

Connecting

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

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NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might be facing the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of children’s potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

Topic for this issue: “Siblings, Twins, and Relatives”

A Teacher’s View

I’ve been teaching for close to fourteen years and in that time have taught my share of siblings, twins, and relatives. Even though I try my hardest not to make comparisons, when talking with parents and the students themselves I sometimes make the mistake of calling an individual by their sibling’s name, especially when they closely resemble each other. While some of these students don’t mind at all, there has been the occasional student who makes it a point to correct me. While this is only a mistake based on appearance I do my very best to assure the student, and at times the parent, that I do “try” to look at each student independently. In truth, there has yet to be a sibling, twin, or relative that seems to be cut from the same mold. Their thoughts, actions, mannerisms, and ideas differ greatly.

While I am confident in this, I am uncertain that many of my colleagues are. They often take time during meetings and discussions to “compare” relatives that have been in our program. While I don’t want to come across as all-knowing and pompous, I would like to share some research and suggestions that exist out there in “gifted land.” Any ideas are more than welcome.

A Parent’s View

- *My twins are in two different 3rd grade classes. One son’s teacher referred him for gifted screening, but my other son’s teacher did not. The school allows parent referrals, but I’m not sure that I should refer my other son. I mean, if his classroom teacher didn’t see a reason to refer him, then there probably isn’t one, right? And what if one is found in need of program services and the other isn’t? Won’t that cause hurt feelings?*
- *My son benefited greatly from participating in gifted services, and was eager when it was time for his younger sister to be screened. While she is very bright and academically advanced, I was not surprised when she was not found in need of gifted services. She took the results in stride, but her brother is devastated for her. I’m glad that he is a passionate advocate for his sister, but I’m worried about his view that not needing gifted services will result in some sort of loss for his sister.*
- *I know that family comparisons are inevitable, but it is really hard to go to holiday gatherings and hear my parents go on and on about my children’s placement in gifted programming. I understand that they are proud, but grandparent pride comes off harshly when other children in the family are facing academic challenges.*

Sibling and relative dynamics are often complex under the best of circumstances, and a designation of “gifted and talented” for a member of the family may complicate them. While it may happen that multiple members of the same family are found in need of gifted services, it is not always a given. Perhaps the best way to approach this issue is to remember that all individuals want to be recognized and celebrated for who they are, what they do, and what makes them unique. It comes back to how the adults in their life treat them and the expectations set on how they should treat each other. Teachers, parents, and extended family members set the tone for healthy and appropriate self-efficacy and relationships. Identification for services should occur on a case-by-case basis.



Please copy and share this with other parents and teachers in your community who may find this useful.

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1. Relativity: Dispelling the Myth

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- In order to understand individuality when it comes to gifted and talented students, one should read what has been discovered about this population during the past 30 years of research. Linda Silverman, of the Gifted Development Center, along with other colleagues, have drafted 23 “points to ponder” about the development of giftedness. http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/What_is_Gifted/learned.htm
- Identification begins for many students at different times. It is important to remember this when faced with members of the same family who may or may not have received services. One characteristic to focus on is the many ways “intelligence” can exhibit itself. The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented has a great piece which provides an overview of intelligence and its relation to potential. <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/newsletter/winter05/winter051.html>

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- Go beyond “gifted & talented”. These terms are sometimes misunderstood and are the subject of debate by experts. Instead, avoid labels. Experts recommend that we not label children in any manner. It should not be that a child is something; rather the focus should be on potential, behaviors, and needs. This keeps a healthy focus on a child’s growth and development. “Labeling: To Tell or Not to Tell”, a piece by Paul Plowman sheds some light on labels. <http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Articles/label.pdf>
- Be Informed – Explore research on “Parents’ Conceptions on Giftedness” to help frame your own understanding. <http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Articles/Conceptions.pdf>
- Help Family Members Be Informed: Guide family members into helpful support by dispelling the common myths in gifted education- <http://www.nagc.org/commonmyths.aspx>

2. Is It a Problem? Not necessarily!

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When working with siblings or relatives, be sure to keep in mind that professionals have been dealing with this situation for quite some time. There is a vast amount of research with some exceptional results that could really help you in your understanding of this situation.

- *Twins in School: What Teachers Should Know* by Lilian Katz presents a comprehensive look at what it means to be a twin in school, and what that knowledge, in turn, means for educators. <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eeearchive/digests/1998/katztw98.html>
- Research has shown that not only is it not necessarily harmful to have a sibling identified as gifted, it may also be beneficial. Access the *Gifted Child Quarterly* article here. <http://gcq.sagepub.com/content/39/3/135.abstract>

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- While family relationships are not necessarily always smooth, parents and relatives should not assume that there will be a problem when one child is “identified” as gifted, but another is not. However, there are supportive steps we can take, just in case.
- What is fair is not necessarily what is equal: Different children require and benefit from different experiences. What is important is that individuals get what they need. Read an excerpt of Barbara Clark’s “Growing up Gifted”. <http://www.education.com/reference/article/siblings-gifted-children/>
- Avoiding Favoritism: “Parenting Teens by Suite 101: Balanced Parenting of Gifted & Normal Siblings” recommends some strategies for parenting without favoritism <http://reece-manley.suite101.com/balanced-parenting-of-gifted-an-normal-siblings-a125551>

3. Accentuate the Positive: Viva la Difference!

- **Be Specific:** At its root, the designation “gifted and talented” is a way to get at who a child is as a learner, thinker, etc. “Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains.” What is it that an individual is working to - or has the potential to – achieve? In which domain? <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=574>
- **Praise Effort:** Carol Dweck’s research on how people view themselves and the resulting behavior shows the importance of praising work and effort over accomplishments. See “How Not to Talk to Your Kids: The Inverse Power of Praise” in *The New York Times Magazine*. <http://nymag.com/news/features/27840/> Putting the emphasis on effort shifts the focus to include an internal, proactive mindset of setting goals and achieving them.
- **Recognize Individuality:** Despite labels, each child possesses their own unique set of characteristics. It is who they are.

ADDITIONAL READING

Parenting Gifted Children edited by Jennifer L. Jolly, Ph.D., Donald J. Treffinger, Ph.D., Tracy F. Inman, Joan Franklin Smutny, Ph.D.

<https://www.nagc.org/NAGC2/NGCShopper/ProductDetails.aspx?productID=NGC42134&CurrIndex=8>

***“Our siblings. They resemble us just enough to make all their differences confusing,
and no matter what we choose to make of this,
we are cast in relation to them our whole lives long.”***

- Susan Scarf Merrell

This issue of *Connecting for High Potential* was compiled by Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist, and Susan Dulong Langley, Parent Representative to the NAGC Board of Directors.



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