While it might seem like light years away, the holiday season will soon be here. This issue of Parenting for High Potential provides a potpourri of perspectives for navigating upcoming holiday celebrations, gift-giving traditions, and extended family gatherings.

We’re pleased to feature two perspectives from the leadership of NAGC’s Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (GLBTQ) Special Interest Group (SIG), which provides support to parents of those who are “G-Squared”—gifted and gay. Their wisdom on ways for nurturing strengths and helping reduce stress for GLBTQ adolescents during the holidays, and beyond, highlight universal themes that all parents of gifted children can draw upon.

Puzzled about the perfect way to engage your high-ability learner? Be sure to check out NAGC’s annual toys and games review, featuring the top toys, games, and puzzles as selected by more than 250 junior game reviewers. And for educational, no-cost ideas, author Martha Hildebrandt challenges us to play math games in the car or on the run, using a keen sense of observation and everyday items.

Finally, parents regularly report that one of the most beneficial, rewarding things they can do for themselves and their families is to connect with other parents of like-minded children. Be sure to take a look at how Washington state parent Deborah Simon discovered that starting a parent support group brought her something money can’t buy: the priceless gifts of friendship, camaraderie, and support. Personal connections are what will remain the constant in our lives, long after the parties are over and the gifts are unwrapped.

Kathleen Nilles, Editor-in-Chief
Parenting for High Potential
Home for the Holidays: Reducing the Stress for your Gifted GLBTQ Kid

By Teresa Ryan Manzella, NAGC GLBTQ Special Interest Group Advocacy Chair

As families get together for various brands of holiday merry-making over the next couple of months, parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth can play a key role in making these gatherings more comfortable for their kids. Studies indicate that children are identifying as gay at earlier ages than in previous generations—often between the ages of 7-12. If your gifted daughter or son has come out to you, I hope that you are still on great terms and that you are able to have open conversations about everyday challenges these kids face. Having strong relationships with our children is critical for them as they grow into adulthood.

If you have a sense that your child has something important—having to do with sexuality—to tell you, but that talk hasn't happened yet, you can still be an advocate when the extended family gathers.

Some tips that can make this time of year easier:

Clothes
When your family is getting ready for a party, don't force your child to put on clothing that is more dressy or gender-conforming than she or he feels okay about wearing. Highly gifted youth have a strong tendency to be androgynous anyway, and the GLBTQ ones may be particularly uncomfortable about dressing to gender stereotype. Clean—yes. Fussy—not necessary. It's not worth fighting over.

Appearance
Hairstyles and colors, jewelry, piercings, tattoos...some fashion choices that teens make don't always sit well with parents. Again, remember that you are the adult and are therefore supposed to be the calm, mature one in the equation. The more we stress out about our kids' choices, the more likely they are to become increasingly outrageous. I have found that letting my kids try different hair colors and/or piercings has resulted in their eventually going for more mainstream styles. It may take a while, so be patient.

Conversation
Whether your kid is out to you or not, his or her sexuality is not something to share. Extended family members don't always understand, and it's up to the young person to decide who should know. However, if your child wants to come out to the family, you should support it. Making your child keep his or her GLBTQ identity a secret in the family and not letting him or her talk about it is known to cause health and mental health problems. If your child is not yet ready to share, be careful not to out your child through references to dating or inadvertent comments.

Tolerance
Research also shows that lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who report higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were more likely to attempt suicide, be depressed, use illegal drugs, and engage in unhealthy sexual practices compared with peers from families with no or low levels of family rejection. Sometimes, people at parties can say obnoxious things, and the holidays have a way of intensifying this. If any of your relatives get into gay bashing, let them know—in no uncertain terms—that you won't tolerate their intolerance. Be an “upstander,” not a “bystander.” Your teen will be grateful (whether you know it or not), and knowing you will stand up for her or him will build confidence and self-esteem.

Extended Family Allies
Relatives can sometimes surprise us in positive ways, too. Perhaps there is an aunt, uncle, or cousin who is known to be a supportive type and could be an ally for your kid. Having an understanding, supportive adult—other than Mom and Dad—can be very helpful in general, and especially at family gatherings.

Your Perspective
Even if you do not feel completely comfortable with your child’s sexuality, you will need to protect him or her, help him or her cope with reactions experienced from others, and focus on teaching problem-solving and coping skills. Try to open the doors of communication with him or her long before you take your teen to a holiday party. The holidays are stressful times, and if your kid feels as though you don't accept him or her, the holidays can turn into times of depression and potential self-harm. Have some conversations with your teen, look into your heart, and remember the pledge of unconditional love you made when this child came into your life.
Exit Strategy
Some gifted kids experience sensory overload in settings with lots of people and noise. Stress about identity issues in a room full of people they don’t see very often will heighten this. Before you get to the party (or before it comes to your house), agree on a plan for departure, should the atmosphere get to be too much. If your child knows that it will be possible to leave, or even just take a book break in the car for a while, that will make being at the party easier.

Not all of our gifted-GLBTQ kids get stressed out over family get-togethers. But if you have some plans in mind for keeping these events comfortable for your teen, the holiday season will be more enjoyable for everyone in your family.

Resources
Websites
G-Squared Youth Advocate (http://gsquaredyouthadvocate.com)
Site for youth who are gifted and GLBTQ and for the adults in their lives.
The Trevor Project (http://www.thetrevorproject.org)
Provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to GLBTQ youth.
PFLAG (http://community.pflag.org/page.aspx?pid=191)
For parents and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.

Articles & Books

Author’s Note
Teresa Ryan Manzella is Gifted Youth Coordinator and Past President for Minnesota Mensa, one of three founding members of the NAGC GLBTQ Special Interest Group, and a member of the American Mensa National Gifted Youth Committee. She holds a Master of Liberal Studies degree, the focus of which addresses the challenges facing youth who are gifted and GLBTQ. Teresa has written articles for the Virginia Association for the Gifted Newsletter, 2e: Twice Exceptional Newsletter, and Mensagenda. She is currently working on resource guides for parents and educators of gifted GLBTQ—“G-Squared”—youth. Teresa is the mother of two profoundly gifted kids, and lives in Maplewood, MN.

Endnotes
3 Ryan, 2009.
Parents and grandparents are always looking for new ways to engage their kids and grandkids in meaningful, enriching educational activities. While there’s evidence that playing games can increase numerical fluency\(^1\), research also shows that parental involvement outside of school is one of the best predictors of student achievement\(^2\) and that games and puzzles are effective means of encouraging problem solving and logical thinking\(^3\). But, in our busy lives, how can we carve out time for more activities—while stretching our children’s minds and growing their math abilities and problem solving skills?

Free, fun, and frequent opportunities to practice math are everywhere. They’re in the car on the way to a soccer game, at the doctor’s office, or walking through the neighborhood. Here are several ways to encourage counting, estimation, computation, and logical thinking in informal situations while using everyday items—money, signs, license plates, paper and pencil, and a deck of cards—to make use of the downtime that is a part of even the busiest of lives.
Rev Your Math Engines!
Most parents spend a great deal of time in the car with their child. And, while many cars are outfitted with full entertainment centers, commuting time offers an excellent opportunity to interact with your child and practice math. Adapt the game to fit your child: Keeping score and winning are optional; rules are meant to be fluid. Of course, if you’re the driver, be sure to modify your game choices to insure the safety of your vehicle and your passengers!

Counting Signs, Stoplights, Cars
For short trips around town, have your child predict how many stoplights they will see before you reach your destination. Substitute with anything you will frequently pass en route—stop signs, busses, or red cars, for example. See who has the closest guess when you reach your destination.

Example: Our city employs a “belt system” to guide motorists around the area, and my own children never tired of trying to guess the correct number of “orange belt signs” we’d pass before reaching our destination.

License Plate Fun
License plates provide endless opportunities for computation! Here are some options:

• Add the numbers on the plate, or combine the numbers with any operations to reach a specific target—maybe the date or a number chosen at random.
  Example: If the plate reads ABC 1234, the child can give the sum of 10. Or, choose the date (i.e. October 15) which serves as a target number. The goal is to use the values 1, 2, 3 and 4 in any combination to equal 15. One possibility is (2 + 3) x (4 – 1).

• Keep a running total of the sums that you see as you drive. Use the last digit on each plate, or the sum of all the digits—adding additional values as you pass more cars. This requires some quick computational skills if traffic is moving rapidly!

• For young children, have them practice reading the numbers on the plates as you pass the cars. In some states you may be able to practice numbers up to one million!

• While it is not a math activity, use the letters on a license plate to create a sentence—with extra points if a math word is involved.
  Example: ABC 1234 could be “A boy counts” and DFQ 6520 could be “Divide fractions quickly.”
While You Wait
Here are math games you can play while you wait for your meal to be served at a restaurant or while you wait your turn at the dentist.

Dots and Squares
This is a variation of the popular Connect the Dots game. Construct a grid of dots—any size works. Each player, in turn, connects two dots. Play continues until a player encloses a square, and “wins” the square. Play continues until no further squares can be made. The player with the most squares is the typically the winner. Now add a mathematical twist: Place numbers in the squares before you begin play! Instead of the winner being the person with the most squares, it is the person with the highest sum. Use any numbers you like, but if you allow your child to choose the values, it may be best to provide some boundaries as they delight in selecting some very large numbers. An added dimension is to use some negative values as well, so you actually lose points if you win that square.

Hit the Target
Choose four numbers less than 10, and a value less than 30 as a target. How many ways can you find to hit the target using any operations? You can give points for using all four numbers, and fewer points for using two or three.
Example: If you choose 2, 3, 5 and 7 as your operational values and 20 as your target, you could reach the goal in the following ways:

\[(2 \times 5) + 3 + 7 = 20 \text{ or } (3 \times 5) + (7-2) = 20\]

You can make this more difficult by selecting larger numbers for both the target and values used to reach it.

Word Chains
This game connects math and language. Start with a three-letter word and change one letter at a time. Each person can do this independently to see who gets the longest chain, or you can pass a piece of paper around and have each player change one letter in turn. Award extra points if you are able to make a math word in the process! Four letter words can also be used, but the chains will be much shorter.
Example:

can, fan, man, men, ten
Money, Money, Money
Anywhere you have money, you have opportunities to practice math.

Bills
Check your wallet for bills of any denomination. Distribute several bills and have your child or children locate the serial number on each.
• Practice reading the number correctly and see which one has the highest value.
• Add up the digits that make up the serial number. Which bill has the highest sum?
• Look at the individual digits. There are eight of them. In group play, who has all even digits?
  All odd? Who has the most doubles (number appearing twice)?
  Triples? The possibilities are endless.

Example: If the serial number is 89435323, it contains a triple.

Serial number 75317511 has all odd digits, plus two doubles, one triple, and a sum of 30.

Coins
Before emptying your change, there are several games you can play.
• Let each child predict the total value of the coins. Who has the closest guess?
• Count the number of each coin. Which coin is the most common? What is the total value of each denomination?
  Which denomination has the greatest part of that total?
• Look at the dates on the coins: In which year were the most coins minted?
• Which coin is the oldest?

Quarters most common?

2012?

Oldest?

Total value = $17.36?
A Deck of Cards is a Good Deal

War
This classic card game is a great activity for young children. It allows them to connect numerals with a representation of objects, and helps them practice the skill of comparing numbers. Turn two cards over each time. The winner of the hand is the person with the highest sum, difference, product, quotient, or remainder.

Target
Deal each player 3 to 5 cards. Put the remaining pile in the center of the table face down. Turn the top card over. Players try to combine their cards using any mathematical operation to equal the target number. You can remove the face cards from the deck, assign them values (Jack 11, Queen 12, and King 13), or let all face cards equal 10 or 12.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target number: 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hand 1</strong>: 2, 3, 6, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hand 2</strong>: 1, 1, 3, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While these suggestions are not exhaustive, they’re quick and easy ways to trigger the imagination and demonstrate that you don’t need a commercial product to practice and enjoy math. The best thing about any of these games is that they can be modified to fit children with differing abilities and interests. Feel free to mix it up: Change the rules and make alterations so the game is more appropriate for your children.

The most important thing is that we engage our children in number activities that are fast and fun. This helps them realize that numbers are everywhere and are meant to be played! 

Resources

Author’s Note
Martha E. Hildebrandt, Ph.D., teaches both mathematics and education at Champlain University. She has been involved in gifted education at the elementary and middle school levels and has conducted workshops for both gifted students and educators at Carnegie Mellon University for their C-MITES (Carnegie Mellon Institute for Talented Elementary Students) program. She is the editor of Postscripts, a column in the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics journal Teaching Children Mathematics, is a frequent speaker at professional meetings, and believes that games are one of the most effective ways to engage children and grow their love of mathematics.

Endnotes
Dynamic Pathways for Gifted Learners

Center for Talent Development
Northwestern University

Programs Currently Enrolling:

Northwestern University’s Midwest Academic Talent Search
Research-based assessment identifies academic ability, measures growth and connects students to resources and opportunities for advanced students.

Gifted LearningLinks
Online courses allow access to advanced subject matter, individualized pace and one-on-one engagement with instructors.

EXPLORE ALL OUR PROGRAMS ONLINE:
ctd.northwestern.edu
847/491-3782
For the past 18 years, NAGC has sponsored an annual toy and game review, where junior reviewers are recruited to evaluate the latest toys and games just in time for holiday shopping. This year’s toy testers were 262 gifted and talented students from Science & Arts Academy, an independent gifted PreK–8 school in Des Plaines, IL, who played, puzzled, rolled, and strategized their way to selecting their top new toy picks for 2014.

Before the sample games and toys arrived from manufacturers, the school prepared itself for the task at hand by first polling faculty and staff as to how the greatest number of students could interact with the games. The process included:

- Working with faculty and staff in pre-review question-and-answer sessions, so they could make suggestions for ways to incorporate games into curriculum and instruction.
- Selecting a group of students from the Student Council to conduct pre-trial assessments of the games to determine appropriate age and grade levels of each game.
- Deeming May 2014 as “NAGC Game Month,” with each week designated to a particular group of testers.
- Creating a “Game-Time Sign-up” and in-house library system, so teachers could borrow games during specific classroom activities or breaks.
- Designing and developing age appropriate rubrics, based on the unique attributes of the school’s constituent groups. Rubrics were created for Young Learners (Preschool–Kindergarten); Grades 1–3; Grades 4–8; and teacher-specific and family-specific rubrics. The youngest students were able to rate games and toys using an emoticon rubric system.

After classroom trials were completed, students and families were invited to check out the games for home use. These at-home trials not only created family game night opportunities, but provided a valuable source of feedback on the games.

During the 6-week review period, more than 35 toys and games were tested, with 515 rubrics completed from students, faculty members, and parents across all grade levels. These rubrics collected a myriad of data, including initial thoughts of the packaging, length of game play, overall feelings toward the game, and other metrics. Students were encouraged to play as many games as they could, with most playing 5 to 6 different games during their testing times. Games with the highest overall average scores based on multiple criteria were chosen as “top picks.”

As the trials drew to a close, one young student commented, “Instead of NAGC game month, we should have game year!” Students at Science & Arts Academy found that playing games fostered a sense of community, modeled cooperation and participation, and built creativity and resourcefulness in the players—proving that the pleasure of playing games goes well beyond the four corners of the board. Students were thrilled to obtain a behind-the-scenes peek at how games are developed and to provide

Students at Science & Arts Academy in Des Plaines, IL, tested 35 toys and games in May 2014 for NAGC’s annual toy review program. Playing and evaluating games fostered community, cooperation, creativity, problem-solving, and fun at home and school.
input on the future development of games for gifted learners. As an added bonus, the games and toys were added to the school’s library for continued year-round play.

Erica Loewe and Maria Michonski served as the driving force behind this year’s toy and game review. Together, they created a program with systems, processes, and rubrics that will serve as a suggested model for other schools in future years. Student photos courtesy of teacher Corina Vaccarello, Science & Arts Academy. Toy and game photos courtesy of manufacturers.

for all ages

**Folkmanis Puppets**
Manufacturer: Folkmanis
Mfr. Recommended Age: All ages
Testers’ Recommended Age: 3–8
www.folkmanis.com
MSRP: Prices vary

Our younger learners could not get enough of these soft puppets. Teachers noticed that their classes became more animated when the puppets joined in the lesson. Children said they were “incredible,” “enjoyable,” “fun,” and “amazing.” Teachers said lessons were “more active and lively;” with one teacher reporting that the puppets were used to teach empathy and humor. From protecting the king and queen with the slaying of dragons to turning their classrooms into full-on productions, these companions stimulated multiple conversations around our school.

for young learners

**Number Construction Activity Set**
Manufacturer: Learning Resources
Mfr. Recommended Age: 4+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 3–5
www.learningresources.com
MSRP: $24.99

The Number Construction Activity Set was a huge hit. The tiles, made of durable plastic, easily snap together and offer a great way to practice number building and identification skills. Younger students spent time working on constructing numbers, while the older ones used them to work on number sequence. The only drawback is that the small pegs can be hard to take apart when stacking several of the same shape together. Thanks to our imaginative students, creating wasn’t limited to only numbers, but also included shapes, words, and anything else their imaginations would allow. Students used words such as “fun,” “challenging,” and “creative” to describe this set.
play, puzzle, and roll!

for older children

Get 4 & Score
Manufacturer: Simply Fun
Mfr. Recommended Age: 8+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 7+
www.simplyfun.com
MSRP: $32.00

Our students really took to this race-against-the-clock word game. The directions were easy to understand; students loved the ease of play. Teachers liked the game because it facilitates vocabulary building, improves memory recall, and grows with students’ learning. Testers referred to this game as “fun,” “wonderful,” “exciting,” and “challenging.” One student wrote, “Keep making this game!”

High Tail It!
Manufacturer: Simply Fun
Mfr. Recommended Age: 10+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 6–9
www.simplyfun.com
MSRP: $34.00

Hop around the board and be the first player to complete the journey with all five kangaroos and win the game! Our students enjoyed the new spin on this “checker-like” board game. It teaches colors, problem-solving, and how to follow directions. Younger students took to this game more than older ones, and found it was most fun in groups. However, all students enjoyed this game with some fans calling it, “the best game ever!”

Speed Bump
Manufacturer: Fat Brain Toy Co.
Mfr. Recommended Age: 6+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 6–9
www.fatbraintoyco.com
MSRP: $24.95

Speed Bump is a fast-paced racing game where players must spin, switch, and swap the tiles in front of them to match the pattern challenge card. Players race to hit the “speed bump” buzzer to alert fellow players they’ve completed the challenge. Level 2 incorporates roundabouts, bridges, tunnels, construction zones, ponds, and traffic signs to increase visual-spatial reasoning, interaction, and quick thinking. For some, the buzzer was a bit bothersome. One student described this game as “something I need to go tell my parents about.”

IQ Steps
Manufacturer: Smart Toys and Games, Inc.
Mfr. Recommended Age: 8+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 7+
www.smartgames.eu/us/
MSRP: $9.99

IQ Steps helps develop logic, visual, and spatial perception skills. Like the rest of the IQ family, the goal is simple: Fit all the puzzle pieces into the game grid to complete one of the 120 available challenges. Our student testers referred to this puzzler as “interesting,” “strange,” and “addictive.” Seems great for solo time and is compact enough to bring along on a road trip. Students were eager to challenge their friends and themselves.

Last Letter
Manufacturer: ThinkFun
Mfr. Recommended Age: 8+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 8+
www.thinkfun.com
MSRP: $12.99

This fast-moving letter game improves listening skills, reflexes, and concentration. Players yell out words from the illustrated card that starts with the last letter of the word previously called. Highly verbal student reviewers especially loved it, stating the game was “fun,” “awesome,” and “colorful.” Card illustrations are detailed, so there’s always something new to find. A typical game takes less than 5 minutes, which our Language Arts teachers thought made for a great all-group classtime warm-up or activity break.
Squeals of delight and laughter could be heard rolling down the halls of Science & Arts Academy when the students played *Geek Out! Pop Culture Party*. It’s a wild game that reveals which player is the most knowledgeable about favorite pop culture subjects, TV, movies, music, and literature. Players draw cards asking them to list things that fall under a certain category, and try to bluff their way through. “It’s hard and you have to think a lot…but it was awesome!” said one student. Students suggested the game be stocked with a timer and note cards, but it was determined as a great game overall.

*Say What You Meme*

Manufacturer: Playroom Entertainment
Mfr. Recommended Age: 8+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 10+
www.playroomentertainment.com
MSRP: $30.00

Say What You Meme is a hilarious game where players create their own memes and choose the funniest. Just like popular memes found on social media sites, families can now join in on this pop culture phenomenon at home. Students had a lot of fun with this game, with one student saying, “It’s something that works well for our generation, and a great way to stimulate creativity.”

*Quadrillion*

Manufacturer: Smart Toys and Games, Inc.
Mfr. Recommended Age: 7+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 8+
www.smartgames.eu/us
MSRP: $19.99

Whenever a game is considered challenging at Science & Arts Academy, it’s a keeper. Quadrillion is a fun solitaire game for anyone who likes to solve packing problems. After clicking together four magnetic grids to make a personal game board, gamers need to fit all the puzzle pieces on the grid. With thousands of endless possibilities, our students said this game was “mind-bending,” “logically appealing,” and “interesting.” Another said, “It’s almost hard to stop playing!”

*L-Sixteen*

Manufacturer: Kadon Enterprises, Inc.
Mfr. Recommended Age: 6+
Testers’ Recommended Age: 7+
www.gamepuzzles.com
MSRP: $59.00

With this game, the holes mean a lot! The goal is to create shapes, color designs, or continuous paths by using 16 L-shaped tetromino tiles with holes and placing them in an 8-by-8-inch array on a framed tray. The challenges are endless. Students rated the game as “stupendous” and “magnificent,” and liked it for the many ways it can be played. This little white box has more to offer than its packaging. According to one student, “It is full of awesomeness!”
Do you have a story or success you’d like to share with other parents? Parenting for High Potential would like to feature your stories about parenting, support groups, and advocacy. This issue features Deborah Simon, president of West Sound Gifted, Talented & Twice-Exceptional (WSGT2e), who started a parent group in Washington in 2013. In just one year, this small, but mighty group has held community forums, attended school board meetings, and helped influence local gifted programming.

Deborah, a former teacher and paralegal, is now homeschooling two daughters, completing a master’s degree in gifted education, and writing a blog on the musings of a family with gifted children. She offers tips to other parents on how to effectively start and maintain an advocacy group in their local area.

What prompted you to start West Sound Gifted, Talented & Twice-Exceptional (WSGT2e), formerly North Kitsap Gifted?

A well-run Seattle-based Washington state gifted advocacy group has been in existence for more than 40 years; however, we’re on the other side of the Puget Sound and enough of a distance from that population area to make casual travel difficult. There was nothing organized west of Seattle, and our group fills that void. Parents in the bedroom communities of major metropolitan areas often need something closer, so I decided to start a group. Heading into the 2014-15 school year, we decided to change our name to West Sound Gifted, Talented & Twice-Exceptional (WSGT2e) to more accurately reflect the breadth of members, both from the geographic and gifted perspective.

What are the goals of the group? Did you create an action plan?

The goals of parent support and community outreach stem from a seminal question I asked myself in the very beginning, “What do families of highly capable children most need and how could that be effectively delivered to our area’s population?” The answers were relatively simple and straight-forward and became the roadmap for the group:

- **Information.** Provide a website and social media presence with user-friendly, up-to-date, research-based guidance and knowledge.
• **Camaraderie.** Offer a place where people with similar issues could meet regularly and share their frustrations, laughter, and tears.

• **Support and advocacy.** Those trained in giftedness, gifted education, and state/local education regulations with local school/district relationships can advocate with educators and school/district administrators.

**How many people came to your first meeting? How many do you draw in now?**

I’m an introvert with relatively few “friends,” so I didn’t have the luxury of just opening my address book or Facebook page to start the group meetings. I secured a free meeting room at the local City Hall, took out an ad with local newspapers, and began talking to anyone I met through business and personal interaction about the impending first meeting. There have been up to 10 people at meetings, but we average around 5 or 6 parents, one of whom is also a teacher. There are approximately 10 other families who ask for advice or help but have conflicts that keep them from attending the meetings regularly.

These few have become good friends and confidantes of mine, and our children now have playdates. We’ve become a cohesive group of people who relate to each other and share each other’s sorrows and triumphs. And that is the goal. We’re open to more—actively and regularly inviting newcomers—but we’re not letting numbers be the judge of our success.

**How do you keep parents engaged and continually coming back?**

The camaraderie itself keeps many parents involved. Keeping abreast of state and national issues—and informing parents, community members, and leaders about them—allows the group to remain in the forefront of peoples’ minds.

We also have an annual spring Community Information Night and speak regularly at school board meetings that are recorded and made available to community members. The presentations are available on our website: www.wsgt2e.com/community-informational-night/

**Which topics do you discuss in your meetings?**

We are currently working through *A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children* as a primer on giftedness and starting point for discussing what’s going on in each other’s daily lives. We have time for a check-in from each person and discussion of local, state, and national gifted issues. The purpose of each meeting is to cover the basic topics of giftedness, parenting gifted children, and gifted education (public, private, or homeschooling), while still providing time for people to discuss what’s most relevant at the time to their family and/or situation.

**Does the group consist only of parents, or do community leaders, business people, and educators also attend?**

We mostly draw parents of gifted children, however, we’ve invited the mayor, a state senator, and district officials to speak and attend. The intention of the group is to reach out to those who need gifted information, camaraderie, and support—regardless of the role they play in the community.

**How has the group affected gifted programming in your area or state? What’s your measure of success?**

Opportunities continue to build on each other. We’re a young group, barely a year old, but the group started with a focus on one section of the county and is now reaching out to three other counties and the state’s virtual academy. Who knows what the future will bring?

We’ve been featured in local news articles, hosted a public forum that brought together representatives from neighboring school districts to discuss their gifted programming, and have been instrumental in advocating for families and helping influence the gifted education plans in three different districts. The group is becoming a force to be reckoned with.

I never want another family to be in the same position our family found itself. That’s the measure of success. If this group continues to provide information, camaraderie,
and support, it has succeeded. Whether it’s for one family or for 1,000, it’s not about the numbers. It’s about the people.

How did you help influence gifted plans in three districts? What’s your involvement?

Our foot in the door was getting involved in the district’s community committees. This gave a face to a name and a voice to the group.

Having a working knowledge of the committees makes it easier to direct questions and comments to the district administration and school board about the district’s gifted plan and other gifted topics. Speaking with school board members at district meetings and events led to discovering a little-used district policy that allowed groups to request a place on the school board meeting agenda to discuss relevant topics (a perfect venue for a presentation on the basics of giftedness!).

Inviting school district gifted facilitators to participate in a Q&A panel for parents was another way to spread the group’s influence to other local districts.

Also, our group draws parents from neighboring districts, so, when they encounter issues or have questions, the group emails and calls administrators in their district to advocate on their behalf. I’ve made a point of creating a distinction between what I, as a parent and community member, have to say and what the group has to say. One way I do that is by communicating through the group’s email for “official” business.

Of course, just because we have influence doesn’t mean everyone listens to us. But, it’s the relationship that makes the difference—we try to maintain a professional, working relationship with all local districts and administrators. Through our relationships, we’ve been able to suggest identification tools, recommend professional development resources, submit a theoretical and research-based sample gifted education plan, and assist parents in district appeals and communication.

It’s a process, not a destination.

If this group continues to provide information, camaraderie, and support, it has succeeded. Whether it’s for one family or for 1,000, it’s not about the numbers. It’s about the people.
Parents and teachers often share common goals, and are well-positioned to nurture children’s gifted and high-level development by working together to support and enhance learning. Read and ask yourself: R you there yet?

Rationale
No gifted child is alike, which means that developmental pathways differ from one child to the next. It’s important, therefore, for us as parents, caregivers, and teachers to always take a step back and reflect on the rationale for why a particular path is appropriate for a specific, individual gifted or high-ability child.

• Respect—Every child has individual differences, learning preferences, interests, and areas of strength and weakness.
• Recognize—Giftedness has exceptional capability in one or more areas, requiring programming adaptations or differentiated learning experiences.
• Responsibility—Facilitate lots of opportunities so children can be the best they can be.
• Reasonable goals—Help set objectives that are sensible and realistic.
• Recommendations—First, carefully consider the many influences and factors that may have an impact on a child’s development.
• Respond—Stay flexibly attuned to individual needs, and sensitive to what might affect children emotionally, socially, or academically.

Receptiveness to Change
Just as our children develop and grow physically, their gifted needs will change over time. From time-to-time, parents need to reevaluate their child’s situation, be open-minded, and be ready to offer help with children’s adjustment to new learning situations or programs.

• Reassess—Parents should reevaluate programming on an ongoing and targeted basis, to ensure it remains appropriate.
• Rightness of instructional methods—Are they fitting, meaningful, timely?
• Range—Understand the importance of an array of learning options that vary with respect to depth and scope.
• Readiness—Be mindful of ability (which develops step by step), so children can be properly challenged and happily productive.

• Realization of limitations—Be accepting of what a child can and cannot do.
• Review—Explore various perspectives, recommendations, processes, goals, and decisions.
• Rest, recreation, and relaxation—Downtime is really important for recharging energy and igniting creativity.
• Realistic—Recalibrate expectations about the pace of school change and be patient, but persistent.

Resourcefulness
There are a plethora of resources out there to help parents find appropriate experiences for their gifted child. It’s important to tap into support systems and community resources, and seek information from multiple sources to facilitate children’s play, exploration, learning, and development.

• Rapport and relationships—A climate of mutual trust among the child, parents, teachers, and outside supporters is good for everyone.
• Risk-taking—Always within reason, and as a way to stretch and extend frontiers.
• Relevance—Real-world significance makes learning more interesting; it’s a powerful motivator.
• Record-keeping—Keep up-to-date information on what’s happening in a child’s life, and a record of activities that illustrate abilities in different areas.
• Riches—Nurture the mind, the creative spirit, and the various social and...
emotional dimensions of children’s lives to promote well-being.
• **Representation**—Advocate in positive, constructive ways.
• **Resolve**—Continue to advocate in positive, constructive ways.

**Reassure**
Both children and parents occasionally need reassurance that they are not alone. Emphasize that individual differences are normal and accepted, diversity is a strength, and that support is available.

• **Reflect**—Encourage children to take time to think about what matters to them—and why. (Reflection is important for adults, too!)
• **Resilience**—Not everything comes easily, and children often need help seeing errors as learning opportunities.
• **Reaffirm**—Keep positives in mind—things improve with effort.
• **Reinforce**—Support a child’s personal, social, and academic growth.
• **Rally**—Collaborate, share ideas, and join forces with others.
• **Rejoice!**—For lots of very good reasons!

**Author’s Note**
Dr. Joanne Foster is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids (2014) and the award-winning Being Smart about Gifted Education (2009). She’s also the author of Not Now, Maybe Later: Helping Children Overcome Procrastination (in press). In addition to Parenting for High Potential, Joanne’s writing has been featured in numerous publications around the world. She has actively promoted learning for over 30 years in the capacity of teacher, gifted education specialist, enrichment program coordinator, policy advisor, and educational consultant. Dr. Foster teaches educational psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto where she also provides leadership in the areas of giftedness and high-level development. You can visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net.

Note: An earlier rendition of “R We There Yet?” by Joanne Foster was first published in Parenting for High Potential, September 2006. The article has been reorganized and revised by the author for publication here.
Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth are attracting more attention—in the news and in education—with good reason. They will someday join the 2% to 37% of the adult population (depending on research study) that fits into the various “G,” “L,” “B,” “T,” and “Q” sexual-orientation categories. Studies show that approximately 80% of GLBTQ youth reported consistent verbal harassment in school, and about 40% encounter physical harassment. While society currently seems most focused on bullying issues and other pressures related to GLBTQ youth, there is little focus on their strengths and talents.

GLBTQ youth have many strengths, with about 24% of boys and 48% of girls in seven metropolitan GLBTQ support groups identifying as gifted. Similarly, approximately 30% of 1,000 online GLBTQ adult respondents indicated that they, too, had attained gifted-range accomplishments.

Parents of gifted GLBTQ youth have an additional challenge: Not only do parents need to advocate for their children’s academic identities, but they also need to help foster and support their social-emotional, psychological, and sexual identities.

A number of years ago, I conducted an extensive, interview-based, research study of four gifted gay males at a state school for the arts. Through the process, the students offered compelling insights to how their parents could support their strengths. Their suggestions aligned with gifted gay males’ preferences from three other research studies I conducted in the 1990s.

Here are six ways parents can support and nurture the strengths of gifted GLBTQ children:

#1 Provide Positive Information about Sexual Minorities
Parents can provide their information-hungry gifted youth with positive printed material about homosexuality. Sons in the arts high school study felt that their parents’ sharing of positive information not only affirmed their gay identities but also encouraged more constructive parent-student relationships. Other research indicates that parents who shield their GLBTQ children from information—or who keep them away from sexual-minority friends to protect them—actually isolate their children and intensify their feelings of being alone and unwanted.

#2 Point Out GLBTQ Role Models
Parents can also identify for their sons one or more sexual-minority (and especially gay) role models, realizing that parents themselves cannot know all the information that these youth will need in order to survive and excel. In the study, parents provided sons with direct leads on nearby sexual-minority role models and offered them indirect encouragement to look for those role models when they were not in the students’ communities. Sons felt a sense of independence when they sought their own mentors.

#3 Encourage Independence
Parents can encourage, or at least permit, sons to be independent on many fronts, understanding that these young men will almost certainly lead gay lives that must be constructed along the way. For most sons, their parents’ (especially their mothers’)
encouragement toward independence had been building for many years. The young men very much appreciated this encouragement toward freedom and responsibility.

**#4 Offer Multiple Forms of Sexual-Minority Acceptance**

Parents who understand the magnitude of their sons’ challenges—and the modern possibilities of success in those challenges—can provide many forms of acceptance. The sons’ most appreciated forms of parental support in the study ranged from unconditional acceptance, to friendly dialogue, to financial aid.

**#5 Support Student Gifts**

As sons grow older, one form of acceptance that they particularly appreciated was for their positive traits and predominant strengths. Fathers in the study often financially supported their sons’ artistic strengths more than these youngsters’ social development. However, their sons still recognized and appreciated the contributions. In addition, through fathers’ and sons’ discussions over artistic and social relationships, the men began to come to terms with their longstanding similarities and differences as individuals.

**#6 Provide Support for Emerging Community-Engagement Efforts**

Mothers and fathers should support their children’s contributions to communities. Parents in the study were verbally supportive of these efforts, including their sons’ HIV/AIDS and GLBTQ activism, though the parents were sometimes reticent to financially fund the GLBTQ-related efforts. Youth saw parental support of all forms of the students’ community activism as very helpful in building student identities.

Families, parents, caregivers, and guardians have a dramatic impact on the self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-acceptance of their GLBTQ children. They can assist gifted gay male youth—and lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning adolescents—by addressing these students’ needs for intellectual, social, emotional, and special-skill development. Their efforts are most impactful when addressing current and future challenges and strengths. Through all these efforts, gifted GLBTQ children will hopefully soon be noted more in school for their achievements than for their hardships.

**Author’s Note**

Dr. Terry Friedrichs grew up gay in Minnesota in the 1960s and 1970s. For 35 years, he has been a K–12 teacher of, and a university educator who has taught about, youth with varied gifts and disabilities. He served hundreds of gifted sexual-minority students as an educator, researcher, and college and high-school youth group leader, and as founding (and current) coordinator of NAGC’s Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Special Interest Group. He earned a Ph. D. from the University of Virginia in Gifted Education and Learning Disabilities, and an Ed. D. from the University of St. Thomas in Critical Pedagogy, and has published 15 scholarly chapters and articles on gifted GLBTQ youth. For information about gifted GLBTQ students or about membership in the NAGC GLBTQ SIG (free to NAGC members), please contact Terry at tpfriedrichs@stthomas.edu.

**Resources**

**NAGC GLBTQ Special Interest Group (SIG)**

Established in 2011, NAGC’s GLBTQ SIG offers many resources for parents and educators of gifted sexual-minority youth. It provides:

- Positive information about GLBTQ people, events, and role models
- Ideas on encouraging and accepting gifted GLBTQ students
- Approaches toward supporting students’ gifts and community-engagement activities.

The SIG also advocates to gifted-related organizations outside NAGC, offering parents, administrators, teachers, and counselors in those organizations the opportunities to learn more about gifted sexual-minority youth and to advocate for their well-being. The SIG also hosts an annual get-together at the NAGC Convention for parents and educators to socialize with other GLBTQ-positive individuals. Membership is free to NAGC members. Please contact SIG Coordinator Terry Friedrichs at tpfriedrichs@stthomas.edu.

**Endnotes**


