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Characteristics and Traits of a Gifted Preschooler



Source: [American Association for Gifted Children](#)

Is your preschool child gifted? Here are some traits to look for, provided by the American Association of Gifted Children:

Language and Learning

- talks and reads early and has a large vocabulary
- demonstrates advanced language proficiency
- enjoys self-expression, especially in discussion
- has unique learning style
- has greater than average attention span
- asks many questions
- exhibits advanced observational skills and retains information about what is observed or read
- is challenged by problems, and chooses sophisticated activities, such as chess or collecting, as early as age 5 and shows interest in many kinds of books, atlases, and encyclopedias
- is interested in calendars, clocks, and puzzles
- is proficient in drawing, music, or other arts

Psychomotor Development and Motivation

- walks early and displays early or advanced fine motor control in writing, coloring, and building things; loves projects that require inquiry
- is driven to explore things, is curious, asks "why"
- wants to master the environment; enjoys learning
- is extremely active and goal oriented
- has wide-ranging, consuming interests

Personal-Social Characteristics

- spends less time sleeping
- is more dependent on adults for communication
- interacts with adults more effectively than with children, and struggles with adult inconsistency
- is sensitive to dishonesty and insincerity in adults
- demonstrates awareness of issues, such as death, war, and world hunger

*(*A child does not have to exhibit all or even a majority of these characteristics to be identified as gifted. Seeing a number of traits in one child, however, indicates a need to take a closer look at the extent of the child's giftedness.)*

While many educators have emphasized the need to identify giftedness in young children, there is seldom a concerted effort to identify primary level children for gifted programs and preschoolers have almost no opportunity to be evaluated and placed in programs that meet their needs. One of the main reasons cited for not acting to identify young children is the inadequacy of identification procedures.

The National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1988) has adopted a position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, which expresses concern about the use of standardized testing for placing young children in special programs and the practice of making decisions based on a single score or measure. Their position is based on agreements that instruments used for such selection are not reliable and valid when used with very young children. Further, teachers are often unable to recognize signs of giftedness in young children and continue to select only students who are high achievers in the classroom (Roedell, 1985, Whitmore, 1982). Parents are fairly accurate identifiers of gifted preschoolers, but need other indicators.

Valuable Data for Evaluating Giftedness

(Karnes and Taylor, 1978)

Information from Parents and Others

- biographical and developmental evidence
- interests and activities
- personality and behavioral characteristics

Information from teachers, school psychologists, and other school and social services personnel

- developmental level; personality & behavioral characteristics
- examples of schoolwork
- testing and evaluation data
- standardized testing and intelligence testing
- systematic observation with rating scales or checklists of behavioral characteristics
- specific products, such as printing of letters or words, addition of numbers, or drawings

Traditional assessment instruments often fail to identify gifted students from the population of economically disadvantaged, limited English pro-ficient, and minority children. Educators are trying

to make necessary changes to address these issues by using more direct observations and helping parents and teachers to develop portfolios on children that will provide professionals with a better understanding of their potential and their areas of exceptionality.

As students enter school, testing or other assessment outcomes, often serves as the primary determining factor in the placement of children into particular grades, classes, sections, and special programs in school. These gauges of achievement, proficiency, and aptitude can make up the core of a school's routing system, leading, in theory, to the most appropriate levels of challenge, variety, and enrichment locally available to each student. If the quality of a child's testing and assessment experience seems questionable, additional testing may help resolve many of the relevant issues.

Parents are generally accepting of the assessment approaches used by local schools. They determine the school's tests and measure to be adequate tools for assessing the needs and abilities of their children, or, because assessments can be a little intimidating, may simply defer to the judgment of school officials on such matters. Placing such trust in educators is not unreasonable. Teachers, counselors, and principals are professionals who have made it their mission to educate our children. Still, in certain cases, parents may justifiably feel that their child's assessment needs have not been adequately met.

Parents in pursuit of additional testing for their children should first seek the advice of local school or district officials, such as counselors or Gifted/Talented Coordinators. Parents should remember to allow these educators to be their allies and not force them into an adversarial role.

Some Contacts for Evaluation & Testing

Educators may know of special testing opportunities or be able to offer direction to testing specialists or other resource persons who can provide the desired assistance. Other possibilities for referrals or direct testing assistance include local mental health centers, graduate school psychology clinics, and community counseling and guidance clinics.

Once a source for additional testing is identified, and before the decision to test is finalized, parents should assure themselves that the chosen option will, indeed, benefit them and their students. All test scores are not immediately relevant for placement of other applications. Parents should determine what specific information will be gained. They must also be certain that the testing results will be effectively communicated. Test results that are not stated in a clear, understandable manner are of no use to parents or school officials. A tester should welcome the inquiries of concerned parents. Hesitation by the tester to respond to parental inquiries may signal the need to go elsewhere for assistance.

If testing is considered, parents should discuss the test and the reasons for the test with the child. Parents should attempt to make the testing experience as comfortable as possible for the student so that testing performance is not hampered by anxiety, stress, or other distractions, and the goal of securing better assessment information can be achieved.

Common Testing Terms

Ability (aptitude) test: a test, not closely linked to a specific curriculum, that is used to predict a student's future performance.

Achievement test: a test that measures prior know-ledge usually linked to a specific subject or course.

Criterion-referenced: a score that compares a student's performance to specific standards.

Grade equivalent score: a student's standing in relation to others in terms of grade and month in the school year.

Norm group: the group used as a point of comparison for a test.

Norm-referenced: a score that compares a student's performance to that of people in a norm group.

Out-of level test: a test that features questions or other assessment devices that are generally considered most appropriate for students of greater age or higher grade.

Percentile rank: a comparison of one student's score with the scores of people in the norm group.

Standardized test: a test that is administered and scored under the same conditions for all students.

Stanine score: a score utilizing a nine-point scale found in some standardized tests.

The American Association For Gifted Children, *Preschool Project*

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