

# The 4-1-1 for Parents and Caregivers of Gifted Children: Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions



By Kathleen Nilles

Back in the day, a curious caller within the U.S. would dial 4-1-1 from their phone to receive directory assistance and local information on just about everything. For the past 8 years, I have served as the 4-1-1 resource for parents who contact NAGC with their most burning questions on how to serve their

gifted children. From the hundreds of interactions I've had with parents, I've created this frequently asked questions list. Please feel free to tear out, copy, and share with parents, grandparents, and caregivers far and wide.

## What does it mean to be gifted?

**THERE IS NO SINGLE DEFINITION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED.** Most definitions cite that gifted and talented children have demonstrated abilities that are significantly advanced compared to other children of the same age, experience, and background.

Gifted children can also be gifted and talented in any domain. They may have advanced abilities in math, music, or dance, for example, and some states have a definition addressing each academic or performance area. Children who are gifted and talented in any domain—or in more than one domain—need appropriate support and opportunities to develop their potential. For more information, read *Gifted 101*.

And, while gifted education can be traced back to the 1800s, most states and school districts model their definition of “gifted” from the federal definition established in the 1972 **Marland Report**—the first national report to Congress on gifted education.

### Resources

Inman, T. F., & Breedlove, L. (2018). *Gifted 101*.  
[bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Download the Executive Summary of the *Marland Report* from  
[bit.ly/36x4Hds](https://bit.ly/36x4Hds)

## What are the typical traits and characteristics of a gifted child?

**WHILE NO TWO GIFTED CHILDREN ARE ALIKE** there are common **traits and characteristics** that gifted individuals share such as reaching developmental milestones earlier than their peers, having a large vocabulary or vivid imagination, and

creating high expectations for self and others. However, because gifted children are so diverse and develop differently, not all gifted children exhibit all characteristics or exhibit them at the same age.

### Resource

NAGC has more about traits and characteristics at  
[bit.ly/3wjh2fw](https://bit.ly/3wjh2fw)



**I suspect my 3-year-old is gifted. He is reading/doing math/creating art/reaching developmental milestones much earlier than his peers. What can I do?**

**RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PARENTAL SUPPORT IS AN IMPORTANT PREDICTOR OF A GIFTED CHILD'S SUCCESS**

**IN LIFE.** For young bright children, even prior to entrance to school, it's essential that parents follow their child's lead by tapping into their interests, sparking curiosity, **nurturing a love of the arts**, and stoking their love of learning. Don't worry about getting too far ahead but, keep in mind, there's a fine balance between following your child's lead and pushing too hard. Young children still need time to play and be creative! Read: **Early Childhood and Beyond School Walls: What Parents Can Do to Widen the Horizons of their Gifted Learners.**



You might consider creating an informal portfolio for your young child that includes samples of artwork, lists of books they have read, accomplishments and milestones, and parental observations. Keep it simple—start a binder, drop samples into a file folder, or record notes and videos on your phone. This information may be useful later if it becomes necessary to advocate for early admission to kindergarten or when applying to academic or enrichment programs. Read the **Parent TIP Sheet on Assessments** for more information.

**Resources**

NAGC has more information about bright young children at [bit.ly/3xgPUiE](http://bit.ly/3xgPUiE)

For more about nurturing a love of the arts visit [bit.ly/3ykmws0](http://bit.ly/3ykmws0)

Hertzog, N. B., & Smutny, J. F. (2016). *Early childhood.*

[bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Nilles, K. (2016). *Assessments.* [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Smutny, J. F. (2014). *What parents can do to widen the horizons of their gifted learners.* Download at [bit.ly/36d1nna](http://bit.ly/36d1nna).

**Is a child born gifted?**

**NO CHILD IS BORN GIFTED—ONLY WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR GIFTEDNESS.** The potential for giftedness or a high level of intellectual development begins early in a child's life. Studies since the early 1970s consistently show that such development is the result of an interaction between the child's genetic endowment ("nature") and a rich and appropriate environment in which the child grows ("nurture"). Those children fortunate enough to have opportunities to learn and develop their uniqueness in an environment that responds to their needs will be able to maximize their potential.

**Resource**

For more information about nature vs. nurture visit [bit.ly/2VbH1ch](http://bit.ly/2VbH1ch)



## Any ideas on who can help me support my child?

### THE GIFTED COMMUNITY OFFERS A WEALTH OF EXPERTISE VIA NON-PROFIT GROUPS, VOLUNTEERS, AND PROFESSIONALS SPECIALIZING IN GIFTEDNESS.

While studies have shown that parents are the best advocates to ensure their gifted child's needs are met, other resources offer parents guidance and support. In addition to the many resources NAGC offers at [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org), another resource is your state gifted education association. Each state association is different, though, and most state gifted associations are volunteer-run organizations. Many do not have extensive

resources and/or staff to answer individual questions. However, the gifted community is very generous, and many volunteers are passionate parents and educators who have walked in your shoes. It's worth inquiring to see if they can provide state and/or local guidance. NAGC's website has state-by-state information.

To support your child's social-emotional needs, you may wish to reach out to **SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted)**. Seeking the counsel from professionals, such as psychologists or attorneys with expertise in serving gifted children, may eventually be required but are typically hired when all other advocacy efforts fail. Read **Finding a Mental Health Professional** for tips on when it is necessary to seek a psychologist or family counselor to support your gifted child.

### Resources

For state gifted education association information, visit [www.nagc.org/information-publications/gifted-state](http://www.nagc.org/information-publications/gifted-state)

Peters, M. P. (2018). *Finding a mental health professional*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG). [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)

## How and where do I get my child tested for giftedness?

**TESTING IS NOT ESSENTIAL NOR THE END GOAL IN SUPPORTING A GIFTED CHILD;** the goal is to meet your child's needs. If parents can find ways to nurture their child's giftedness in math, reading, or creativity on their own, it's not imperative to immediately seek an assessment. However, ability (IQ) and achievement tests are often used as part of the process to identify or qualify a student for an academic or enrichment program for gifted children. Tests should be administered by a licensed psychologist who is experienced in working with gifted children. Testing for giftedness does not typically occur until children are at least 5 or 6 years old.

### Resource

Nilles, K. (2016). *Assessments*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)



### Does my child's school test for giftedness?

**SOMETIMES. IT DEPENDS ON THEIR POLICIES AND PROGRAMS.** Testing is often used as a measurement tool to qualify for a specific program or when it is suspected that a student's gifts and talents are not being recognized. School-age children are typically tested using *group* testing methods through their school's gifted and talented screening program. It is rare that any *individual* test of ability or achievement will be offered to gifted students by their school or district.

Depending on the district, tests are conducted in the primary grades as part of a screening process for special services, including gifted programming. Some districts are starting to adopt a universal screening process (where all students are assessed), but not all follow that practice.

Assessments provide data points, but do not automatically guarantee placement in gifted programs. Most states do not require districts to follow the same identification process or to provide services in specified domains. As a result, most

variables that are key to gifted education programming are left to the district or individual school. Parents and administrators should work together in a positive and collaborative spirit to use test data as one of several measures to develop an appropriate educational strategy for gifted students. In addition, schools should match the identification process for program admission to the focus of the program (e.g., If screening for an advanced math program, it's not appropriate to base decisions on an essay that is used for admission to an advanced language arts program.) It's important to remember that a multi-criterion, portfolio-based approach for identification (beyond an IQ test) is considered best practice.

#### Resources

NAGC has information about testing, types of tests, and ways to identify young advanced learners. Visit [bit.ly/3wFLukq](http://bit.ly/3wFLukq) and [bit.ly/3xLDRKI](http://bit.ly/3xLDRKI)

### English is not my child's first language. Are there other identification tools?

**THERE ARE OTHER TOOLS BEYOND IQ TESTS THAT CAN AND SHOULD BE USED FOR IDENTIFICATION.** Scholars agree there are many challenges in creating equitable identification procedures for culturally and linguistically diverse students, students who are disabled, and those from low-income backgrounds. Many districts rely on verbal ability tests and high cutoff scores, which can unfairly discriminate. An identification strategy that includes multiple assessments is the best way to ensure no gifted learner is overlooked. Other identification tools may include non-verbal tests, universal screening using local norms, rating scales (assessing creativity, leadership, motivation, problem solving, inquisitiveness, humor, and academic abilities), teacher recommendations, parent observations, student self-nomination, classroom performance, and portfolio material.

#### Resources

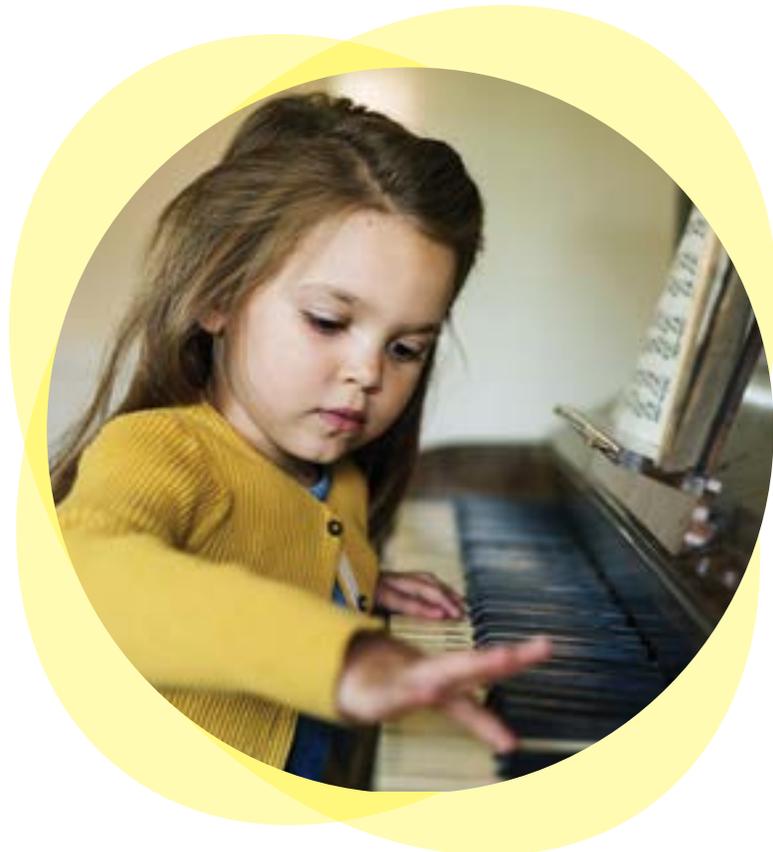
Davis, J. L. (2010). *Bright, talented, & Black: A guide for families of African American gifted learners*. Great Potential Press.

Goudelock, J. D. L. (2019). *Nurturing African American gifted children*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

NAGC. (2011). *Identifying & serving culturally & linguistically diverse gifted students* [Position Statement]. [bit.ly/3Aos9XI](http://bit.ly/3Aos9XI)

Traits, Aptitudes, and Behaviors Scale (TABS), [bit.ly/TABS\\_Rating](http://bit.ly/TABS_Rating)

Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking, [www.ststesting.com](http://www.ststesting.com)



## How do I get my child enrolled in the gifted program in our school/district?

**EVERY STATE IS DIFFERENT, AND A WIDE RANGE OF POLICIES, PROGRAMMING, AND FUNDING EXISTS THROUGHOUT THE U.S.** There is no federal mandate for gifted identification, programming, and/or services, so all policies related to supporting gifted and talented children occur at the state and local levels. State policies typically defer to districts to determine the subject areas for gifted programming, the grades in which the programs are offered, and the number of students who will be served. Parents might start by visiting their state department of education website to better understand whether their state mandates identification and services for gifted children, how giftedness is defined, and whether funding is provided to districts to support gifted children. Read NAGC's **2018-19 State of the States in Gifted Education** report for the most up-to-date data from all 50 states and the District of Columbia to compare your state to others.

Next, look on your local school district's website to better understand its gifted policies and programs and if/when assessment/identification occurs and how that is conducted. Contact the gifted coordinator in your district to ask questions

about how the district handles placement of young, gifted learners, and if early entrance to kindergarten is permitted. You may ask about how they handle acceleration and if they have ability grouping for students who are academically advanced, even at a young age. Because they exhibit giftedness differently than others, students of color often go unnoticed when identifying for gifted programs. Read **Nurturing African American Gifted Children** for more information. Children with disabilities and children whose first language is not English may also need alternate assessments to determine program/service eligibility.

### Resources

For information about state policies and practices in gifted education, download the *2018-2019 State of the States in Gifted Education* report from [bit.ly/3CqasIL](http://bit.ly/3CqasIL)

Goude-lock, J. D. L. (2019). *Nurturing African American gifted children*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

## My son missed the cut-off requirements for the gifted program in our school/district. What can I do?

**YOU MAY NEED TO ADVOCATE WITH THE DISTRICT TO HAVE HIS CASE REEVALUATED. FIRST LOOK TO SEE IF THERE'S AN APPEALS PROCESS.** While states may set the policy agenda with respect to supporting gifted and talented children, the interpretation of these policies falls to the district/school level. And, while there may be state laws and policies, there may not be specific state funding to support identification and programming. Therefore, nearly all decisions regarding identification, programming, and services are determined by the individual school district or school building.

If you suspect that your child is gifted but was overlooked or did not qualify for your district/school's gifted program, look on your district/school's website for information on the appeals process. If one is not outlined, reach out to the gifted coordinator or another administrator to inquire about how to appeal the decision. If an appeal is not possible, you may need to begin the advocacy process to build a case for why your child should be included in the gifted program. Read the **Parent TIP Sheet: Advocacy** for ideas on how to best approach your school. Remember, it's essential to be professional, polite, and prepared.

### Resource

Harris, K. L. (2017). *Advocating for gifted services*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)



### There are no gifted programs in my child's school. Isn't there a law that mandates gifted children receive appropriate services?

**THAT'S UNFORTUNATE, BUT MORE COMMON THAN YOU THINK.** There is no federal law requiring schools to provide services to gifted learners. Many states also do not mandate services and instead leave all decisions about gifted students to local school districts. As a result, families encounter a wide range of programs and services from state to state and district to district within a state. Browse NAGC's **Gifted by State** information to learn more about your state's laws and policies for gifted children. Be sure to download the most recent **State of the States in Gifted Education** report for comparative data by state. To secure less official, modest accommodations at the local level, many parents work directly with their child's classroom teacher and school principal. Others find it necessary to join with other parents to establish services for gifted students in their child's school and district. Well-informed and passionate parent advocates often have great success in affecting change in

their local and state policies in support of gifted students. Read **Advocating for Gifted Services** and **Starting and Sustaining a Parent Group** for ways to build grassroots momentum to change gifted policies and programming.

#### Resources

- Get a general sense of your state's gifted education policies and practices at <https://www.nagc.org/gifted-state>
- For more detailed information about your state, download the *2018-2019 State of the States in Gifted Education* report from [bit.ly/3CqasIL](http://bit.ly/3CqasIL)
- Harris, K. L. (2017). *Advocating for gifted services*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)
- Download *Starting and Sustaining a Parent Group* from the NAGC website at [bit.ly/3hfAzJK](http://bit.ly/3hfAzJK)

### My child is bored in school. What can I do?

#### THE FIRST PLACE TO START IS WITH YOUR CHILD'S

**TEACHER.** While your child might say she is "bored," it's important to get specifics from your child (e.g., she read the book that is used in her reading class two years ago) so that you can have a productive conversation with your child's school. Do not to use the term "bored" when communicating with your child's school as this may insult educators who take pride in developing stimulating curricula for all students. Your first point of contact should always be your child's classroom teacher, as they know your child best. Read **Classroom Advocacy, How to Communicate with your Gifted Child's School** and **Advocate for Your Child** for tips. Ultimately, teaching your gifted child to be a strong **self-advocate** will help them learn to communicate their needs with their teachers directly, while mastering a lifelong skill.

#### Resources

- Read more about advocating for your child at <https://www.nagc.org/get-involved/advocate-high-ability-learners/advocate-your-child>
- Douglas, D. (2018). *Self-advocacy*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)
- Smutny, J. F. (2015, August). Communicating effectively with your gifted child's school. *Parenting for High Potential*, 4–8.
- Smutny, J. F., Georgiades, S., & Nilles, K. (2016). *Classroom advocacy*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](http://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)



## My daughter is unmotivated and is not working to her potential. What is going on? What can I do to help?

**UNDERACHIEVEMENT IS THE UNANTICIPATED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ABILITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENT.** A lack of motivation or **underachievement** is a complex issue for gifted children, as various interwoven causes may exist. These include: social issues such as peer pressure; psychological issues such as emotional sensitivities or **perfectionism**; undiagnosed **learning disabilities**; lack of interest in curriculum (or curriculum is not challenging and engaging); and low teacher expectations, especially with **twice-exceptional**, minority, and students from low-income backgrounds.

Talk to your child and the teacher. It is important to work with your child while helping the school find appropriate options to provide supportive and stimulating learning opportunities.

Sometimes a **licensed psychologist or counselor** is needed to help identify the underlying causes and provide appropriate interventions and supports.

### Resources

For more on underachievement visit [bit.ly/3hwzXhL](https://bit.ly/3hwzXhL)

Read more about twice-exceptional learners at [www.nagc.org/supporting-twice-exceptional-students](https://www.nagc.org/supporting-twice-exceptional-students)

For more about the comprehensive assessment that may be needed to determine if a gifted student also has a learning disability, read NAGC's position paper: *Ensuring Gifted Children with Disabilities Receive an Appropriate Education.* [bit.ly/3wi4Yv5](https://bit.ly/3wi4Yv5)

Wilson, H. E., & Adelson, J. L. (2017). *Perfectionism.* [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Peters, M. P. (2018). *Finding a mental health professional.* [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

## My gifted child has the intellect of a child several years older but sometimes he acts much younger than his peers. Is this normal?

**HAVE YOU HEARD THE TERM ASYNCHRONOUS DEVELOPMENT?** Gifted children vary in their abilities and often their patterns of growth differ from their age peers. When the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and creative aspects of a person develop on a trajectory that is outside of norms, and at an uneven rate, it is described as asynchronous development. For example, a 6-year-old child with a 9-year-old mind wants to draw and write like a 9-year-old, but his motor coordination is age appropriate. A 5-year-old girl may be reading at an 8th grade level, but she is at grade level in math. A young, gifted child may cognitively understand difficult concepts such as death and

social justice but may not have the life experience or emotional maturity to handle these concepts. Both children who are developing asynchronously and their parents require appropriate support; read the Parent TIP Sheet on **Asynchronous Development** for more information.

### Resource

Guilbault, K., & Kane, M. (2016). *Asynchronous development.* [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

## What can I do to help my child make friends?

### SOME GIFTED CHILDREN FIND IT DIFFICULT TO MAKE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS WITH THEIR SAME-AGE PEERS

Experts believe that a gifted child's friendship pattern and social concept is more related to their mental age rather than their chronological age. This means a gifted 6-year-old boy may be 6 years old chronologically but have the mental age of an 11-year-old. As a result, gifted children tend to look to other gifted children, older children, or even adults to make social connections. Gifted children may have different sets of friends—idea peers and age peers—based on intellectual ability, interests, intensities, maturity, and temperament. Finding like-minded peers (those who share same interests) is sometimes more important to them than socializing with age mates, although many gifted children enjoy playing sports, or music, or other activities with others their age.

It's important to find other families like yours, so that parents have support and your child can connect with those who are like-minded. Look out for programs/classes through museums, orchestras, universities, and enrichment programs tailored to high-ability children to stimulate curiosity in areas of interest. You might do an internet search for "programs for high-ability young children" or "gifted children meet ups" to see what comes up in your local area. Read **Making Friends** for additional tips.

### Resource

De Bonte, A., Mall, K. & Kane, M. (2017). *Making friends.* [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)



### I feel my daughter may need some outside help to address her social-emotional needs.

#### HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT SEEKING THE ADVICE OR HELP FROM A PSYCHOLOGIST, COUNSELOR, OR SOCIAL WORKER?

Parenting gifted children can be a challenge, as they may develop at a different pace than their age mates. Beyond demonstrating advanced abilities, they may exhibit intense emotions, have difficulty connecting with peers, and sometimes say and do unusual things. In addition to personal support, psychologists and

neuropsychologists are the go-to professionals for administering IQ tests and neuropsychological evaluations, which can help parents and educators better understand a gifted child's unique needs. Therapists and counselors may be able to help your child work through social issues, family situations, anxiety, perfectionism, and coping with frustration, among other issues. **Finding a Mental Health Professional** can help.

#### Resource

Peters, M. P. (2018). *Finding a mental health professional*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

### How can I nurture my child's interests and passions beyond school?

**GIFTED CHILDREN ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN THEIR INTELLECT OR TALENT.** To fully support and help children reach their potential, parents and educators must address their full range of needs: cognitive, social, emotional, physical, psychological, and more. It is important to nurture the **whole gifted child**.

In school, gifted children often cannot delve as deeply as they would like into the subjects that interest them—whether academic, **creative**, athletic pursuits, or even hobbies. Enrichment activities, typically extending beyond the school curriculum, can fulfill this need, with the added benefit of socializing with like-minded peers. **Enrichment** programs exist in a wide variety of formats and usually occur after school, on the weekend, or during the summer. Some local universities operate gifted centers that offer a range of programs; private, independent organizations offer STEM, art, music, computer coding, and other programs designed to spark curiosity in gifted minds. Ask fellow parents, teachers, and administrators about programs in your area. A local community college may be another resource to address your child's interests. Check out the **NAGC Gifted & Talented Resources Directory** for hundreds of offerings from providers across the U.S.

#### Resources

Brulles, D., Hébert, T., Inman, T. F., & Newsom, T. (2020). *Serving the whole gifted child*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Joerg, M., & Smutny, J. F. (2018). *Enrichment*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

Smutny, J. F., Shade, P. G. (2017). *Nurturing creativity*. [bit.ly/NAGC\\_TIP](https://bit.ly/NAGC_TIP)

For information about providers of summer, online and residential programs, check out NAGC's Gifted & Talented Resources Directory at <https://giftedandtalentedresourcesdirectory.com>



#### Author's Note

A parent and passionate advocate, **Kathleen Nilles** has served as the editor of *Parenting for High Potential* since 2013. She has fully immersed herself in understanding the needs of the gifted, as well as related issues at the national, state, and local levels. Kathleen often presents at national and state gifted conferences and is a frequent workshop facilitator for parents of gifted children. She is co-editor of the book *Success Strategies for Parenting Gifted Kids* and co-producer of the film, *Through Gifted Eyes*. She holds a master's in gifted education from Northeastern Illinois University.