



# Bexley City School District

To provide educational experiences that engage, equip and empower each student.

## QUARTER 3 NEWSLETTER for FAMILIES of GIFTED LEARNERS

March 23, 2021

### Homestretch!

The third quarter of school has ended and we are headed into the homestretch of the end of the year. It is hard to believe we are at this point of the year, and I'm not sure any of us could have imagined the path we have taken to get here. Hopefully everyone had an enjoyable spring break and was able to take advantage of the (slightly) warmer weather and time off to re-energize as we enter this last quarter of the year. This final season is filled with another change in learning mode as most of our students head back into school full time, testing at many grade levels, and a chance to engage in some of the end of year traditions we may have missed last spring. While that is all very exciting and joyous on many levels, it can also bring a sense of uncertainty or anxiety for both students and adults. You may want to revisit the first newsletter this year with tips for helping students during transitions or second newsletter with the article on helping students build their understanding of change. You can find past newsletters at [www.bexleyschools.org/GiftedEducation.aspx](http://www.bexleyschools.org/GiftedEducation.aspx). In this newsletter, we will build upon that and will focus on supporting gifted learners emotional needs during times of transition.

Have a great spring!

Sincerely,

Dr. Colleen Boyle , Coordinator of Curriculum and Gifted

### Anxiety and Depression Among the Gifted

Some of the most beneficial characteristics of gifted learners include things like attention to detail, consideration of multiple perspectives, anticipation and response to complex problems, recognition of patterns, imagination, comprehension of abstract ideas, motivation to succeed, awareness of subtle nuances, and curiosity. However, sometimes, intense gifted students possess and utilize those traits to the extreme, which can create stressors leading to heightened emotional response. Sometimes those emotional responses can lead to more troublesome experiences of clinical anxiety or depression.

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It is important to know that it is normal for humans, including our gifted children, to experience a range of emotions from joy to sorrow, confidence to anxiousness, peace to anger, and everything in between. How boring the human experience would be without those feelings! But, it can be the tendency of humans to try to avoid the unpleasant emotions. Along that same thread, it is just as common for well-meaning parents and caregivers to want to shield their children from those same painful feelings. But, doing so often leads to patterns of behavior with more devastating outcomes that sneak up on an individual at a later time.

It is also important to understand that gifted children's advanced development may result in their awareness of situations that lead to both pleasant and unpleasant emotions earlier than some of their agetates. The gifted brain may experience those emotions more intensely than how they are experienced by most people. Something that might make most people smile and move on may elicit a squeal of joy or giddiness from the gifted child. A circumstance that may result in a fleeting disappointment or sadness may be temporarily devastating to the gifted person. A desire to perform well on something as simple as a short spelling test may ignite perfectionism and unexpected worry. To further complicate things, while cognition and emotional perception may be advanced in light of the gifted child's age, their emotional responses and ability to manage and communicate their feelings may be right on track for their age, thus making the experience seem even more extreme. As a result, gifted individuals can be easily misdiagnosed as having a mental health condition, which can result in inappropriate interventions. Most physicians, psychologists, counselors, and others do not receive training in the characteristics of gifted children resulting in the need for parents and guardians to educate those health care providers in order to avoid misdiagnosis.

There has been an increased focus on the social emotional well-being of all groups during this season of the pandemic, including within the gifted community. Based on research prior to COVID-19, gifted individuals were no more or less likely to be diagnosed with anxiety or depression than others. However, the qualitative reports within the field suggest that those gifted individuals who encounter feelings of anxiety or depression may do so more intensely. As such, there are times when a gifted child's experiences of anxiety or depression warrant support from a mental health professional. If the feelings of anxiety or depressed mood are frequent or persistent or if they are so intense they impact the individual's ability to function in daily life, reach out to your physician or a mental health provider for guidance. If you are not sure if your child's experience has gotten to that threshold, it is always better to ask for support or guidance than to not do so. Below are some resources when considering getting professional help for your gifted child:

- [Ohio Association for Gifted Children Tips for Finding a Psychologist or Counselor](#)
- [SENG Tips for Selecting the Right Counselor or Therapist for Your Gifted Child](#)
- [SENG Misdiagnosis Initiative Website](#) (includes a mental health provider directory and articles about misdiagnosis and dual diagnosis of gifted children and adults - helpful to share with doctors and counselors who may not be familiar with the ins and outs of giftedness)
- [Ohio Psychological Association Directory of Mental Health Providers](#)

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The April 8 family session via Zoom will explore this topic in more depth. Information about that is toward the end of this newsletter. Additionally, the [Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted \(SENG\)](#) organization provides articles, webinars, books, and more related to the topic of anxiety and depression and the overall emotional lives of gifted individuals. I encourage families to take a look, as there is sure to be something of interest on that site.

## Providing Social Emotional Support for Gifted Individuals

In many ways, providing social emotional support for a gifted child is the same as it is for anyone. In a 2019 blog post on [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org), educator Dr. Kate Buchtel suggested the following process for pursuing well-being: “listen, validate, challenge, create, repeat.” Because gifted children often encounter their world with a different take than others, including the adults supporting them, it can be difficult to validate experiences, reactions, or thoughts that are unfamiliar to us. But it all really boils down to listening without judgment and guiding them to next steps.

As the responsible adults in the lives of gifted children, it is also our role to provide boundaries and structure within which our kids operate. Notice I did not say shelter. We need to create a space where it is safe for our kids to experience life and the bumps and bruises that me with it without being overwhelmed or in real danger. It is a tightrope walk to make sure they are not in harm’s way while still providing opportunities for children and teens to make mistakes, get their feelings hurt, or experience other unpleasant realities of life in order to learn how to work through and recover from those experiences. Boundaries might include things like vetting friend and peer groups so they interact with those who value their intelligence and other identity traits while encouraging healthy behaviors among the group, establishing quota limits with social media or access to the news, or setting minimum expectations for course selection or grades. (Side note: If you expect rigorous course selection, give space to your student to earn something other than straight As. If you expect all As, give space for courses that are less demanding.)

To further support social emotional wellness, the adults in the lives of gifted children need to tend to their own well-being. This is both so that you are equipped and energized to support your child and so you can help model what emotional wellness looks like. This includes working through your own emotional experiences and sharing them in an age-appropriate way that your child can replicate when they face their own struggles. If you are aware of how you process your emotional challenges, you will be better able to coach your student through theirs. Again, the goal isn’t to remove their struggle but, rather, to help them process and respond in a proactive manner.

Below are links to articles with practical tips for supporting your children as they process their emotions:

- [When Your Child Goes Overboard: Fears and Compassionate Concerns.](#)
- [De-Escalating: Helping Gifted Children Identify Their Emotions and Regain Control](#)

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Additionally, the following books may be helpful:

- Daniels, Susan and Piechowski, Michael M. *Living with Intensity: Understanding the Sensitivity, Excitability, and the Emotional Development of Gifted Children, Adolescents, and Adults*. Great Potential Press, 2008.
- Fonseca, Christine. *Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students*. Prufrock Press, 2016.
- Peters, Dan. *From Worrier to Warrior: A Guide to Conquering Your Fears*. Gifted Unlimited, LLC, 2013. (written for teens)
- Peters, Dan. *Make Your Worrier to Warrior: A Guide to Conquering Your Child's Fears*. Gifted Unlimited, LLC, 2013. (written for parents)
- Peters, Dan. *The Warrior Workbook: A Guide to Conquering Your Worry Monster*. Gifted Unlimited, LLC, 2013. (written for children)
- Rivera, Lisa. *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens: Living with Intense and Creative Adolescents*. Great Potential Press, 2010.
- Rivera, Lisa. *A Smart Teen's Guide to Living With Intensity: How to Get More Out of Life and Learning*. Great Potential Press, 2010. (written for teens)

## Upcoming Family Engagement Opportunities

Thank you to those who attended our January family meeting as we discussed supporting executive functioning of gifted learners. We will meet again one more time this year via Zoom in April to discuss anxiety and depression among gifted learners. Slides and recordings of previous sessions will be posted on the district's gifted website at [www.bexleyschools.org/GiftedEducation.aspx](http://www.bexleyschools.org/GiftedEducation.aspx).

- *April 8* - Anxiety, Depression, and Giftedness - 6:30-7:30pm - [Join via Zoom](#)

The Renzulli Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development is also hosting a series of monthly 30-minute webinars for parents/guardians of gifted learners. Previous topics include twice-exceptional children, technology during COVID, and talking with children about giftedness. April's session is on the topic of perfectionism and struggle. Information about registering for upcoming events and accessing recordings of past seminars can be found at the bottom of their website at <https://gifted.uconn.edu/events>.

## Summer Opportunities

Summer is a great time for your gifted learner to engage in activities that fuel an existing passion, spark a new one, or allow for low-risk exploration into the unknown. Take a look at our collected list of summer programs throughout Ohio and beyond. The list includes programs for all ages, some specific to gifted and advanced learners, others for all students. Program options include both virtual and in person experiences on topics across all disciplines. [You can find the list here](#).