

How to explain "giftedness" to your child

What should you tell your child about being gifted?

Whether identified as gifted, referred for an evaluation, or placed in a “gifted and talented program,” children quickly form their own impressions. They may wonder if this makes them different or smarter or weirder or better than the other kids. They may worry that they will become less popular or will be teased or bullied. *They might even want to stop being gifted altogether.*

Understanding giftedness is not easy

Understanding giftedness is complicated for adults; it is even more challenging for a six-, eight- or ten-year-old child. They are too young to fully grasp what giftedness means or place it in a context that makes sense. Gifted children already know they are different. They have probably heard both compliments and criticism about their quirks, talents, and precocious behaviors. The “gifted” label can provide some validation for what they already know to be true, but it also might evoke confusion and anxiety.

Your child needs your help.

Children need their parents to provide a framework for understanding what being "gifted" means. The following are some possible explanations you might offer to your child:

1. Gifted is just a word.

It doesn't mean that someone is better than anyone else. It was named a long time ago because people felt that it was a “gift” to be able to learn so easily. People might feel the same way about kids who run really fast or can slam dunk a basketball. You are so fortunate to be able to learn so quickly. But it doesn't make you a better person. People are special for all kinds of wonderful reasons. Being gifted does not make someone any more special than the next person.

2. Gifted is a word given to kids who have different learning needs.

Everyone is different. Just like some people are taller or shorter than others, or more or less athletic, some people need a different approach in school to make learning more interesting. Everyone learns at a different pace, just like people grow taller at different rates. Some people need their teachers to teach a little more slowly, and others do best when they can move quickly through the topic. You seem to need teaching that lets you move quickly or spend a lot of time exploring a topic in depth.

3. You were found to be “gifted” because of some tests you took.

We asked the school to [give you these tests](#) because you complained about being bored. We knew that if the testing labeled you as “gifted,” we could ask the school to give you more interesting work. We didn't care if you were gifted or not. We didn't care what score you got on the test. The only reason for taking it was so the school could give you more choices and make school more interesting. (Note: it is never a good idea to tell a young child his or her [IQ score](#).) Now that the school knows your test results, they can find more interesting school work that is more suited to what you need.

4. Giftedness is something that is a part of you.

Giftedness is just like your eye color or height. It doesn't come from how hard you work in school, and will not go away if you slack off. It is always there and gives you some great choices to do some really creative/intensive/interesting/(you fill in the blanks) things. You can't turn it on and off like a light switch. Being gifted affects how you see the world and think - not just how you perform in school. But if you work hard, you can achieve a lot. If you don't, you will lose out on the opportunities your abilities have given you. Just like you can decide what clothes you wear or what haircut you get, only YOU can decide how to use your abilities.

5. You are a lot more than your giftedness.

Even though being gifted is a part of who you are, it is not everything. There is so much more to who you are, and so much we love about you. Your intelligence and talents are just one small piece, and we wouldn't love you any less than if you had different color eyes or hair. You have so many great qualities and interests, and we are so happy that we get to know them.

6. Giftedness comes in all shapes and sizes.

Some kids are really gifted with math. Some are great writers. Some are born leaders. Others paint up a storm. Occasionally, a few gifted children are good at many things;

most are not. You have subjects in school that come really easily to you, and interests that you love. We hope you continue to put a lot of energy into these things. But you still need to work hard in those areas that are not easy for you.

7. Gifted children sometimes feel they are different from other kids.

Even if you like how easy school is, it can be uncomfortable when you [feel like you are different](#) from a lot of the other kids in your class. It's normal to feel this way. We can help you to figure out what to say if other kids make comments about your interests. We also can help you find things you *do* have in common with some of the other kids, or help you find outside activities that school does not offer. Being a kid can be hard for everyone - even for some of the other kids who look like they have it easy. Friendships may become easier to find when you get older - but we will help you get through whatever is hard for you right now.

8. Giftedness is not an excuse.

Being gifted does not mean school should be easy. We know that some of your classes may be too basic for you, which is why we are trying to find opportunities inside and outside of school that will challenge you. We don't expect you to be perfect, but want you to try hard and put in your best effort. Success at anything takes hard work and [practice](#). Not everything you are going to do at school - or later in a job - is going to be interesting, so you have to learn to do the hard work even if you don't like it.

9. We love you no matter what

You don't have to be gifted or smart or talented or do well in school for us to love you. We love you for who you are and always will. You don't have to be perfect or prove anything or live up to your giftedness. You just need to figure out what interests you and let yourself delve into it. Of course, we would like you to put in effort in school - even when you don't like your classes. That's just life - sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do, like chores at home. But we don't love you any more or less just because you are gifted. We love you because you are you!

These ideas are just a few suggestions for starting a conversation with your gifted child. You will need to modify them to suit *your* child's and your family's beliefs and values. What is most important, though, is conveying that you will help your child navigate this

journey through giftedness, and that ability and achievements play no role in your love and appreciation for your child.

Posted by [Gail Post, Ph.D.](#)