

SYLVIA RIMM

On Raising Kids



A Newsletter to Help Parents and Teachers

Volume 17

Issue No. 2

KEYS TO PARENTING YOUR GIFTED CHILD*

You think your child is gifted, but you're not really sure. Research indicates that parents' perceptions of their preschool children's giftedness are usually accurate; however, you may not have confidence in your perceptions.

You've observed your friends' children: sometimes they seem as capable as your child, yet at other times those comparisons make your son or daughter seem unusually intelligent. Of course, you really prefer not making comparisons, but they happen anyway.

Should You Test Your Preschool Child?

Age four is usually early enough for a first testing if you require the information for school decision-making. Tests can supply you with important information about your child's intellectual giftedness, as long as you recognize that test results tend to be somewhat unreliable for preschool children. Scores can easily be lowered by shyness, a bad day, or merely fear of a particular tester. Lucky guesses can enhance the score a little, but slightly higher scores cause fewer problems than dramatically lowered scores.



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www.sylviarimm.com
www.seejanewin.com

*Excerpted from *Keys to Parenting the Gifted Child* (3rd Ed.) by Sylvia Rimm, 2006 (Great Potential Press).

Here are several very good reasons for having your preschool child tested:

1. Children who are intellectually gifted may benefit from early entrance to kindergarten, special curriculum planning within kindergarten, or a uniquely enriched preschool environment.
2. Test scores give quantitative data, which you may or may not choose to share with the school when communicating about your child's special needs. These quantitative data are usually based on norms that come from large samples, which permit you to compare your child's development to that of average children of similar age.
3. Weak areas may be discovered that otherwise might be masked by your child's intellectual giftedness. It is not unusual to find verbally gifted children who score poorly in tests of spatial abilities or small motor skills. Preschool testing permits you to assist your child in practicing these skills.
4. Test scores will give you confidence in your personal observations or correct them appropriately. For example, some children are very verbal but do not have abstract thinking skills yet and may appear to be gifted. Tests can prevent you from putting too much pressure on your child.
5. Early test scores provide baseline information that will help you to monitor your child's intellectual growth and progress.

If you've decided there may be a reason to test your child, you'll want to find a tester. If you're determining whether your child should be entered into school early or if you believe your child may require special programming, you could request that your local school psychologist do the testing or find a private psychologist or university psychological center familiar with testing gifted children. There's reason to emphasize that the psychologist be familiar with the specialty of gifted children—not all psychologists are. Don't hesitate to ask. The director of gifted education in your state's department of education or your state association for gifted children may be able to help you to find an appropriate tester. State associations are listed on the website of the National Association for Gifted Children (www.nagc.org).

If you sense that your child is gifted but there are no early entrance decisions or specific curriculum changes that need to be considered, you could postpone testing until first grade. Many gifted children learn to read or do math only at the typical age in first grade, and for those children, individual psychoeducational testing can wait until school age.



School Identification of Giftedness

Public Law 100-297 (1988) provided schools with the most current national definition of giftedness. A similar definition was recommended in the 1993 federal report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent* (Public Law 100-297, Sec. 4103. Definitions):

The term "gifted and talented students" means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities.

Even if your children are gifted, your children's school may not be providing for their types of giftedness. Schools and states differ in their approaches to identifying children for gifted programming, and many do not even provide special programs. Furthermore, some schools may have programs that only provide for certain kinds of giftedness; for example, they may only provide for high achievers and neglect those children who possess leadership, creative, and artistic abilities.



For many years, economically disadvantaged students and minority groups were greatly underserved. More recently, efforts to appropriately identify and program for these populations have increased dramatically.

Some school districts use only group IQ scores for identification of their students. Other schools may include creativity tests, student products (such as artwork or music), peer or parent nominations, and/or teacher recommendations. The identification process may seem quite confusing to parents. However, parents shouldn't hesitate to ask questions of school personnel. Schools will undoubtedly be happy to communicate their philosophies and selection criteria.

Programming for Gifted Children

If you become aware of an actual lack of academic challenge for your gifted child, you'll want to explore ways to obtain a more stimulating and challenging curriculum. This lack of challenge may be brought to your attention by your child or your child's teacher. Gifted resource programs, classroom enrichment and differentiation, and subject acceleration provide appropriate curriculum adjustments for most gifted children. Grade skipping is usually the preferred arrangement for students who have very high IQs and strong overall achievement.

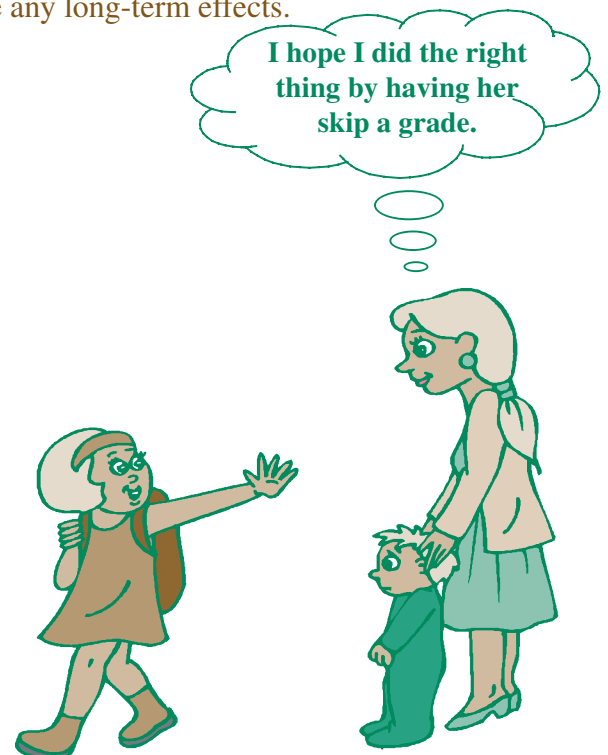
“Grade skipping is usually the preferred arrangement for students who have very high IQs and strong overall achievement”

Parents and teachers often are reluctant to recommend grade skipping from concern that it places too much pressure on the children and that the skipping will negatively affect their social adjustment. Adults may want to remind themselves, however, that doing nothing is also making a decision. If adults don't make accommodations to challenge their gifted children or students, this gives these children a message that academic challenge is a lesser priority than social conformity and that hard work is unimportant. This message of conformity may cause problems when children become adolescents. Teenagers may repeat the message in another form and tell their parents and teachers that social life is their main priority and that they don't want to work hard on their schoolwork.

Individual tests of academic ability (IQ) and achievement are the most important evaluative measures used for acceleration decision-making. Despite the many documented problems of IQ tests, they provide good predictors for successful grade skipping.

The availability and quality of school enrichment programs and the academic makeup of the child's present class, as well as that of the class to which the child would be advanced, should also be considered. Peer academic environments can vary from grade to grade, and sometimes a challenging peer group in the lower grade can provide more appropriate learning than a less challenging peer group in the higher grade.

Other variables that should be considered are motivation, or lack thereof, social adjustment, physical size and maturity, grades, and attitude of the receiving teacher. These are of lesser importance than test scores and academic environment because: (1) grade skipping may improve motivation; (2) all studies indicate that grade skipping has no negative effect on social adjustment, and some research has shown that grade skipping actually helps adjustment; (3) physical size, maturity, and grades don't appear to make a difference in adjustment; and (4) although attitude of the receiving teacher appears to make a dramatic, immediate difference, it does not seem to have any long-term effects.

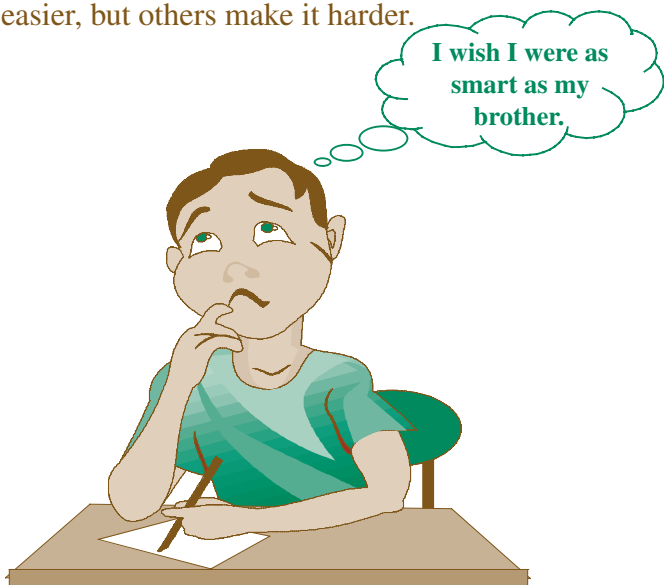


You may wonder why it is that so many parents, teachers, and administrators oppose grade skipping when controlled research documents its success, both academically and socially. People tend to base their evaluations of the success of grade skipping on their personal experiences with children who were grade skipped. Almost everyone can recount a grade-skipping story about an adolescent who has experienced difficult social adjustment problems, and they are quick to assume that the problems were caused by the skipping of one or more grades.

Normal adolescents, however, gifted or otherwise, skipped or not skipped, experience developmentally appropriate problems during adolescence. Sometimes they're not invited to a party where they'd like to be, and they usually must cope with rejection by at least one boyfriend or girlfriend. Unfortunately, when grade-skipped adolescents encounter these typical problems, they, their parents, and their teachers tend to blame the problems on the grade skipping. If they haven't jumped a grade, however, the problems are assumed to be normal. Some research also indicates that profoundly gifted children (those with IQs of over 145) tend to have greater social problems than more typically gifted children; thus the assumption that grade skipping causes social problems is made by adults who are not specialized in the psychology of gifted children.

Family Issues for Gifted Children

Some special parenting issues affect first and only children, especially gifted children, and can enhance their giftedness; other issues can cause serious problems. Some of these issues make parenting easier, but others make it harder.



First children are only children for at least a little time until siblings are born. Sometimes they are only children for many years. Therefore, they are at risk of being attention addicted and too powerful. With a two-to-one, adult-to-child ratio, they easily become the center of adult attention. If you add several grandparents or aunts and uncles, the attention ratio may be multiplied. It's easy to take one child along to adult social functions at which the child may be the center of an adult audience or included in adult conversations. Parents may treat them as consultants—for example, “Where would you like to eat?” or “What would you like to do tonight?” These children feel equally powerful to their parents, and sometimes, even more powerful. Democracy may begin too early for first and only children. They can't imagine why they require adult guidance when they already feel like one of the adults, and they may not do well sharing attention.

“Sibling relationships can also be complicated”

Sibling relationships can also be complicated. Sibling relationships cause concern in all families but having gifted children in the family may complicate sibling matters.

Gifted Children with Less Talented Siblings

Gifted children with very high intelligence or extraordinary talents may present impossible competition in their areas of giftedness for other children in their families. These children's unique abilities often require inordinate investments of time and resources to develop their talents and meet their unconventional needs. In the process, gifted children naturally receive large amounts of attention and recognition. Brothers and sisters must be able to admire their gifted siblings' successes but also must recognize that similar levels of success may not be attainable for them. Less talented siblings must use a different measuring stick to evaluate their own abilities, or they may fall into the trap of viewing their own real successes (and themselves) as failures.

NEW BOOKS BY DR. SYLVIA RIMM

Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers
Keys to Parenting the Gifted Child (3rd Ed.).

Order at: www.sylviarimm.com

Or call (800) 795-7466

One critical underlying principle should always guide you in decision-making: each child should be provided with the best possible opportunities for intellectual and creative development. A belief in equal treatment in the name of democracy can easily misguide you to withdraw opportunities for gifted children because other siblings are unable to participate. On the other hand, fair treatment provides all children in the family with affordable and attractive opportunities that fit their special interests and capabilities. Treating siblings the same can actually exacerbate the competition they feel. Within my book you'll find many other topics.

“A belief in equal treatment in the name of democracy can easily misguide you to withdraw opportunities for gifted children”

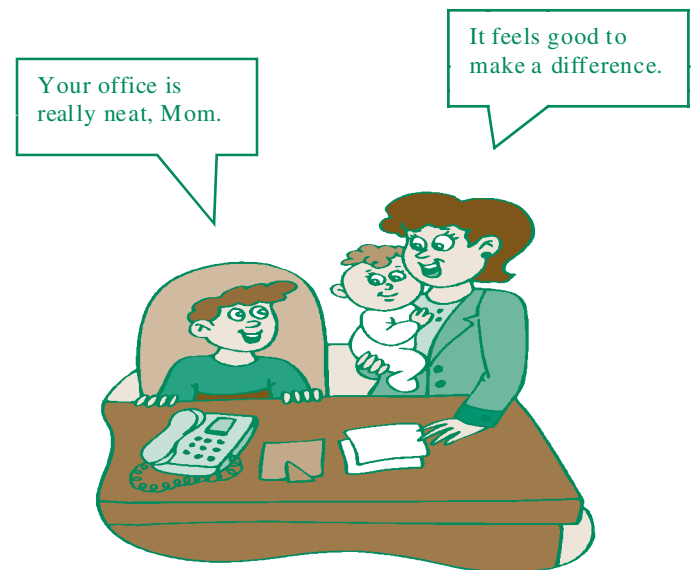
Other chapters in *Keys to Parenting the Gifted Child* (3rd Ed.).

- ◆ How to Enhance Learning in the Family
- ◆ Parenting with a United Front
- ◆ Homework Issues
- ◆ Underachievement
- ◆ Perfectionism
- ◆ Gifted Children With Disabilities
- ◆ Peer Pressure
- ◆ Risk-Taking for Inhibited Gifted Children
- ◆ Parent-School Communications
- ◆ Challenge Alternatives for Gifted Tweens and Teens
- ◆ Blended Families
- ◆ Educational Alternatives
- ◆ Career Direction and Selection
- ◆ Creativity, Pretending, and Lying
- ◆ Talent Search Websites
- ◆ Additional Resources for Parents
- ◆ Computers and the Internet
- ◆ Gender Issues
- ◆ Profoundly Gifted Children

Parent Pointer*
Designing An Achiever Image

Try some positive achievement messages about your work to inspire your gifted children to become hard workers:

- ☺ It’s been a hard day, but a good day.
- ☺ I really helped someone today.
- ☺ My education really paid off. I’m doing a job I enjoy.
- ☺ This may not be an ideal job, but I’m learning.
- ☺ Your dad is really respected for his work.
- ☺ I guess you have to pay your dues. I don’t mind doing a little extra.
- ☺ Let me tell you about my interesting day.
- ☺ It feels good to make a difference.
- ☺ I don’t know how your mom does it all—Girl Scout leader, great cook, a college student, and a great wife. You’re lucky kids.



NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids is published quarterly. The introductory price is \$16/year; \$20 thereafter. A special school district rate to copy for all the parents is available.

For more information, or to order:
1-800-795-7466 • www.sylviarimm.com

*From *Parent Pointer, Learning Leads Q-Cards*. (Apple Publishing, 1996).

How to Praise to Motivate Without Pressure

- ✓ Do praise your children as “good workers,” “persevering,” “bright,” “creative,” “kind,” or “attractive.” Please don’t use terms like “brilliant,” “extraordinary,” “perfect,” “stunning,” “spectacular,” “genius,” “best,” “most beautiful,” or “favorite.” The former are qualities children can control by their own efforts. The latter may be internalized as impossible goals, are highly competitive, and will cause children to feel pressure.
- ✓ Don’t praise your children for every accomplishment, every word or drawing, or clever piece of knowledge. Permit them to enjoy the inner rewards of learning and creating. Be sure to insist that they work and play alone for a little time each day so they can experience the fun of learning and don’t become attention addicted.
- ✓ Moderate praise may empower children to feel confident and to love learning. Extreme praise may enslave them to pressure and dependence. Children who have been told they’re the best believe they must always be the best. Children who have been admired as “perfect” believe that they must be perfect. “Perfect” and “the best” don’t live in the real world. Don’t imprison your children with impossible goals in the hope of building their self-confidence.

Family Achievement Clinic Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D., Director

Family Achievement Clinic specializes in working with capable children who are not performing to their abilities in school. Gifted children are the clinic’s specialty. The clinic also offers a comprehensive range of psychological services centered on children, adolescents and their families. Services include therapy for underachievement syndrome, attention deficit disorders, anxieties, and oppositional problems, as well as parenting and marriage therapy, divorce counseling, and career planning.

For appointments,
Cleveland, OH 216-839-2273
Hartland, WI 800-795-7466

Teacher Tips*

How to Help a Student Set Goals for Moving to a Higher Reading Group

Mr. Reed: You know, Mark, that since the school psychologist tested you and since you’ve been completing more of your reading workbook pages, I’ve realized that you have the ability to move up to the high reading group. You are a very good reader and I would like to see you challenged.

Mark: (smiling) Mr. Reed, I think I could read with the “Blue Birds” but they have too much work to do and I don’t think I could finish it all.

Mr. Reed: The tests tell me that you could, with a little practice and a little catching up. All the reading you do at home has been a big help.

Mark: (still smiling) You mean I could just read with the other group right away?

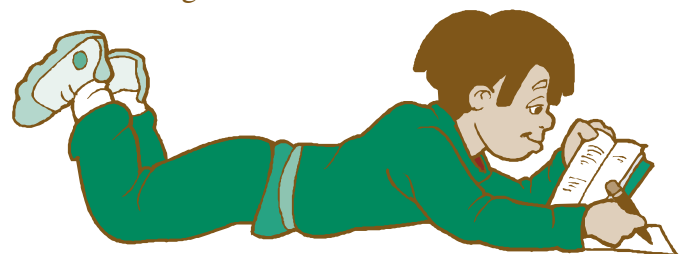
Mr. Reed: No, not exactly, but let me show you what you would have to do. (Demonstrate with textbook and workbook.) Here’s where your group is. There are 20 stories that I would want you to read and I’ve picked out 20 of the most important workbook pages. If you come see me for a few minutes after school every day, I can make sure you understand the instructions for the work page. You should read one story and do one workbook page a day at home. You can bring the workbook page in and mark what you’ve done on the chart. If you follow through, in 20 days you’d be ready to take your reading test. I feel certain you could pass it and you’d be ready for the challenge of that high group.

Mark: (hesitatingly) Do you really think I could do all that?

Mr. Reed: Absolutely. It won’t seem so hard because you do just a little at a time.

Mark: I guess I’ll try. I’d like to be up there with my friend, Alan.

Mr. Reed: Well, that’s where you belong, so let’s write a little agreement.



*From *Teacher Tips, Learning Leads Q-Cards* (Apple Publishing, 1990).



Sylvia Says...

Dear Dr. Sylvia:

My 11-year-old son is in the accelerated learning program in his school. While he's bright, he also has a great deal of difficulty in making and keeping friends. He seems to believe he's superior to his peers, teachers, and even my husband and me. In talking with my son's teachers and school counselor, we've been told that social counseling may benefit him. How do I find someone who is trained to deal with this problem?

Sometimes gifted children feel superior to others because they learn things easily. While academic intelligence is important to school learning and often to career success, gifted children are happier and more successful if they develop good social skills as well. Every child needs friends. Furthermore, kids should value others for far more than their intelligence. Being sensitive, kind, insightful, thoughtful, and fun doesn't interfere with intellectual ability but only heightens what gifted children can accomplish in life. Your son's teacher or counselor can probably recommend a child psychologist in the area that helps children develop a valuing of others and social skills. Kids improve their relationships with other children by learning these skills.

Because your son acts in a superior fashion even to you and his teachers, there may be more than a lack of social skills at the root of his problems. Your son may also be overempowered, and sometimes that problem comes with giftedness. Family dynamics may cause your child to feel more intelligent than his parents. I've often heard parents say things about their gifted child like, "he sure has a better IQ than I have," or "she's a lot smarter than I ever was." Parents may be so intimidated by their child's brilliance that they forget they're only children, and adult wisdom is more critical than an IQ score for raising children.

I don't exactly know why your son acts in a superior way, but it will surely cause problems in his world if he isn't humble enough to appreciate the guidance of adults. It would be important to not only find some social skills counseling for him but also some counseling for your parenting of your gifted child. There are some characteristics about gifted children that can easily trap parents into overempowering them.

These are my demands.



Columns in this newsletter are from Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids newspaper column. If the column is not in your local paper, suggest it to the editor.

You may send questions to Dr. Rimm at PO Box 32, Watertown, WI 53094 or DrRimm@sylviarimm.com

Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids Newspaper Column online at www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures.html (next, click Dr. Rimm's picture)

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Dear Dr. Sylvia:

My daughter is six years old and has been identified by her school as gifted. She is bright, highly sensitive, and wants to know everything. She is bored with school and begs to be homeschooled, but she wants to be homeschooled after going to “real school” all day to socialize. I have two younger children (three and one) and my husband and I would like to have a fourth child, so homeschooling seems like a very big challenge to me!

My daughter is a sponge at school, but often does not finish work or hurries to finish assignments because she has been so busy watching or listening. She has so many different interests that keeping her on one subject for more than a few minutes is a challenge. If she is interested in a topic, she can sit and absorb the material for hours. I observed her watching a program on PBS about physics for an hour, and then she said, “That is what I want to learn at school. Did you see him make that pipe sing by heating it up? That was amazing. Can we get a book on physics at the library?” I offered to find a book during our weekly trip to the library, but that was not soon enough for her. She dissolved into a two-year-old, complete with kicking and screaming because we would not take her that very minute.

This is a daily occurrence in our home. One minute we deal with a six-year-old that wants to have a friend sleep over. Then we deal with a 25-year-old who wants to purchase some new books so that she can be homeschooled, but realizes that the budget just won't stretch that far. Within minutes our six-year-old as two-year-old returns with a screaming fit if I leave her alone in the room, and she says, “What if someone had tried to steal me?” Please, where do we begin? What books should we be reading? What discipline techniques should we be trying? Should we homeschool? How do I teach her to be a child? What in the world do I do to maintain my own sanity and the sanity of her siblings and father?

Your gifted daughter is obviously very intense and strong-willed. She has much to learn about being patient. I wonder if you feel intimidated by her giftedness and find it difficult to say no to her, only because she is so bright.

It is wonderful to have a child wish to learn so much, but she can wait until you take her to the library to follow up about her physics interest. She'd probably

love a set of encyclopedias or books that she could search through for her interests. As she learns to use the computer she'll be able to pursue websites more independently on the Internet. Encouraging her independent learning will certainly help.

Related to her speed and carelessness in school, you should explain that the quality of her work is more important than the quantity and she needs to take pride in the papers she completes.

It's all right to tell your daughter that homeschooling is simply out of the question. Hopefully the school that has identified her giftedness will also provide appropriately challenging curriculum for her. It would be good if you could spend a little time reading and sharing interests with her every day when the other children are asleep. Some of her moodiness and demands may only represent her search for attention after being dethroned by two other siblings.

Although some gifted children have uneven development, that is they may be intellectual beyond their age and emotionally at their age, it's important to keep in mind that gifted children are primarily children and only secondarily are they gifted. They can trap you into thinking of them as much more adultlike because of their advanced vocabulary or knowledge. Don't let that fool you. Your daughter needs to be parented and needs limits like all children do. Her curiosity and interest in learning should be encouraged, but she can learn to be patient.

