities. You may find it worthwhile to look at any of the statements which you felt unable to tick and see if these responses might not be incorporated into your own family.

If you were only able to score less than 25 statements, then I suggest that you read through the list of responses again to see if more of these helpful activities could become a part of your daily routine.

Note from the Practica Advisory Service:

If you would like to increase the number of responses but are uncertain about how to do so, or concerned that your child may respond unfavorably to changes, then we suggest that you e-mail your questions and concerns to us on info@practicaprogram.co.za

Furthermore, Dr David Lewis' book: 'How to be a Gifted Parent' is out of print, but if you can find a copy somewhere, it would be a great investment.