

From Compass Points, April 14, 2011

Supporting our Gifted Children during Turbulent Times....

During these turbulent times in history, millions of people around the world are witnessing unprecedented catastrophic natural disasters and fierce wars. As adults, we are disturbed or even distraught by these shocking global events. But how have these earthly troubles affected our highly perceptive, sensitive, and compassionate gifted children? Some will intellectually ponder and ruminate on the events, while others may be traumatized by the destruction and death. Gifted children are acutely attuned and globally aware of current disturbances, and often intensely concerned for families and children across the planet. Anxious for the preservation and protection of the earth's natural resources, these gifted children worry about others and their own safekeeping.

All people require safety and security to thrive, and children look to their home life in finding a safe haven. However, in many locations around the world, children and families lack stability and protection. Here in North America, our alert, responsive and insightful gifted children are aware of global inequalities in standards of living and have become fearful and worried about so many things. It is difficult to protect our children from the detailed knowledge of atrocities as reported and discussed around them. For example, many caring children are pondering the people in Japan who were ravaged by the tsunami and are homeless and need food and water. They are shaken by the mass deaths, injuries, the nuclear power plant disaster and the shortage of care available to the victims. Additionally they fret about the land and ocean waters surrounding the nuclear plant and the contamination of the life giving earthly vitalities. Although this disaster occurred far away, their imagination forms questions concerning their own safety, "What if a tsunami hit our coast line? What if an earthquake caused thousands of deaths and catastrophic homelessness? What if our home was destroyed? What if the nuclear power plant in our region became damaged, how would we survive?" On the heels of this natural disaster came the bombing in Libya. There is news and talk about vicious governments and cruel armies, prejudices that result in massive killings, and risings of people for change. The inquiring minds and gentle spirits of our gifted children wonder, "What is happening to the families in these regions? Are people safe? Is our planet truly safe? How can we be protected from such things happening?" During these tumultuous times our children can be overwhelmed by fear-ridden images, and a myriad of "what if..." questions result.

In truth, our sensitive, caring and globally aware gifted children are bombarded with reason for concern. They intrinsically know that what happens on any continent has ripple effects throughout the world. Some gifted children innately live the guiding principle of brotherhood, and interdependence among all life. They worry for themselves, and they worry for others. Knowing we are all interconnected, they may feel guilty for their comfortable life, when others are in

desperate need. Their unease can be shown in restlessness, sleeping difficulties, nightmares, irritability, discontent, anxious feelings and endless questions. Some gentle spirited children are bereft with grief over enormous injustices, cruelty and disregard for fellow human beings. Some are frightened by the unpredictability of natural disasters, and thereby concerned for their own safety. What can we do to help our children feel more secure? How can we adequately respond to their fears? During these disturbing times, we must be more emotionally responsive to our sensitive children's needs and apprehensions. We must take their worries seriously and not dismiss them as unlikely. We must respond with empathy to their compassion for others, and acknowledge that difficult challenges do at times occur in life. We must enter into conversation on what can be done to create positive change and then partner with them in practical and age-appropriate action. Although our children are amazingly bright and can engage in adult-like conversation on these dire matters, we must not be fooled by our belief they are emotionally mature enough to handle detailed information without plunging into despair or fear. We must not only use their intellectual capacity and vocabulary as a guide to the amount we share, but instead primarily consider their chronological and emotional age to gauge the details discussed. Children have limited years lived to anchor their emotions, contemplations and solutions. During these turbulent times adults must be the "rudder" of the ship stricken in these stormy seas. Our presence, calmness, assurance, respect, empathy, and partnership in positive action are the ingredients for our gifted children's safe travels during difficult times.

Patricia Gatto-Walden, PhD
Chair, Global Awareness Network
Contact me: www.patriciagatto-walden.com