

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development

# **TWICE- EXCEPTIONALITY**

A Resource Guide for Parents

# THE DAVIDSON INSTITUTE

This guidebook was written and published by the Davidson Institute for Talent Development. Started in 1999, the Davidson Institute is a 501(c)3 private operating foundation. Our mission is to recognize, nurture and support profoundly intelligent young people ages 18 and under, and to provide opportunities for them to develop their talents to make a positive difference.

The Davidson Institute's Young Scholars program supports the families of profoundly gifted children through free services and resources including individualized consulting, an online community, and in-person connections. We also support teachers and administrators through our Educator's Guild, an online community and resource hub for elementary, secondary and post-secondary educators, as well as other professionals committed to meeting the unique needs of highly gifted young people.

For general questions, please contact us at [info@davidsongifted.org](mailto:info@davidsongifted.org).

If you are part of the Davidson Young Scholars program, please reach out to a Family Consultant via the Young Scholars Private Website if you have more questions or would like support in guiding your child who is 2E.

*This guidebook can be accessed on the Davidson Institute's public website at <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Young-Scholars/Free-Guidebooks>.*

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

The Davidson Institute is committed to supporting the profoundly gifted population including the many children who are twice-exceptional (2E) within our community. Though this isn't an exhaustive text, this guidebook is meant to act as a launch pad for parents to learn more about twice-exceptionality, the process of identification and assessment, and how to support children who are 2E intellectually, emotionally and socially.

This guidebook includes:

- **First-Hand Stories** from 2E families to give you insight from people who have "been there, done that." (These stories were contributed by members of the Young Scholar community, and all names have been changed to protect the identity of the Young Scholars.)
- **Expert Q & As** on a variety of specialized topics with professionals currently working in the fields of twice-exceptionality and education.
- **Resource Highlights** that showcase some of the organizations parents in our community have found helpful in navigating the 2E world.
- **Side Notes** that include article excerpts which dive deep into topics related to the issues discussed in each section.
- **Parent Tools** created by our team to help you translate the section's information to your own family and situation.
- **Key Takeaways** that summarize the main points at the end of each section.

Beyond the Resource Highlights, each section also cites and discusses additional helpful books, articles, organizations and other resources. All these resources have been conveniently gathered into one page on the Davidson Gifted Database: the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#) page. This page has been divided by section so that you can quickly find the resources discussed as well as additional readings on that section's main topics.

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# SECTION A

## DEFINING TWICE-EXCEPTIONALITY

### Betsey's Story

In first grade, my daughter reported being "bored." She would often take a very long time to finish even simple homework and refused to do some types of homework, especially coloring. Her teacher commented that Betsey stared out the window. We met with the school to ask about enrichment, but there were no opportunities. The principal stated that, in this district, many children have test scores like hers.

In second grade, Betsey continued to complain about boredom. The teacher again reported that she was disengaged and stared out the window. She regularly did not finish class work on time or timed tests. Betsey took an exceptionally long time to finish homework, but she received average to above average grades on her report card. That year, Betsey scored in the 97th percentile on a standardized test. She got every answer she attempted correct but did not finish the test.

In third grade, Betsey's grades were average. Her handwriting was below grade level, but her Lexile score (reading level) was equivalent to a typical eleventh-grade student. Her third grade teacher suggested an evaluation for an attention disorder. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 26, 2015)

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At the Davidson Institute, we know that every profoundly gifted child has a unique set of talents, abilities and challenges. Some profoundly gifted children are considered twice-exceptional (2E). This means they have been "identified as gifted/talented in one or more areas while also possessing a learning, emotional, physical, sensory, and/or developmental disability" (Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Huber, 2006, p. 14).

Few resources exist for profoundly gifted individuals, and fewer exist for people who are 2E. One reason for this is the debate over who qualifies as 2E.

## WHAT CHALLENGES EXIST IN DEFINING TWICE-EXCEPTIONALITY?

There are many stakeholders in the debate about who is 2E: the individuals who identify as 2E, parents, educators, psychologists, therapists, school administrators and policy-makers. And while there are some exceptionalities that are more clear-cut, most exceptionalities also have contested definitions and processes for identification—including giftedness.

Many have put forth definitions. Some include only learning disabilities, disorders and differences. Others are broad and include a range of difficulties that may impact a person's academic, physical, social and emotional abilities. Still others frame twice-exceptionality as a tension between strengths and vulnerabilities. The three definitions below show how much definitions can differ:

1. The National Twice-Exceptional Community of Practice, a group that includes "organizations and individuals representing a broad range of stakeholders" in the 2E world (Amend, 2015, para. 1), has stated, "Twice exceptional (2E) individuals evidence exceptional ability and disability, which results in a unique set of circumstances. Their exceptional ability may dominate, hiding their disability; their disability may dominate, hiding their exceptional ability; each may mask the other so that neither is recognized or addressed." (Amend, 2015, para. 2)
2. Drs. Susan Assouline and Megan Foley Nicpon write, "Some students who fall under the umbrella of twice-exceptionality may have high overall ability and low academic achievement, others may have high achievement and ability with social and emotional concerns, and still others may have artistic or leadership talents with social and communication deficits. However, all will show differences between 'potential and achievement' (Morrison & Rizza, 2007, p. 63) that require attention to address the areas of strengths and vulnerabilities." (Assouline & Foley Nicpon, 2015, p. 203)
3. The *2e Newsletter* states that twice-exceptional is "a term often used to describe kids who are exceptional because they're gifted and because they have learning disabilities, learning disorders, attention difficulties, or just plain learning differences." (What's 2e?, n.d.)

As you can see, the first definition focuses on how twice-exceptionality can be expressed in an individual. The second puts it in terms of achievement. The third defines it as a learning

difference of some sort.

The lack of a definitive description of twice-exceptionality has led to several issues. Beverly Trail (2011) has argued that this "has resulted in only a limited number of gifted students with disabilities being identified" (p. 12). Susan Assouline, Megan Foley Nicpon, and Staci Fosenburg (2014) have also argued that general descriptions of twice-exceptionality obscure the fact that there is "significant heterogeneity among the population of twice exceptional students" (Section 1, p. 2). Along with other factors, the disparity over the definition has left some individuals and families in need overlooked, misunderstood and under-supported.

## HOW DO I DEFINE TWICE-EXCEPTIONALITY FOR MY FAMILY?

Because there is no definitive definition of twice-exceptionality, it's important to develop your own definition of twice-exceptionality that truly fits your child. Having a way of speaking about your child's strengths and challenges can be helpful in the advocacy process and in thinking about ways to support your child.

One place to start is to look at how your school or state defines twice-exceptionality. Definitions of twice-exceptionality can vary at both the state and local levels (Trail, 2011, p. 12). To that end, you might also try researching the National Association for Gifted Children's list of state gifted associations and departments of education.

As you read resources on twice-exceptionality, giftedness and your child's particular challenges, you'll grow your twice-exceptionality vocabulary and deepen your understanding of twice-exceptionality.

To build your own definition of twice-exceptionality, you may want to:

- Highlight words you think describe your child well;
- Note which phrases seem to best communicate how your child learns as you work with teachers, administrators and other professionals;
- Think through how both your child's giftedness and challenges affect him or her academically, socially and emotionally; and
- Select a couple moments that you can quickly share about your child that truly captures what a day-in-the-life is like.

Your child's talents and struggles don't exist in separate spheres; they affect one another and coexist to make up your unique child. It's helpful to have a definition that highlights both your child's strengths and relative weaknesses as well as your child's other exceptional characteristics. The following template and examples were created to help you craft such a definition.

# PARENT TOOL WRITE YOUR OWN 2E DEFINITION

My child is intellectually talented and is diagnosed with dyslexia. Academically, this means that he is very capable of retaining lots of information, understanding complex concepts, working three grade-levels above in math; he's a tinkerer who likes understanding the "how" and "why" behind things. This also means he has challenges with reading and writing. He learns best when information is presented visually. Socially, this means that he thrives in situations where there are older kids or lots of math-y kids, and he has trouble with relating to many of his age-peers. Emotionally, this means that he feels things intensely and that he has difficulties with his self-esteem. Overall, his strengths are math, building things and theater, and he needs support in reading, writing and boosting his confidence.

My child is profoundly gifted and struggles with processing information quickly. Academically, this means that she is very capable of understanding advanced material and thinking well-beyond her age. This also means she has challenges with written output and timed tests. She learns best when she has time to read material and then discuss it with someone; she produces her best work when she's allowed to go at her own pace. Socially, this means that she thrives in situations where she has time to "warm up" before participating, and she has trouble with transitioning between activities. Emotionally, this means that she has a developed sense of justice and how things "should be" and that she has difficulties when she perceives people are being unfair or mean. Overall, her strengths are observation and intuition (she has a great sense of how people, things, and systems work), and she needs support in translating her ideas and thought process into standard forms of output.

# WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE 2E?

## Pete's Story

My son's thirst for learning greatly declined after kindergarten. That year, he had a teacher that provided him with learning materials that were at his level. Once he got to first grade, he would tire out easily. He started to say things like, "I hate myself" and "I wish I was never born." He had headaches and stomachaches over social situations at school. He daydreamed a lot. We noticed poor frustration tolerance, which had been present since he was a toddler. Even when my son skipped a year of school, these problems persisted. At that point, we went to a tester who was familiar with gifted children. He confirmed our suspicions that our son was 2E. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 21, 2015)

Although characteristics of people who are 2E can vary, these individuals may exhibit some shared characteristics. Many young people who are 2E are able to conceptualize quickly, perceive patterns and identify the relationships between disparate information, but may experience difficulty carrying out tasks within the classroom. For example, one child may be gregarious and talk at length about a topic in great detail but struggle with organizing those thoughts on paper. Another child may be anxious in social situations and struggle with understanding emotions of others; thus, she may get marked down for not contributing to class or placed in a social skills class. That same child, though, may be able to retain a lot of auditory information and be a talented musician. A third may be passing as a typical student at school but has hidden depths and talents.

Raising a child who is 2E can feel isolating. However, there is a wide and varied community of families who have experience with twice-exceptionality. The personal stories throughout this guidebook are intended to show the rich diversity amongst children who identify as 2E. These are just a few examples of what twice-exceptionality looks like.

## Cassidy's Story

I always knew that Cassidy was gifted. It was evident from her early speech, early reading and insatiable curiosity. But, from the very beginning of her school career, handwriting was difficult for her. This became more and more evident as the handwriting demands of her classes increased in middle school and high school. Particularly problematic was writing down the homework assignments, tests, etc. The teachers expected all students to copy these off the whiteboard. Cassidy simply could not do this in the time allowed. She had great difficulty keeping up with written homework and special projects, partly because she didn't want to use a computer for this. It would make her work appear different from other students' assignments. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 29, 2015)

For children like Cassidy, Pete and Betsey, identification of both their talents and their challenges were important for developing strategies that could help them grow. Identification and assessment of children who are 2E is the topic of the next section. For more resources on understanding the 2E community broadly and for the list of resources referenced in this section, please see the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

New to the 2E community? Check out the **2e Newsletter**. This online organization publishes a bimonthly newsletter and has a collection of resources for families, including a list of 2E-friendly schools and a database of professionals who have experience with children who are 2E. Look for their "Spotlight on 2e" booklet series (available from their store) and their free, online Parent Primer.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is no universal definition for twice-exceptionality. For this reason, it's important to develop your own definition that fits your unique child.
- There is no "typical" 2E individual, though there are some characteristics that some children who are 2E share.
- Young people who are 2E are exceptional in many ways, and this can make children and parents feel different from others. However, there is a rich 2E community that grows stronger as families find each other and as resources (like this guidebook) are developed to support this community.

# SECTION B

## IDENTIFICATION & ASSESSMENT

### Katherine's Story

"When Katherine was five and six, I started to see that she was learning to read much differently than her older brother. She first became interested in reading at age four, but she was too frustrated and gave it up. At five, she started reading in earnest, but I could tell that her reading fluency was purely a factor of memorizing hundreds and hundreds of sight words rather than decoding them. She was in private school then. Her teachers assured me that there was no issue. She was consistently reading and writing above grade level. She was in all of the highest reading and math groups. I pursued evaluation nonetheless." (Anonymous, personal communication, April 10, 2015)

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The last section discussed how defining twice-exceptionality can be difficult. This section examines why the identification process can be challenging and the ins-and-outs of assessment.

There are a few reasons why identifying twice-exceptionality can be complex:

**Sometimes a child's giftedness is clearly evident and hides areas of challenge.** In this scenario, the child has abilities in a distinct area such as in learning languages, art or math; this is recognized by teachers or tests. But, as *Parenting Your Twice Exceptional Child* states, "despite their intelligence, these students never seem to work up to their potential... Many times these students wear a label such as *underachiever* or *lazy*. Their failure to achieve is seen as deliberate, not the result of conditions beyond their control" (2010, p. 2). This can be frustrating because a child wants to pursue a talent but something is holding him back.

**Other children who are twice-exceptional (2E) have a clear learning difference or physical condition, and their giftedness is overlooked.** These children may have been diagnosed early and have an Individualized Learning Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan in place at school. With a heavy focus on their weaknesses, however, their talents are left unnoticed (*Parenting*, 2010, p. 2). These children may feel unintelligent and lose confidence in their abilities.

**Finally, some children who are 2E appear as typically developing children.** These children are difficult to identify because "[n]either their gifts nor their deficits stand out because each masks the other. Because they are performing at grade level, no one sees these students as needing special attention—neither gifted programming nor special education" (*Parenting*, 2010, p. 2). In this situation, a child doesn't receive the help she needs nor is she given the opportunity to use her gifts.

Further, though awareness is growing, few educators or professionals are well-informed about twice-exceptionality. Thus, parents may receive mixed-messages about their children's abilities.

## WHAT IS MASKING?

The identification issues discussed here all have to do with masking. Masking is when a part of a person's learning profile is hidden. Masking occurs when:

- A child's gifts compensate for her challenges,
- A child's challenges overshadow his talents, or
- A child's gifts are compensating for challenges and those challenges simultaneously obscure her true talents.

When masking happens, a child's learning profile appears to be one thing but is actually more complex.

## HOW DO I DETERMINE IF MY CHILD IS TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL?

There isn't an easy answer to the question above because, as you know, twice-exceptionality presents differently in each child. In the first of several expert highlights in this guidebook, Dr. Megan Foley Nicpon discusses her insight gained from her professional experience in psychology and gifted education. In addition to her thoughts below on identification, Dr. Foley Nicpon comments on other areas of her work on twice-exceptionality throughout the rest of this section.

## EXPERT Q & A WITH DR. MEGAN FOLEY NICPON



Dr. Foley Nicpon is an Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology and Associate Director for Research and Clinic at the Belin-Blank Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, both at the University of Iowa. Dr. Foley Nicpon's research and clinical interests include assessment and intervention with high ability students with ASD, ADHD and emotional/learning difficulties, and the social and emotional development of talented and diverse students. Her awards include the NAGC Early Scholar Award, AERA Research on Giftedness, Creativity, and Talent Path Breaker Award, AERA Division E Outstanding Research Award in Human Development and, twice, the MENSA Research Award, MENSA Education & Research Foundation.

**Q. Although characteristics can vary within the twice-exceptional population (and therefore may manifest differently in each child), how can a parent distinguish between gifted characteristics and potential cognitive/learning problems/disabilities?**

**A.** Twice-exceptional students are all very unique, which makes how they present to parents, teachers and peers unique.

This being said, I offer five situations that *could* suggest a child may have both high ability and a disability:

- Difference between a child's scores on standardized measures of achievement or ability and his or her classroom performance. A seventh grader may be earn all Cs on his report card but achieve standardized scores in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.

- Discrepancy between a child's knowledge and his or her output. A fourth grader may talk extensively about a particular topic, using advanced conceptualization and vocabulary, but only be able to write three incomplete or simple sentences about the topic.
- Mismatch between a child's behavior and self-awareness of his or her behavior. A third grader may think she has several friends in the classroom, but, when observed, she may play solely by herself or be rarely asked to birthday parties.
- Difference between a child's intentions and delivery. The sixth grader starts his school day with every intension of getting along with "Billy" during recess, but when Billy annoys him for the third time, he punches him in the stomach.
- Discrepancy between a child's behaviors and peers' behaviors. Even though the ninth grader always gets perfect scores on her math tests, her social and communication skills are far below others in her grade.

**Q.** Identification of children who are 2E can be difficult because their strengths and weaknesses can mask each other. These characteristics can often create a unique learning profile for the child, which may not be readily visible. What are a few signals or early indicators parents might notice?

**A.** This depends on the child's talent domain(s) and/or areas of difficulty.

In the child's talent domain, there are several possible characteristics to consider; some include:

- Intense interest and depth of knowledge in the talent domain.
- Thinking "outside the box."
- Engaging in complex imaginative or creative play.
- Fierce curiosity about the world.
- Advanced reasoning and problem solving skills.

Signs or early indicators of academic, social, or behavioral difficulty could include:

- Struggling to master content that seems more challenging than it should, given his/her reasoning skills. For example, a fourth grader could read about and discuss airplanes and how they function, but, when asked to write about the topic, she only produces a few simple sentences filled with grammatical and structural errors.
- Attention difficulties inconsistent with one's developmental age. A second grade boy could be intellectually challenged in his or her enrichment program but be frequently in trouble for "misbehaving" or acting impulsively. Another child could be obtaining grades that are below expectations because of her inability to focus and concentrate.
- Social and communication challenges. A child may have the inability to establish friendships with peers who share common interests and talents. Another child may be able to describe his interests in depth but struggle to engage in social chat or ask peers about their interest, ideas and experiences.



**Q. What are the signals that indicate a professional evaluation may be useful? At what point do parents act on those signals?**

**A.** The following general situations may prompt the need for a professional evaluation:

- Assessment scores from a child's school are unclear. Sometimes scores may seem to change from year to year or be quite variable based on the domain assessed (i.e., high verbal reasoning with low quantitative reasoning). This may suggest the child struggles to pay attention during tests or may have learning differences.
- Assessment scores from a child's school are inconsistent with what parents believe to be true about their son or daughter. This again may suggest a more individualized approach to assessment may be useful to tease out talents and areas of difficulty.
- A child is struggling socially or emotionally in various school situations. A professional evaluation can help sort out what is the cause of the behaviors parents observe.
- Parents believe they are the only one who sees their child's strengths. Children with behavior and/or social problems may be pegged as "problems" and therefore strengths or talent domains may be forgotten or not addressed.

At this point, your question may be, "Should I have my child assessed?" Dr. Foley Nicpon's thoughts on the last question may be a helpful guide in answering your question, but, ultimately, you know your child best. If you find that there is something persistent or happening across different situations, it can be beneficial to explore that more in depth. This may mean seeking a professional assessment. Assessments can help you to determine your child's learning style, educational needs and potential areas of weakness and strength. Although testing may not give you all the answers you're looking for, it could help you understand your child better and how to support him in his journey forward.

## WHAT DOES ASSESSMENT LOOK LIKE?

It's important to note that there isn't one test that definitively identifies twice-exceptionality. An assessment, though, can give you a more complete picture of how your child learns, interacts with others and understands the world. Julia Osborn (1998) clarifies the difference between testing and assessment. She states:

Testing, or the individual administration of a standardized test, means presenting test items according to very specific pre-set directions and following an exact verbal script. The results are usually reported as numbers. This is a limited activity and the information that it provides is similarly limited. Assessment, on the other hand, includes standardized test administration but goes well beyond it. Good test administration should be the same from person to person; that is, it should be independent of personal

experience and personal viewpoints. Assessment, especially clinical assessment, is highly dependent upon training, theoretical orientation, personal experience, research knowledge and clinical experience. In good test administration, the person administering the test should not have a major impact on the test results; in assessment, the person doing the assessment does have a major impact on the final result. For these reasons, assessing children is part science and part art. The science part is straightforward and largely concerns testing. The art part is difficult to describe, difficult to teach and essential. (Osborn, 1998, p. 1-2)

Assessment attempts to look at the whole child—not just one metric of intelligence or performance. Each professional has his or her own approach to assessment. They may include different measures and methodologies. After reviewing the studies and literature on the methods for identifying gifted and other neurodivergent students, Krochak and Ryan (2007) concluded that, in general, a multi-faceted approach is the best method for identifying twice-exceptional children (p. 50). Such an approach may include quantitative and qualitative measures.

The quantitative measures may be IQ testing, which evaluates a child's cognitive abilities, and achievement testing, which evaluates a child's knowledge. Comparing the results of both tests may reveal discrepancies between ability and current level of performance. A child may also undergo other testing that evaluates attention, executive functioning or other areas. If a physiological condition is suspected, a child's vision, hearing, speech or motor skills may be assessed.

Qualitative measures may include classroom observations, surveys completed by teachers and/or parents, interviews with the child or the review of a child's educational record and portfolio. This qualitative data may provide the assessing professional a better context in which to interpret assessment results.

## WHAT DOES NEURODIVERGENT MEAN?

Neurodivergent is the counterpart to neurotypical. The term "neurotypical" gained traction in the autistic community as a word to describe those who didn't fall on the spectrum. Since then, "neurotypical" has expanded to describe individuals who follow a typical human development pattern and typical brain function pattern. Some would say "normal" instead of "neurotypical." This is correct in the mathematical definition of "normal;" most people are neurotypical. Others fall outside the norm to different degrees. Those are the neurodivergent individuals.

Neurodivergency includes many variations. Individuals who are 2E are neurodivergent in their giftedness as well as in the other ways they are exceptional. For example, gifted individuals often follow an asynchronous development pattern and have non-linear thought patterns.

## HOW DO I FIND A PROFESSIONAL TO ASSESS MY CHILD?

In the preceding subsection, Osborn (1998) makes clear that the assessing professional plays a large part in the evaluation process. Finding a professional to evaluate your child can be difficult. You can locate professionals in your area through a variety of channels: a state gifted association, a regional special education advocacy group, a local parent's group, the state department of education or your child's school counselor, psychologist or social worker may have leads on professionals in your area. Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG), the 2e Newsletter, and Hoagies' Gifted also have lists of professionals that have experience working with gifted children.

Assessment may vary in price and can be quite expensive. Depth of assessment can vary as well. However, there are a couple of cost-effective assessment options families may want to seek. Sometimes public or private schools may be willing to administer an assessment. However, the school may be limited by finances or staff, and they may only be able to administer specific tests. Some universities with counseling or testing centers offer assessment on a sliding or reduced scale. At universities, assessment may be administered by a graduate student under the supervision of a licensed professional as this is one way graduate students gain experience.

Parents may have many questions when it comes to researching potential professionals to work with their child: What should I look for in a tester? What can I expect to receive after assessment? When should I have my child assessed? While there are no universal answers (a professional that is a good fit for one family may not be the right fit for another family), Dr. Megan Foley Nicpon offers her thoughts on these questions.

### Q & A WITH DR. FOLEY NICPON (CONT.)

**Q: What types of characteristics should parents look for in a tester?**

**A.** Knowing the training and background of the evaluator prior to test administration is important. In seeking an evaluation for a potentially twice-exceptional child, it is best if the evaluator is a licensed psychologist who competently assesses and understands ability profiles and can make mental health diagnoses. If parents wish to assess whether their child has an autism spectrum disorder, ask whether the evaluator has specific training in autism diagnosis and intervention. Ideally, the professional completing the evaluation is familiar with high ability students and twice-exceptionality. It is a positive sign if these specialties are listed on his or her website. If not, inquire about familiarity with the unique needs and presentations of high ability and/or twice-exceptional populations before scheduling an appointment.

**Q. What can parents expect in a comprehensive assessment and written report? What types of information can they ask for?**

**A.** What professionals put into comprehensive evaluations is quite variable. Sometimes scores

are provided, and, other times, they are not. What tests are administered also depends on the referral question. For example, I would administer a different battery of tests if I were determining whether a child has ADHD versus autism spectrum disorder. Most written reports contain: information about the referral question, background information, tests administered, scores, interpretation, a summary and recommendations based on the information received.

When deciding whether to pursue an evaluation, it may be helpful to ask providers the following questions:

- What do the evaluations look like? How long is testing? What and how extensive is parent involvement? Who does the testing?
- What is the process of sharing the results? Are scores provided in a report?
- How long does it take to receive the results? Are the results provided in a feedback session? Who should attend the feedback session?
- What recommendations are provided to families?
- Are there opportunities to contact the professional in the future if there are questions? If yes, what is the best way to contact him or her?

It may take time to find the right professional for your child. Speak to a few professionals before making your final decision.

As Dr. Foley Nicpon mentions, it is important to know what a professional will offer at the conclusion of the assessment. What will the report look like? There are several different types of reports. Some simply provide the scores from standardized tests. Others include background information on each test and interpretation of the child's scores. Still others contain summaries of the qualitative information collected and recommendations when it comes to a child's education, talent development, social-emotional growth and supporting a child in the areas where he struggles.

Thus, it is important to ask yourself why you are seeking assessment at this moment. Is the professional assessment going to meet your needs, expectations and goals? If you plan to share the results with educators or other professionals, you will also want to consider what information they will be able to utilize.

### RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

After receiving an assessment report, the jargon, numbers and diagnoses can be overwhelming. Your child is an individual that engages with the world in a unique way. There are many organizations that celebrate and promote understanding about these differences. Three such groups are TiLT, Asperger Experts, and Dyslexic Advantage.

1. TiLT's mission is to help "parents raising differently-wired kids do so from a place of confidence, connection and peace." TiLT has a podcast in which Debbie Reber, the founder, interviews experts in the fields of parenting, learning differences, giftedness and education. Her 2E son is a regular guest and offers a first-person perspective on different topics.

2. **Asperger Experts** was established to “enliven, empower and educate people with Asperger’s, their parents and other members of the Autism community.” The organization is run by people diagnosed with Asperger’s. They create guides, run workshops and maintain a community for individuals with Asperger’s diagnoses and the people in their lives.
3. **Dyslexic Advantage**’s aim is to “promote the positive identity, community and achievement of dyslexic people by focusing on their strengths.” The organization was founded by Drs. Fennette and Brock Eide, prominent authorities on dyslexia. There are free resources available through their website as well as a magazine, webinars and other benefits for members. Membership is open to all.

## MY CHILD WAS ASSESSED. NOW WHAT?

### Emma’s Story

At seventeen months old, my husband and I were surprised to learn that Emma knew all of her letters and the sounds they made. Then at two, she started memorizing books we were reading to her. We figured she was smart, but Emma was our first child. We didn’t really know any different. As her giftedness emerged, so did her odd behaviors—self stimulating, whirling, screaming and hurting others physically. At the urging of concerned family members who suggest we have her “tested,” we went to see a neuropsychologist who concluded that Emma had an IQ over the 99.9th percentile, and she was just quirky because her IQ was so high.

But, at age five, when she attempted to socialize at school and continued to hurt her younger siblings, my gut told me something was wrong. So off we went to the same neuropsychologist who again concluded that he had never seen a child with such intelligence; she was just a little “different” because she was so brainy. So on the one hand, I watched amazed as Emma tested at a college reading level. But on the other hand, I came home from church every week distraught because she had been screaming at or biting or pinching the kids in her Sunday school class.

What was up? My mommy instincts told me we still needed to search for answers. So finally, at age seven, we flew her to Phoenix where we had her tested by a gifted specialist. After spending over ten hours with Emma and us, his team reported that yes, she was profoundly gifted, but she clearly had Asperger’s syndrome, ADHD combined type, and OCD.

Instead of feeling overwhelmed and burdened, I finally felt some relief! Suddenly it all made sense, and her behaviors were not the result of my faulty parenting. My husband, on the other hand, really struggled with the autism piece. He didn’t want her to be labeled, and he saw the diagnosis as something that would be detrimental to her long-term. It took about a year before he could use the word “Asperger’s” or “autism” when talking about Emma. By accepting all the parts of our unique child, we have been able to get her the specific help she needs in so many areas. (Anonymous, personal communication, May 15, 2015)

The results of assessment can bring a flood of emotions. Sometimes, there is such a sense of relief; you knew something deeper was going on and now you have a report that confirms it! Sometimes there’s guilt. You wish you had caught this earlier; you feel as if you should have just known what was going on. There may also be a deep sense of sadness. You know this means your child may have some rough patches ahead as he experiences a world that may not always understand him. And sometimes, there’s sheer panic. What does this all mean? What do I do now?

Most parents need time to work through their thoughts and emotions after receiving the assessment results. That’s normal. Talk to your partner or a trusted friend or family member. Spend a special day with your child. Do something nice just for yourself.

Here’s the good news: Your unique, lovely, amazing child is still your unique, lovely, amazing child.

Assessment doesn’t change who your child is. It just gives you specific words and some tools for understanding your child. How you use those words and tools is up to you.

You don’t need to act right away. You can take time to learn more about your child’s profile and explore your options when it comes to further supporting your child. When you’re ready, the remainder of this guidebook has tips for helping your child academically, emotionally and socially.

## WHAT IF I’M NOT SURE ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT RESULTS? DO MISDIAGNOSES OCCUR?

### Cassidy’s Story

We had the first neuropsychology evaluation done by a psychologist who worked at a school for students with learning differences when Cassidy was in fourth grade. She said it was important to document the learning differences so that Cassidy would qualify for a 504 Plan when she went to public school for fifth grade. Unfortunately, the psychologist did a better job diagnosing the learning differences than diagnosing the giftedness. I later learned that, with 2E kids, the processing difficulties can pull down their scores. So when we had the testing re-done in eighth grade, I asked the educational diagnostician we hired to get a good read on the giftedness as well as the learning differences. She gave Cassidy all of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children IV subtests. That way, she was able to use the scoring rules to substitute higher scores for some of the subtests that were pulled down by the low processing speeds and dysgraphia. This gave us a better picture of where Cassidy really was at. I took Cassidy to the conference with the education diagnostician in which we discussed the results. I wanted Cassidy to hear from this professional how amazingly intelligent she is. I think it was a much-needed confidence boost for her. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 29, 2015)

Sometimes, after thinking deeply about the assessment, parents feel the results really don't match their child. Like Emma's mom above, they feel the professional missed or misunderstood something.

Misdiagnoses do occur. Unfortunately, many medical and psychological professionals receive little or no training on the characteristics of gifted people (Webb, et al., 2016, p. 3). James Webb, et al. (2016) "believe that misdiagnoses stem primarily from the widespread ignorance among health care professionals about the social and emotional characteristics and needs of gifted children and adults" (p. 1). Thus, a person's gifted characteristics could be attributed to some other disorder because, as Webb, et al. (2016) argue, sometimes diagnoses are made "solely upon the presence of behavioral characteristics, with little regard for the origins of these behaviors and/or whether the behaviors might be considered normal given the person's background or life circumstances" (p. 1). In other words, a certain behavior may be worth looking into, but the occurrence of the behavior itself does not mean an automatic diagnosis. For example, a child that's consistently distracted in a classroom may be under-challenged, having problems with another student in class, be suffering from a vision or hearing issue, be struggling with anxiety, be dealing with something at home or have an attention disorder. The larger context needs to be considered.

A professional can also fail to identify giftedness because of masking. For example, a child who has gifted verbal abilities and mild dyslexia may have been listening with rapt attention to books aloud at age two, telling elaborate stories at age three, learning to play the ukulele and composing her own songs at age four, yet learning to read at age six. Six is not an unusual age for a neurotypical child to read. A professional who has experience with twice-exceptionality may have investigated the discrepancy between her advanced verbal abilities and her average reading skills. An assessment could lead to recognizing and supporting her gifts and challenges.

You know your child best. If the findings of an assessment do not match what you have observed with your child, you may wish to seek a second opinion.

## Q & A WITH DR. FOLEY NICPON (CONT.)

**Q. What do parents need to know about missed and misdiagnosis and what might flag a parent to suspect a missed or misdiagnosis?**

**A.** Missed and misdiagnosis can occur within a range of mental health conditions and talent domains. A missed diagnosis is where a child's talent domain and/or disability status is overlooked. A misdiagnosis is where a child is diagnosed with a mental health disorder and either no diagnosis or a different diagnosis is more appropriate. There are rare occasions where a child's high ability is pathologized to be something psychiatric when really the child is exhibiting characters that are inherent to his or her personality or interest domain. Other times, a child may exhibit a symptom that *could* be associated with a mental health diagnosis or high ability (i.e., intense interest in a subject domain). These are instances where a comprehensive evaluation may be useful. For example, a high ability child may have intense interest in astrophysics and know everything there is to know about the topic. That, in and of itself, does not mean the child has autism spectrum disorder. It is only when the intense interest is both all

-encompassing and accompanied by several additional symptoms consistent with autism spectrum disorder that a diagnosis would be warranted. Parents may wonder about missed diagnosis or misdiagnosis if they believe the mental health provider or educator misunderstood or overly pathologized their child.

**Q. How can parents approach concerns about missed or misdiagnosis with professionals and at what point should a parent consider seeking a second opinion?**

**A.** Second opinions are not uncommon in multiple professions, including psychology and psychiatry. They can be quite helpful in clarifying presenting concerns, but there are some things to consider in the decision-making process:

- It is important to think about the length of time between evaluations. Most psychological tests should not be re-administered within the same calendar year. A different test could be administered to measure a particular domain, but sometimes the testing options are limited.
- Consider the impact on the child. Going for psychological or psychoeducational testing can be quite taxing. Do the benefits outweigh the cons of having additional testing?
- What is the goal for obtaining a second opinion? If the answer to this question somehow involves improving the child's quality of life, then proceeding likely is warranted. If the answer is related to a parent's desire for their child not to have a diagnosis, then maybe proceeding is not warranted.
- Second opinions may be associated with additional financial costs, which could overly burden the family.

After you have thought about your child's assessment results, you may feel the need to do some research into the diagnoses you received. The next section digs into developing a strategy to support your whole child. But, before that, here are a few final thoughts from Dr. Megan Foley Nicpon.

## Q & A WITH DR. FOLEY NICPON (CONT.)

**Q. How do you work with children who are twice-exceptional?**

**A.** As a counseling psychologist, I operate from a strengths-based perspective in all of my work with children and adolescents. Far too often attention is on what is *wrong* with a child rather than what is *right*. Human beings are not psychologically equipped to endure continual focus on what we struggle to do. Figuring out children's talent domains is crucial to their long-term success. Once discovered, providing opportunities for children to soar in their talent domains, while accommodating for their challenge areas, is the next step.

What does this look like? It depends. Maybe it looks like acceleration in one or more subject

domains. Maybe it looks like enrichment classes or participation in their school's talent development program. Maybe it's attending art classes on the weekends or leadership development camp. No matter where the talent lies, the child may need accommodations to be successful. That's expected and should *never* take away from developing the child's talent, potential or dreams.

For the list of resources and organizations referenced in this section, please see the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Masking can make identifying twice-exceptionality challenging.
- When seeking assessment, it's important to find a professional who can meet your goals and who you are comfortable with.
- After assessment, it may take time to process the results and understand what they mean for your individual family.
- Misdiagnoses can occur, and, if you think that's the case, it's okay to seek a second opinion.

## SIDE NOTE ABOUT LABELS

Once you have a diagnosis, the question may then become, What do I do with this? Do I tell my child? Do I tell his school? Do I tell my friends or relatives?

Everyone answers these questions in a way that makes sense for their child, education situation and parenting philosophy. And answers evolve. Maybe things are going well at school, and there's no need right now to tell them. But later, a situation might arise at school in which it would be helpful to share that the child is twice-exceptional.

The decision about if, when and how to tell your child is complicated. Speaking about the gifted label in particular, Dr. James Delisle (2006) suggests that "[w]hen your child is identified as gifted, take time to sit down with him or her and explain *in your own words* what you think this term means. Give your child some cues that you picked up at an early age ('You know, Shawna,

I remember you were reading cereal boxes and road signs when you were not even two years old.')

Many parents have the urge to downplay giftedness because they don't want their child to become arrogant. But, as Delisle (2006) states, "[b]y not discussing giftedness, or by telling your gifted child to avoid mention of it around others, you are sending a confusing, mixed message—be proud of your abilities, but don't let anyone know that you have them" (p. 13).

Delisle believes that instilling humility in children is important; there's a difference in thinking you are *better at* some things than other people and in thinking you are *better than* other people (Delisle, 2006, p. 14). However, he doesn't believe that giftedness is something to hide or be ashamed of.

With twice-exceptionality, giftedness is just one part of the puzzle, but Delisle's thoughts could be applied to other challenges or exceptionalities as well. Exceptionalities are simply part of your child. Many children know they are somehow different before they are assessed. Knowing the names of their differences may provide a sense of relief. There isn't something wrong with them; there's a name for it and a community of others who are similar to them.

Below is an article (shortened for the purposes of this guidebook) by educator, speaker and mom of three gifted children, Lisa Van Gemert on her thoughts when it comes to labels. The full article, "8 Reasons You Should Label Kids as Gifted," appeared on the *Gifted Guru* website. There are other things to consider when it comes to twice-exceptionality, but many of Van Gemert's points are relevant to the 2E world.

## 8 REASONS YOU SHOULD LABEL KIDS AS GIFTED BY LISA VAN GEMERT

**Reason 1: It allows them to receive academic support and services.**

In most cases, it is school systems labeling kids as gifted, and they do so to be able to serve kids with different needs from typical learners. In schools, "gifted" is a service model, not an identity. If we don't allow the student to be identified for the services the school offers for them, we deny the child appropriate educational placement. Refusal of the label denies services.

**Reason 2: Saying you don't want a child "labeled" is like saying you don't want a child to have a hair color.**

Everyone is labeled. The only choice is whether we want more formal labels as opposed to only the informal labels applied to us every single day. "Labeled" is a loaded term that at its heart means, "recognized as." You can be labeled as tall, short, fat, thin, belonging to a certain ethnic or racial group, having a particular facial structure or feature, or a wide variety of other physical attributes. You can also be labeled as a reader, an artist, an athlete, a parent, a sibling, a grandchild, a Christian and on and on. Labels are unavoidable, and I'm not sure why we're so

against them. Perhaps it's because we think it will narrow the way the person sees him- or herself or the way others will see him/her.

### **Reason 3: The kids didn't choose the name.**

Some people argue against the term "gifted," believing it implies superiority or arrogance. I believe the opposite. To me, the word "gifted" as it applies to cognition is a constant reminder that this was a gift, not earned. I think it's humility inducing, not arrogance producing. No matter which way you look at it, however, the child did not choose that term, and it seems patently unfair to say that children are responsible for the distaste of a word they didn't have any voice in choosing.

### **Reason 4: Giftedness is no guarantee. It's potential, not promise.**

Giftedness means that you have ability. Like a seed, it is a potential, but it must be nourished, cared for, fertilized and have sun in order to grow. It is the responsibility of parents and educators of gifted kids to explain that being identified as gifted is not a "get out of working hard free" card.

### **Reason 5: Gifted kids have social and emotional needs as well as cognitive needs.**

Even a quick perusal through [the National Association for Gifted Children's] list of common traits of gifted kids will reveal that only a fraction of them are cognitive. These kids feel differently, as well as think differently. If they don't get labeled as gifted, they may not get the understanding they need.

### **Reason 6: Gifted doesn't just mean thinking better; it means thinking differently.**

To me, this is the number one biggest misconception about gifted kids. People as a whole seem to think that gifted just means "smart"—like you think better than other people. When you are gifted, it's not just that your brain is efficient. Your brain is divergent. They need challenge in school in a way that is very, very different from just more work.

### **Reason 7: Gifted kids deserve all of the information about themselves.**

Would you not tell a child he/she had Rh-blood? Would you not tell a child he/she was Italian? It's part of identity construction to know who you are, your strengths and weaknesses, your challenges and opportunities. Parents then provide context for these aspects of identity so that they do not become all-defining. When you get a name for the apartness so many gifted children feel, you can make more sense of those feelings.

### **Reason 8: It allows parents to get support, too.**

Parenting gifted children is not for the faint of heart. This game is not for amateurs. Don't try this at home, folks. When a child is labeled as gifted, at least you have something to Google. Maybe you'll get lucky and you'll find [the National Association for Gifted Children] or your state gifted organization or a parenting Facebook group or some other resource that will help you navigate Giftedland. Parents of gifted children can feel isolated and even attacked. It is not uncommon to find defensive parents of GT kids—that's a natural response to being

marginalized for long periods of time. When we label a child as gifted, we actually identify an entire family as needing support, encouragement, understanding and resources. When we refuse to identify kids as gifted, we deny not only the child, but also the parents of the services and support they might otherwise receive.

And that's why you should label kids as gifted.

Gifted is different, not better.

Labeling is identification and information, not destiny.

The name implies unmerited, not arrogance.

The knowledge of it is power, not an easy path.

*This article is reprinted with permission from Gifted Guru.*

# SECTION C

## MOVING FORWARD

### Pete's Story

In the fall, we asked the school for a 504 Plan, but the biggest challenge we have is that one side of the bell curve is addressed but not the other. My son has extended time on tests and the ability to take breaks when need. However, the school is not accommodating his gifted side at all. Also, because he is performing at or above grade level, he does not qualify for services (such as occupational therapy or psychological counseling) through the school. Any interventions we have for him have been entirely out-of-pocket for us. What is upsetting is that, if he was below grade level, he would be getting more attention and support. But he's not, so all of his needs are ignored. And he continues to disengage in school. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 21, 2015)

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Pete's story is not unusual. Susan M. Baum, Robin Schader, and Thomas P. Hébert (2014) state that "although students [who are twice-exceptional (2E)] possess gifts and disabilities simultaneously, the two exceptionalities are often addressed separately in educational settings, with little regard for the influence one exceptionality may have on the other" (p. 311). When strengths and weaknesses are addressed separately, often the default is to focus on areas of challenge.

There is a persistent belief among professionals, educators and parents that children who are 2E will flourish if "appropriate accommodations are in place" for a child's areas of weakness (Baum, Dann, Novak, & Preuss, 2009, p. 13). However, these accommodations often "focus mainly on meeting grade-level objectives while ignoring gifted potential" (Baum, Dann, Novak, & Preuss, 2009, p. 13). What this means is that a child receiving accommodations at school that allow her to successfully navigate her challenges with ADHD may still not be working at her potential. She may be using a ball chair, receiving extended time on tests and getting direct instruction in organization. But she may still be acting out, floundering grade-wise or losing motivation if she has no opportunities to develop her strengths. For this reason, the National Association for Gifted Children (1998) has called for children who are 2E to receive "a dually differentiated program: one that nurtures their gifts and talents while accommodating for learning weaknesses" (para. 6). As mentioned at the end of last section, this dually differentiated program is also called a "strengths-based approach."

## WHAT IS A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH?

A strengths-based approach considers the whole child. It recognizes the child, first, as a gifted individual who deserves opportunities to develop his talents and interests, and second, as a student who deserves the appropriate support in areas of challenge so that he can fully demonstrate those talents and interests. By putting their strengths in the forefront, children build on the inner-resources they already have which puts them in a better position to work on areas of difficulty; as a child grows in one area, other areas can follow.

## HOW DO I MOVE FORWARD AFTER LEARNING MY CHILD IS 2E?

Building a strengths-based plan for a child doesn't happen overnight and doesn't just address a child's education. It's an overall approach for all aspects of a child's life: his intellectual, social, emotional and talent development. It accounts for her life at school, at home and the places in between (extracurriculars, therapy, camps, tutoring, etc.). The next parent tool includes strategies you can utilize to work towards taking a strengths-based approach.

# PARENT TOOL

## BUILD A STRENGTHS-BASED PLAN

Educate Yourself

Assemble a Team

Evaluate Environments

Set Goals

Monitor & Modify

**Educate yourself.** In addition to learning about twice-exceptionality, you may want to learn more about giftedness and your child's diagnoses. You may also want to learn more about your district's policies, your state's laws and federal law. Local, regional, state and online parent or advocacy groups often provide many resources and support as you navigate the world of twice-exceptionality. A few resources to start with can be found on the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

While being informed is important, you can easily get bogged down in all the literature. Keep your child at the forefront. Out of your research, what speaks to his profile? What gels with your parenting style? What can you tackle now? What can wait?

Additionally, while it would be nice if all gifted organizations, learning difference advocacy groups and other support networks were well-informed about twice-exceptionality, they may not be. It can be lonely as a parent (as well as a child!), which brings us to the next step.

**Assemble a team.** When thinking through how to productively intervene and advocate on behalf of your child, it can be helpful to identify potential allies and to build a support network for your child and yourself. There may be rough patches on the road forward, and it can be hard to go through it alone. Who could be these supportive allies?

- **Your family.** This seems obvious, but many skip the step of deliberately thinking about and discussing how each family member will support your child who is 2E. For example, one parent may be the primary point person for working with the school while another family member (the other parent, an older sibling, a grandparent) may be responsible for transportation. How will your child take charge of her education and home life? How will siblings support their brother or sister?

- **The school.** Schools can be great sources of support. They often have access to trained professionals that you may find helpful. The next few sections of this guidebook discuss how schools can support your child.
- **Professionals.** You may already have one professional that has a relationship with your child – the person who did the assessment. Depending on your child's particular diagnoses and strengths, you may be in contact with other professionals. Many parents think about professionals as executing particular tasks (such as doing an assessment) or supporting a child in one particular area (such as improving the fine motor skills of a child who has dysgraphia). However, professionals can be so much more. How can you utilize their full body of knowledge and experience? For example, an executive functioning coach, who is assisting your child with ADHD, may be able to suggest:
  - Local groups or regional organizations to join
  - Parent resources to help you better understand your child's way of being in the world, or
  - Activities your whole family could do together such as watching particular films that include a strong characters who struggle with attention issues.

You can also think outside of the professionals that are working specifically with your child on his areas of challenge. For example, your pediatrician may be able to give you additional tips for helping your active child fall asleep at night.

- **Family friends and community members.** In addition to fulfilling other roles, family friends and community members could be mentors who help your child stretch herself in an area of strength or explore new interests. They may also act as more of a social-emotional mentor. Is there someone in your circle or area that has a similar profile to your child? For example, if your child struggles with anxiety, is there another trusted adult who also struggles with anxiety? Perhaps that adult could share stories of his time in school and how he works with his anxiety. You may be able to find other adults through networks you're already a part of such as a gifted organization, a parenting group, a faith-based institution or another association.
- **Peers.** You might also consider helping your child identify peer allies. Which of your child's friends could be a good sounding board when he is facing an obstacle? Is there a classmate he could ask for help if something comes up during class? Is there a person who your child hasn't approached but who may be a good ally?

As you start thinking about who you are already connected to and who you may also be able to connect with, hopefully you'll find that your support network is larger than you first thought.

**Evaluate the environments that your child is a part of.** Consider how each is already working for your child and if you would like parts changed to better fit her.

- **Academic.** How does your child's academic environment fit his learning style? How are



his strengths advanced and talents developed? How is he learning to work with his challenges and flourish with them?

- **Home.** How is your child's twice-exceptionality coming into play at home? Consider how she is relating to each member of your family. What routines do you have in place? What responsibilities does she have at home? What does your child's personal spacelook like? How does your family schedule balance the needs of all members?
- **Social.** What does your child's social community look like? Does it accept her for who she is and allow her to develop her interests? It may be important to keep in mind that your child's social circle may look different than your own and different than other children's. Many gifted children have only a couple of strong friends. Some don't find their tribe until they are older or attend college. Some are introverted (which lends them unique strengths as discussed in Susan Cain's *Quiet Power*). That's okay. What's important is that your child feels connected and supported. If she doesn't, perhaps that is an area to explore more.
- **Extracurriculars.** What does your child do in his free time? How does that advance his interests and talents? When and how much unstructured time does your child have? What's the balance between academic, family, social, extracurricular, therapy/support services and free time that works best for your child?
- **Therapy.** Therapy is being used here in the broadest of terms to mean the ways that your child receives support. What support is she currently receiving? How is it working for your child? Who is providing support? What is their approach? Are there other areas where he needs support?

**Set goals.** Once you've educated yourself, assembled a team and evaluated your child's situation, you're ready to set goals based on the information, people and resources you have.

When you and your child start setting goals, it can be tempting to set too many goals. Setting too many goals can ultimately be overwhelming and discouraging. Perhaps you can limit your goals to one per environment (home, school, extracurriculars and therapy) or a couple that can be achieved on different timelines (one that can be achieved next week, one in the next two weeks, one in the next month). Or perhaps you could break up goals according to who takes the lead (one your child focuses on and one you focus on).

Involving your child in the goal setting process can be important as it often leads the child to have more buy-in to the goals themselves and he may be more motivated to achieve the goals.

One goal setting rubric that many use is SMART. One version of the acronym SMART stands for:

**S – Specific:** Is the goal tailored to your child? That is, is this goal really meeting your child where she's at and is it appropriate considering her 2E profile?

**M – Meaningful:** Will achieving this goal create meaningful change for your child? Is it a goal that he cares about?

**A – Action-Oriented:** Can you break down the goal into concrete steps?

**R – Realistic:** Is this a goal that your child can achieve in a reasonable amount of time? Will she be able to see her progress?

**T – Timely:** Is this something you can do now considering the information, people and resources you have? Is this something that your child can work on right away?

**Monitor and Modify.** As you implement your plans for your child, observe how these changes are affecting him. Remember that changes can often take many weeks to really take hold and produce the outcomes you were hoping for.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

Looking for ideas on supporting your child and building a path forward? [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org) dedicates itself to supporting parents who have children with learning and attention issues. Understood.org is the result of the combined efforts of fifteen nonprofits and offers:

- Parenting Coach, a tool for personalized recommendations.
- Access to experts in their field through webinars and more.
- Well-researched, practical information for everyday life.
- An online community for parents to reach each other.

Together, these resources reinforce their mission "to empower [parents] to understand their children's issues and relate to their experiences. With this knowledge, parents can make effective choices that propel their children from simply coping to truly thriving."

It can take many tries to find the plan that works for your child. And what works right now will not always be what works next month or next year. Sometimes, that is exciting; it can mean your child is growing. Sometimes, though, it can be frustrating.

It's okay to take a break from some goals or plans and focus on something else for a period. For example, perhaps instead of focusing on turning in homework, you focus on enjoying family nights together. A break can make us reconsider our goals and help us set better goals for the future.

Even in instances where you don't need a break, your child may. As psychologists Megan Foley

Nicpon, Allison Allmon, Barbara Sieck, and Rebecca D. Stinson (2011) remind us, “In general, gifted students are lauded by society, whereas children with disabilities can be misunderstood or ostracized. The twice-exceptional child must navigate both kinds of feedback, an undoubtedly disorienting experience.”

For parents, navigating the 2E world can be similarly disorientating, exhausting, confusing and overwhelming. You and your child’s path forward may not be linear. But you can always revisit the steps presented in this section to think through other ways of moving forward.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Children who are 2E benefit from a strengths-based approach that nurtures their areas of strength and bolsters their areas of challenge simultaneously.
- The 2E journey can be lonely, so it is important to assemble a strong team for your child and for you as a parent.
- Twice-exceptionality affects all parts of a child’s life. When building a plan for your child, look at the impact of twice-exceptionality in your child’s home, school, social and inner life.

# SECTION D

## THE 2E SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

### Emma’s Story

After we received the Asperger’s diagnosis in the summer between her first and second grade year, I asked the public school to evaluate her so that she could access some services at school. They did the usual battery of tests—speech, occupational therapy, cognitive, etc. When we met with them about the results, the school told us that she had scored so high on all the tests that they couldn’t provide any services. So, halfway through the year, we pulled her out and took her to a new charter school. After a year of being there, the charter school could tell that she was struggling socially, so they called me and said they thought she needed an IEP. She qualified on the basis of her social speech. The administrators really cared about her, and the IEP process went so smoothly. (Anonymous, personal communication, May 15, 2015)

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Children who are twice-exceptional (2E) can be successful in a variety of educational settings. Some children flourish in traditional public, private or charter schools with minimal accommodations. Other children and their families work with teachers and administrators to find the right adjustments to the curriculum and school environment. Some families find that the flexibility and individualization of homeschooling allows their children to grow and develop. Other families work to tie together a variety of online and in-person educational opportunities that fit their child's learning style and interests.

It's also important to acknowledge that school isn't just about academics. The friend, mentor and teacher relationships that children build within schools are valuable and can have a positive impact on their school experience and overall development. School culture can impact the entire family. Many parents form friendships through school groups and spend a lot of time at school events. In addition, many children and families participate in extracurriculars that allow a child to pursue interests they otherwise wouldn't.

As you evaluate your child's current education situation, it can be important to consider their school experience in all aspects: academically, socially and extracurricularly. School is a marathon, not a sprint. Many families cycle through different educational settings as they gain a better understanding of their child's needs and as their child grows and changes. Profoundly gifted children often have a few learning leaps in their grade school years, and, suddenly, what was working before needs adjustment. And, for 2E families, there's the added complexity of the child's other exceptionalities.

## WHAT IF MY CHILD BRINGS UP ISSUES ABOUT SCHOOL?

As you examine your child's education, it can be difficult to distinguish between temporary rough patches and larger problems. All children have bad days. Many children may have classes they aren't engaged in, have teachers they don't gel with or have disagreements with other students. They may mess up assignments or fail to turn in something on time now and then. When children share some trouble at school, often the parent instinct is to jump in and try to fix things. Sometimes, though, children just need some validation and space. When a child says, "Ugg... school sucks," sometimes all she needs to hear is, "Yeah, bad days are the worst."

For children who are 2E, some challenges may be part of the typical experience and are to be expected. But other times, there are larger issues where parent involvement is necessary. How do you know whether this situation is a fleeting nuisance or something more serious? Below are some questions that may help you parse the two.

- **Is this a developmental or environmental issue?** As children grow and change, there may be times when their struggles will be solved by time. For example, many kindergarteners are going to talk out of turn, not sit still for extended periods of time and be off task. Increased focus and sustained attention are, for some, issues of development. The asynchronous development that many children who are 2E may experience can complicate matters. In these situations, it may be helpful to compare your child's behavior to that of several age peers. Is the behavior that unusual?

Environmental factors can also come into play. For example, many children will stumble a bit when they transition from elementary to middle school. In middle school, many children, for the first time, are transitioning between multiple classrooms daily, juggling different teachers' styles and expectations, taking on a heavier homework load and taking more responsibility for their school items (textbooks, pencils, notebooks). In the first semester of middle school, most children will be late to a few classes, forget to bring a textbook to class and miss a couple deadlines. Neither of these examples automatically means that there is a larger issue.

- **Is this concern present in multiple areas of a child's life?** Asking this question can narrow down whether this issue needs a small intervention or a more global strategy. For example, a child that has problems paying attention in history class but doesn't have issues in other classes may just need a change in routine or strategy in that class. This is an issue that may be solved by brainstorming solutions with your child. Maybe the class is right before lunch, and your child needs a snack. Perhaps the child is seated next to other students who talk consistently through class. However, if a child struggles with paying attention in multiple environments (such as different classes, during family dinners and when hanging out with groups of friends), the issue may deserve more attention and a consistent strategy.
- **Is this a persistent issue?** Are you noticing a trend? If this is an issue that has been occurring for a good amount of time (perhaps 6-8 weeks) or it's starting to occur more frequently (perhaps becoming a weekly or a daily problem), then this may be worth investigating further. Of course, some issues that pop up are severe enough to warrant attention, which brings us to the next question.
- **How big is the impact?** If your child is mildly annoyed by something, this may just be a pet peeve. However, if this is frequently resulting in meltdowns or another severe reaction, perhaps it's time to step in. It's important to keep in mind that not all children display reactions externally; some children will internalize crises.
- **What is at the root?** Are there contributing factors that need to be addressed first? Sometimes what might be seen as an issue is the most noticeable effect of some deeper challenge. For example, if a child is falling asleep in class, some may first think that this child is bored, disrespectful or lazy. But perhaps there's a greater issue. What does the child's sleep pattern look like? Is the child getting enough nutrition at the right parts of the day? Is there a learning difference coming into play? Could there be a medical issue? Are this child's strengths and talents being utilized? Any of these factors may lead to falling asleep in class.

These questions aren't always easy to answer. It can be difficult to know what exactly is happening with children and the source of their troubles. In those instances, it can be helpful to keep the lines of communication open—the lines with your child, the school and the other people that work with your child.

Go with your gut. If you feel something is wrong, investigate.

# HOW DO I TALK WITH MY CHILD ABOUT SCHOOL CONCERNS?

Talking to your child about difficult topics is something many parents find challenging. In *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish offer exercises and examples to explain several strategies for discussing both everyday and important topics with children.

The first step is to really listen to your child and accept the feelings they are expressing. This can be helpful in getting your child to open up fully so that you have a better understanding of what is occurring in your child's life. Faber and Mazlish offer these four strategies to make that first step:

- 1. Listen with full attention.** While the world demands parents multi-task a lot of the time, setting aside what you're doing and looking your child in the eyes will send the message that what your child is saying is important to you.
- 2. Acknowledge their feelings with a word such as "oh" or "I see."** As Faber and Mazlish state, "There's a lot of help to be had from a simple 'Oh...mmm...' or 'I see.' Words like these, coupled with a caring attitude, are invitations to a child to explore her own thoughts and feelings, and possibly come up with her own solutions" (2012, p. 13).
- 3. Give their feelings a name.** Faber and Mazlish acknowledge that "[p]arents don't usually give this kind of response, because they fear that by giving a name to the feeling they'll make it worse. Just the opposite is true. The child who hears the words for what she is experiencing is deeply comforted. Someone has acknowledged her inner experience" (2012, p. 15).
- 4. Give them their wishes in fantasy: "I wish that could be true, too!"** Faber and Mazlish explain, "Sometimes just having someone understand how much you want something makes reality easier to bear" (2012, p.17).

Once a child feels heard and acknowledged, he or she may be more open working with you to address the issue.

The chart on the following page can help you and your child reflect on issues affecting your child. The book, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, mentioned in the sidebar above, includes strategies for brainstorming solutions to problems with your child, which may be helpful in working through this exercise.

## PARENT TOOL REFLECT ON CONCERNS

### 1. What is the issue?

From the parent's perspective:	From the child's perspective:
--------------------------------	-------------------------------

### 2. What areas of life is this impacting?

physical health
emotional well-being
academics or school life
extracurriculars
free time or pursuit of passions
home life and responsibilities
family relationships
social relationships

### 3. How often is this an issue?

once or twice a year
during the school year
at specific times of the year
every couple of months
monthly
weekly
daily
couple times a day

### 4. How big is the impact?

From the parent's perspective:	1	2	3	4	5	6
From the child's perspective:	1	2	3	4	5	6

### 5. What other factors contribute to this issue?

From the parent's perspective:	From the child's perspective:
--------------------------------	-------------------------------

5. What other factors contribute to this issue?

From the parent's perspective:	From the child's perspective:
--------------------------------	-------------------------------

6. How does this compare to other children's experiences? Are others struggling with this?

From the parent's perspective:	From the child's perspective:
--------------------------------	-------------------------------

7. What are some ways to move forward?

Parent's Solution #1:  pros:  cons:	Child's Solution #1:  pros:  cons:
Parent's Solution #2:  pros:  cons:	Child's Solution #2:  pros:  cons:
Parent's Solution #3:  pros:  cons:	Child's Solution #3:  pros:  cons:

# WHAT IF I SUSPECT MY CHILD IS UNDERACHIEVING

Underachieving is a concern for many 2E families. While definitions of underachievement differ, most describe it as “a discrepancy between potential and actual achievement” (Trail, 2011, p. 104). Students who are 2E are often at risk for underachieving “because of their asynchronous development and inconsistent academic performance. These students are often out of sync with the school curriculum” (Trail, 2011, p. 104)—ahead in some subjects and at or below grade level in others.

There are many reasons that a child may be underachieving: She may not have opportunities to engage in her interests, to grow her talents and to be truly challenged. He may not be adequately supported in his areas of weakness. Her educational environment might not fit her learning style or her way of socializing.

It can be challenging to advocate for an underachieving child. Teachers may “not understand how hidden disabilities can prevent gifted students from achieving. [Underachievers] are often seen as gifted students who have outstanding potential, but are lazy and choose not to work up to their potential” (Trail, 2011, p. 104). Further, schools often want to focus on a child's areas of weakness rather than taking a strengths-based approach to the situation. Young people can internalize these messages and start to believe that there is something wrong.

For these reasons, Dr. James R. Delisle suggests parents and educators remember three things when working with individuals who may be underachieving:

1. **“No one wants to be an underachiever”** (Delisle, 2011, para. 6). It doesn't feel good. Young people are often frustrated with themselves; they can't seem to navigate a school system that others seem to breeze through, or they seem to be wasting time. The disappointment they may feel from parents and teachers adds to these negative feelings.
2. **“Underachievement tends to be an issue of dignity not curriculum”** (Delisle, 2011, para. 7). As Delisle says, “If teachers don't seem to care how high a child can jump, academically speaking, and focus instead on whether [she] can jump at all, the capable child often begins to feel that his or her intellect is being both denied and disrespected” (Delisle, 2011, para. 7). And, if an A is earned with little effort or only by abiding a litany of absurd (from the student's point of view) rules, that student may begin to question the validity of grades.
3. **“Every ‘underachiever’ is good at and passionate about something”** (Delisle, 2011, para. 8). The traditional K-12 curriculum presents only a slice of human knowledge, and there may be few opportunities for a child to find and develop a passion outside that narrow slice. Further, schools often value certain subjects over others, and, if a child has a passion for one of those devalued subjects, he himself may feel devalued.

There are many resources to support you and your child if you suspect that he or she is underachieving. Working through the Parent Tool on page D39 may also help you and your

child get to the root of the underachievement. Further support can be found in the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

**Free Spirit Publishing** was founded by Judy Galbraith, a former teacher and gifted education specialist. Since 1983, when Galbraith identified the need for young people to have books that discussed the real-life issues they faced, Free Spirit's mission has been to "provide children and teens—and the adults who care for and about them—with the tools they need to think for themselves, overcome challenges and make a difference in the world." Free Spirit has many titles that 2E families may find helpful, such as *The Survival Guide for Gifted Kids*, *How to Do Homework Without Throwing Up*, *Being Me with OCD*, and *Real Friends vs. the Other Kind*.

## ARE THERE REASONS TO STAY AT A SCHOOL EVEN IF IT'S NOT A PERFECT FIT?

Yes! In fact, perfect fits can be hard to find. Some families may find an option that works for a limited time or an option that works in most aspects but not all. For example, some families choose to stay with a school because their child has found friends, an accepting school culture and supportive teachers even if that school is not really meeting the child's academic needs. Carolyn Kottmeyer, founder and director of Hoagies' Gifted, considers this the "least-worst option." Kottmeyer shares:

Long ago, a wise friend suggested that I was agonizing too much over the educational decisions before me, concerning my gifted child. In my usual way, I collected tons of information, on every aspect of every decision. I weighed the pros and cons, listened to every potential expert, every experienced parent... and the inevitable result was... *Terror!* That's when I came up with the idea of the "least-worst" choice. (2016, para. 2-3)

For Kottmeyer's family at the time, there was no clear best choice: The private schools didn't offer a perfect place. Homeschooling wasn't the right fit for the family. And the public schools—even after a move to another school district—were "a disaster" (2016, para. 4). After much deliberation, they determined what the least-worst option was for them at the time. And they made it work.

There are many steps your family can take toward making school a better experience for your child if you need to intervene. Section E discusses how to effectively advocate at school. And, Section F looks at IEPs and 504 Plans and explores how those may help a child who is 2E.

## BUT WHAT IF A PARTICULAR SCHOOL REALLY ISN'T WORKING?

Sometimes, when a family assesses their current educational setting, they realize that a change is in order, and, they need to research other options. But how do you know which options will work for your child? In the second expert highlight of this guidebook, Heidi Molbak discusses how to evaluate school options to find the right fit. Links to the organizations and articles she mentions can be found on the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

## EXPERT Q & A WITH HEIDI MOLBAK

Heidi is the Founder of Seed Starter Educational Consulting, an independent educational consulting practice that has helped families find appropriate educational options for their gifted and twice-exceptional children since 2006. Heidi works closely with boarding schools and therapeutic programs that support gifted students and is a frequent presenter at national conferences on the education, social- emotional and treatment needs of gifted and twice-exceptional children.



In 2016, Heidi co-founded FlexSchool, a growing national network of accredited learning communities for gifted and 2E middle and high school students. Heidi served as opening Head of School at FlexSchool New Haven as well as Head of Admission and Outreach. In June 2018, she returned full-time to Seed Starter.

Her personal gifted story includes supporting her three sons through sixteen schools in seven states and three countries as well as running her own small school from home. These included independent day and boarding schools, home school, online schools, the self-directed Beach High School, public magnet and public charter foreign-language immersion schools and a one-room, multi- age school.

She holds an M.S. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Loyola University New Orleans and an A.B. in English from Stanford University. She is the recipient of the Regina Matthews Oehmig Award for Excellence in Counseling. Heidi is a Certified Educational Planner (CEP) and a National Certified Counselor (NCC).

**Q. When a parent knows that their current situation is no longer a good fit for their child, what steps can they take to research or explore other options?**

**A.** While awareness is growing, educators familiar with twice-exceptionality remain few in the United States. Still, there are many good educational options to explore as you thoughtfully consider your student's needs. In my work over the years as an educational consultant helping families find a good school fit for their 2E children, I've developed the following series of steps. Following these helps parents create a framework for researching schooling options that yields satisfying results.

*First*, determine your family's "educational flexibility profile." Look at available finances, work demands, mobility, temperaments and time you need to devote to other family members. These issues will inform your research and help you decide how to narrow your search.

*Next*, take an inventory of your child's specific exceptionalities. Start with giftedness! How advanced is your child's learning and in what domains? Does she need single subject or radical acceleration in academics? Does he need a mentor or professional training in the arts?

Understand the "needs scope" of her giftedness. The impairment(s) your child struggles with will also direct your research. Does she have a specific learning disorder in math, reading or ADHD? Are you seeing signs of mental health struggles such as anxiety or depression? Are social deficits impacting his social learning? Is he multi-exceptional with a combination of impairments?

*Then*, create your family's philosophy of child rearing. You might be surprised to learn that you already have a parenting approach without having intentionally planned it. On the other hand, you may have thought long and hard about how you want to raise your children. Write down the values you want to teach your children and how you think this is achieved. Choosing a school involves finding an approach that fits your family's philosophy of learning as well as your child's personality.

After developing your family's educational flexibility profile, taking an inventory of your child's exceptionalities and considering your philosophy of learning, create a list of must-haves, nice-to-haves, would-love-to-haves in a school. Be deliberate.

Now, you are ready to consider schooling options. Based on your list, decide what types of schools interest you. Depending on your child's age and needs, these may include: public schools with 2E programs, private day and boarding schools with or without a specific educational philosophy (e.g. Progressive), therapeutic residential programs, micro-schools, online offerings, homeschooling or a combination of these choices. Read about schools serving 2E that have been recommended by other parents and professionals. Very reliable sources are Hoagies' Gifted and the 2e Newsletter for schools and the Gifted Homeschoolers Forum for homeschooling. You can also follow my Seed Starter Facebook postings on schools. Consider hiring an educational consultant who studies schools in your area or in other parts of the country that interest you, especially if you are considering boarding school. This is a must if you are looking at a therapeutic program.

**Q. What types of qualities/characteristics do you look for when searching for schools for 2E children? How can parents determine which schools may be a good fit for their child?**

**A.** Despite the wide range of 2E learners, some characteristics are universal to all schools that do a great job with 2E students. Pay attention to:

- The school's openness to listening to parent and student experiences/concerns/hopes,
- Their understanding and enjoyment of the student's profile, including his giftedness and the other exceptionalities the student exhibits,
- Enthusiasm for working with 2E students,
- A strength-based approach, and
- Open, honest communication between the school and parents.

While staff training in your child's exceptionalities is obviously important, equally important is their curiosity in learning how to connect to each unique child.

At the end of the day, there is no substitute for visiting a school and speaking with students, parents and staff to determine a good fit. Even if the school is new, meet with the head of school and learn what motivates him or her to work with 2E students. Observe classes and students – how comfortable do they seem to you? Ask the school for parents who are willing to speak with you to share their experience. Schools are like families; each has its own personality and unique system. It's important you feel at home.

**Q. In your line of work, what are the most common challenges parents face? Are there any resources you'd recommend?**

**A.** Once you have determined the need to search for a new school for your child, the biggest challenge becomes obvious – the tiny number of schools to consider. Each school is as unique and distinct from the other as 2E children are! Just a few of the frequent issues you may face are:

- Scarcity of 2E schools; there may be none.
- Lack of fit in the 2E schools you do have as each has its own mission and serves a specific population.
- Schools may fit one need but not another: Private schools for students with learning disabilities may not have enough challenge while gifted or highly academic schools may not support the learning impediment.
- Schools may not fit your family's values or may not have the range of offerings you are looking for.

What to do? Go to your list of must-haves, nice-to-haves, would-love-to-haves based on your family's "educational flexibility profile" and "needs scope."

Go to Hoagies' Gifted and the Gifted Homeschoolers Forum to find Facebook groups and 2E listserves where you can meet other parents and begin to network. If your child qualifies for the Davidson Young Scholars program, apply to join and find a group of 2E parents to share resources.

A wonderful place to connect with other 2E parents is at the annual summer Support Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG) conferences. These are held in a different part of the country each year and offer programs for children, teens, parents and professionals, allowing you to bring the family, make new friends with other 2E parents and connect with the leading

experts in the country. Look for an SMPG (SENG Model Parent Group), a parent discussion group where you will meet in person (or online) and network outside of your group meetings not only about parenting but about local schooling options.

While not 2E-focused, Understood.org has good resources and an active parent community where you might find helpful discussions.

If you want professional help for a day option – or think a boarding school or therapeutic program might be worth exploring – contact an Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA) consultant. Some boarding schools, whose missions may not be gifted, can provide a fantastic fit for a 2E student that matches their profile.

**Q. What types of questions can parents ask schools? Are there any specific questions you'd recommend?**

**A.** You can ask them anything! If the person you talk with doesn't react well to your question, don't assume the school isn't a good fit. Talk to other staff members to get a sense of how the school responds. If, after speaking with a few people, you aren't comfortable with the answers, pay attention to this, and keep looking at other schooling options. You should feel a sense of comfort and confidence when you find a good fit. You will likely continue to have concerns about your child, but it is important you feel the school is your partner not your adversary.

Some of these questions will be suited for public and private educational settings. Others are appropriate for private only. For a good general lists of questions, I also like the numerous checklists by Understood.org such as "What to Ask the School About Twice-Exceptional Kids" and "What to Look for When Choosing a School."

- What is your interest in twice-exceptional students? What is your experience with them?
- What profile do you serve? What kinds of issues do your students struggle with?
- What students are not a good fit for your school?
- How do you evaluate students during the admission process?
- How do you view testing?
- Do you require a psycho-educational or neuropsychological evaluation by a psychologist? If so, can you recommend anyone to us?
- How do you handle subject and grade acceleration?
- What are your goals for your students?
- Do you know about the 2E Newsletter? Hoagies' Gifted?
- How do you train your faculty on working with a 2E student? What background does your learning specialist have in twice-exceptionality?
- How can parents best support their children at your school? How do you communicate with parents?
- What type of financial aid do you offer?
- Do you offer merit aid?
- Previous teachers have said my student doesn't try hard enough. I know he is trying. How do you approach a student who doesn't turn in homework?
- How do you work with underachievement?
- How do you build on a student's strengths while supporting and strengthening their weaknesses?
- Your school is small. How are you able to offer opportunities to extend my student

beyond core academic classes?

- Can you connect me with current parents who would be willing to talk with me about their experiences at your school?

**Q. Do you have any other advice for families?**

Accepting that your child's schooling is not working out and that you need to make a change can be devastating. You already feel different and now you are recognizing that you need to set out on your own.

Once you make this decision, you may feel a range of emotions from joy to fear. Joy emerges as you feel the thrill of the open road ahead of you. Finally, we can find a school to meet my child's needs instead of trying to change our child to fit the school! Fear can set in if you discover that the school you dream of does not exist in your community, and the open road now seems like an unending journey of one hill always over the next.

Know that you are in good company! There are many 2E families searching, just like you. By joining with them online or in your community, attending conferences and networking you will find a tribe that welcomes you into their family. Your 2E child will benefit from your support and thoughtful consideration of a schooling fit that might have been unthinkable before, like homeschooling or boarding school, but now expands your life in wonderful new ways.

As Ms. Molbak mentions, there are alternatives to traditional schools. That is the focus of Section G.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Some of the challenges that children who are 2E face are typical for all children. These challenges may be tied to developmental or environmental factors. Other challenges are unique to the 2E community.
- When investigating concerns and brainstorming solutions, consider including your child in the process. It may create more buy-in on their end and provide you with insights into their experiences.
- If you suspect your child is underachieving, remember: (1) no one wants to be an underachiever, (2) underachievement may be an issue of dignity not curriculum, and (3) every "underachiever" is good at and passionate about something.
- There isn't a perfect school for all 2E students. Many families make a "least worst" option work. Many families also cycle through several educational options as they look for what works for their child.



## SIDE NOTE

# ON BOREDOM, “SUCKING IT UP” & PLAYING THE GAME

Many schools will say that students need to learn to deal with boredom. Sometimes you just have to suck it up and do what needs to be done even if it isn't fun. These are the rules, and you have to play along.

Children do have to learn all these life skills. They are important. However, young people who are 2E may have a particularly hard time gaining and executing these skills both because of the intensities that come with being gifted and the specific challenges that come with their other exceptionalities.

For these reasons, it can be helpful to put ourselves in the child's shoes. What is her lived experience in school? What does it feel like—physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually?

Truly hearing your child when he talks about his day is a good step in understanding. There is no match, though, for first-hand experience as Alexis Wiggins, a high school teaching coach, learns when she follows a couple students throughout their school days. A link to her article, “A Veteran Teacher Turned Coach Shadows 2 Students for 2 Days,” can be found in the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

If a child's day is spent mostly in a system where they have to reign themselves in or try to work in ways that run counter to how they learn, disengagement may naturally happen. As Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle point out,

If students don't have opportunities to stretch their minds in at least some... ways, they get bored. And when they get bored, they may act out, underachieve, or drop out—either by quitting school before graduation (for example, to work at a job that seems more meaningful to them) or by mentally withdrawing into themselves and giving up on school. In fact, this withdrawal actually happens chemically inside the brain. Researchers have found that, if a curriculum is redundant for the child—beneath that student's level of readiness—the brain is not inclined to engage or respond, and, consequently does not release the levels of dopamine, noradrenalin, serotonin, and other neurochemicals needed for optimal learning. The result is apathy. (2011, p. 120)

How much is too much boredom? That's a hard line to draw. Even harder may be explaining this situation to a school or teacher especially if your child doesn't act like what society says a “genius” acts like. However, the metaphor of a cheetah may be useful in this situation as

Stephanie S. Tolan explains in “Is It a Cheetah,” one of the classic essays on giftedness that has particular resonance with the 2E community.

## IS IT A CHEETAH? BY STEPHANIE S. TOLAN

It's a tough time to raise, teach or **be** a highly gifted child. As the term “gifted” and the unusual intellectual capacity to which that term refers become more and more politically incorrect, the educational establishment changes terminology and focus.

Giftedness, a global, integrative mental capacity, may be dismissed, replaced by fragmented “talents” which seem less threatening and theoretically easier for schools to deal with. Instead of an internal, developmental reality that affects every aspect of a child's life, “intellectual talent” is more and more perceived as synonymous with (and limited to) academic achievement.

The child who does well in school, gets good grades, wins awards and “performs” beyond the norms for his or her age, is considered talented. The child who does not, no matter what his innate intellectual capacities or developmental level, is less and less likely to be identified, less and less likely to be served.

A cheetah metaphor can help us see the problem with achievement-oriented thinking. The cheetah is the fastest animal on earth. When we think of cheetahs, we are likely to think first of their speed. It's flashy. It is impressive. It's unique. And it makes identification incredibly easy. Since cheetahs are the only animals that can run 70 mph, if you clock an animal running 70 mph, IT'S A CHEETAH!

But cheetahs are not always running. In fact, they are able to maintain top speed only for a limited time, after which they need a considerable period of rest.

It's not difficult to identify a cheetah when it isn't running, provided we know its other characteristics. It is gold with black spots, like a leopard, but it also has unique black “tear marks” beneath its eyes. Its head is small, its body lean, its legs unusually long—all bodily characteristics critical to a runner. And the cheetah is the only member of the cat family that has non-retractable claws. Other cats retract their claws to keep them sharp, like carving knives kept in a sheath—the cheetah's claws are designed not for cutting but for traction. This is an animal biologically designed to run.

Its chief food is the antelope, itself a prodigious runner. The antelope is not large or heavy, so the cheetah does not need strength and bulk to overpower it. Only speed. On the open plains of its natural habitat, the cheetah is capable of catching an antelope simply by running it down.

While body design in nature is utilitarian, it also creates a powerful internal drive. The cheetah needs to run!

Despite design and need however, certain conditions are necessary if it is to attain its famous 70 mph top speed. It must be fully grown. It must be healthy, fit and rested. It must have plenty

of room to run. Besides that, it is best motivated to run all out when it is hungry, and there are antelope to chase.

If a cheetah is confined to a 10 X 12 foot cage, though it may pace or fling itself against the bars in restless frustration, it won't run 70 mph.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah has only 20 mph rabbits to chase for food, it won't run 70 mph while hunting. If it did, it would flash past its prey and go hungry! Though it might well run on its own for exercise, recreation, fulfillment of its internal drive, when given only rabbits to eat the hunting, cheetah will run only fast enough to catch a rabbit.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah is fed Zoo Chow it may not run at all.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

If a cheetah is sick or if its legs have been broken, it won't even walk.

IS IT STILL A CHEETAH?

And finally, if the cheetah is only six weeks old, it can't yet run 70 mph.

IS IT, THEN, ONLY A \*POTENTIAL\* CHEETAH?

A school system that defines giftedness (or talent) as behavior, achievement and performance is as compromised in its ability to recognize its highly gifted students and to give them what they need as a zoo would be to recognize and provide for its cheetahs if it looked only for speed. When a cheetah does run 70 mph it isn't a particularly "achieving" cheetah. Though it is doing what no other cat can do, it is behaving normally for a cheetah.

To lions, tigers, leopards—to any of the other big cats—the cheetah's biological attributes would seem to be deformities. Far from the "best cat," the cheetah would seem to be barely a cat at all. It is not heavy enough to bring down a wildebeest; its non-retractable claws cannot be kept sharp enough to tear the wildebeest's thick hide. Given the cheetah's tendency to activity, cats who spend most of their time sleeping in the sun might well label the cheetah hyperactive.

Like cheetahs, highly gifted children can be easy to identify. If a child teaches herself Greek at age five, reads at the eighth grade level at age six or does algebra in second grade we can safely assume that child is a highly gifted child. Though the world may see these activities as "achievements," she is not an "achieving" child so much as a child who is operating normally according to her own biological design, her innate mental capacity. Such a child has clearly been given room to "run" and something to run for. She is healthy and fit and has not had her capacities crippled. It doesn't take great knowledge about the characteristics of highly gifted children to recognize this child.

However, schools are to extraordinarily intelligent children what zoos are to cheetahs. Many schools provide a 10 x 12 foot cage, giving the unusual mind no room to get up to speed. Many highly gifted children sit in the classroom the way big cats sit in their cages, dull-eyed and silent. Some, unable to resist the urge from inside even though they can't exercise it, pace the bars, snarl and lash out at their keepers, or throw themselves against the bars until they do themselves damage.

Even open and enlightened schools are likely to create an environment that, like the cheetah enclosures in enlightened zoos, allow some moderate running, but no room for the growing cheetah to develop the necessary muscles and stamina to become a 70 mph runner. Children in cages or enclosures, no matter how bright, are unlikely to appear highly gifted; kept from exercising their minds for too long, these children may never be able to reach the level of mental functioning they were designed for.

A zoo, however much room it provides for its cheetahs, does not feed them antelope, challenging them either to run full out or go hungry. Schools similarly provide too little challenge for the development of extraordinary minds. Even a gifted program may provide only the intellectual equivalent of 20 mph rabbits (while sometimes labeling children suspected of extreme intelligence "underachievers" for NOT putting on top speed to catch those rabbits!) Without special programming, schools provide the academic equivalent of Zoo Chow, food that requires no effort whatsoever. Some children refuse to take in such uninteresting, dead nourishment at all.

To develop not just the physical ability but also the strategy to catch antelope in the wild, a cheetah must have antelopes to chase, room to chase them and a cheetah role model to show them how to do it. Without instruction and practice they are unlikely to be able to learn essential survival skills.

A recent nature documentary about cheetahs in lion country showed a curious fact of life in the wild. Lions kill cheetah cubs. They don't eat them, they just kill them. In fact, they appear to work rather hard to find them in order to kill them (though cheetahs can't possibly threaten the continued survival of lions). Is this maliciousness? Recreation? No one knows. We only know that lions do it. Cheetah mothers must hide their dens and go to great efforts to protect their cubs, coming and going from the den under deep cover or only in the dead of night or when lions are far away. Highly gifted children and their families often feel like cheetahs in lion country.

In some schools brilliant children are asked to do what they were never designed to do (like cheetahs asked to tear open a wildebeest hide with their claws—after all, the lions can do it!) while the attributes that are a natural aspect of unusual mental capacity—intensity, passion, high energy, independence, moral reasoning, curiosity, humor, unusual interests and insistence on truth and accuracy—are considered problems that need fixing.

Brilliant children may feel surrounded by lions who make fun of or shun them for their differences, who may even break their legs or drug them to keep them moving more slowly, in time with the lions' pace. Is it any wonder they would try to escape; would put on a lion suit to keep from being noticed; would fight back?

This metaphor, like any metaphor, eventually breaks down. Highly gifted children don't have

body markings and non-retractable claws by which to be identified when not performing. Furthermore, the cheetah's ability to run 70 mph is a single trait readily measured. Highly gifted children are very different from each other so there is no single ability to look for even when they are performing; besides that, a child's greatest gifts could be outside the academic world's definition of achievement and so go unrecognized altogether. While this truth can save some children from being wantonly killed by marauding lions, it also keeps them from being recognized for what they are—children with deep and powerful innate differences as all-encompassing as the differences between cheetahs and other big cats.

That they may not be instantly recognizable does not mean that there is no means of identifying them. It means that more time and effort are required to do it. Educators can learn the attributes of unusual intelligence and observe closely enough to see those attributes in individual children. They can recognize not only that highly gifted children can do many things other children cannot, but that there are tasks other children can do that the highly gifted cannot.

Every organism has an internal drive to fulfill its biological design. The same is true for unusually bright children. From time to time the bars need be removed, the enclosures broadened. Zoo Chow, easy and cheap as it is, must give way, at least some of the time, to lively, challenging mental prey.

More than this, schools need to believe that it is important to make the effort, that these children not only have the needs of all other children to be protected and properly cared for, but that they have as much RIGHT as others to have their needs met.

Biodiversity is a fundamental principle of life on our planet. It allows life to adapt to change. In our culture highly gifted children, like cheetahs, are endangered. Like cheetahs, they are here for a reason; they fill a particular niche in the design of life. Zoos, whatever their limitations, may be critical to the continued survival of cheetahs; many are doing their best to offer their captives what they will need eventually to survive in the wild. Schools can do the same for their highly gifted children.

Unless we make a commitment to saving these children, we will continue to lose them and whatever unique benefit their existence might provide for the human species of which they are an essential part.

*This article is reprinted with permission from Stephanie S. Tolan: <http://www.stephanietolan.com/>.*

# SECTION E

## SCHOOL ADVOCACY

### Evan's Story

Advocating for 2E kids is a ping-pong game. One day, I'm advocating for acceleration, and, the next, I'm reminding the teachers that my son has to wear his hearing aids and sit at the front of the room. One of the things I have learned is the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the teachers. In most cases, they truly want to help; they just need specific guidance about 2E kids. When I mentioned to the first grade teacher that my son has executive functioning deficits, I got a blank stare. To her credit, she did some homework and came back to me, excited to finally understand terms like "asynchronous development" and "twice-exceptional."

Ultimately, you and your child are the experts on your child. So just pray that you will be brave enough to trust yourselves. For example, my first grader was having behavior problems at school and was diagnosed with depression. I could see that perhaps some of the problem was due to the fact that he was bored. At home, he would say things like, "Mom, I just don't think the way the other kids do. I'm different than they are." When I told him about single subject acceleration, he said, "I know that's the right thing for me, Mom. I just know it." I have to admit that I didn't trust his decisiveness. After all, he was only seven; what could he know? But he was right. The school has allowed him to accelerate in some subjects, and it has been a great move for him. (Anonymous, personal communication, May 15, 2015)

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One role that many parents don't expect to take on is that of school advocate. But it's a role that many quickly assume when their child is identified as twice-exceptional (2E), and, for many students, it's a very important role. Unlike school officials who have to consider the needs of all students in the school—including your child—you, as your child's main advocate, are the only person who gets to put your child's interests first. You get to be your child's loudest cheerleader, creative problem-solver, steadfast pick-me-upper and biggest fan.

Though parents and school officials have different roles in the advocacy process, the relationship isn't necessarily adversarial. Dr. Vicki Stocking, former Director of Research at the Duke Talent Identification Program, states, "Parents and school personnel are dedicated to the educational well-being of children, but they represent different perspectives" (2003, para. 1). The two groups have different areas of expertise. As your child's first teacher, you are an expert at who your child is, how she thinks, what she's interested in and how she engages in the world (Stocking, 2003, para. 2). Teachers are trained in motivating students, instructional methods and curriculum development (Stocking, 2003, para. 3). They come to know how your child interacts in different environments and with other students. Other school officials have different areas of expertise. For example, school psychologists have a background in child and adolescent development and behavior (Stocking, 2003, para. 5). Bringing together this expertise, parents and schools can work together to make school a better place for the child and to help the child better navigate the school.

When parents begin the advocacy process, they often worry about becoming "that parent"—the pushy parent, the helicopter parent. This can be a difficult image to combat; many educators are misinformed about the nature of children who are 2E. When some see pushiness, 2E parents know they are just trying to desperately keep up with their precocious child. When some see helicoptering, 2E parents know this worrying can be the result of the exhausting crusade to get the right accommodations for their child.

School advocacy is hard work, and it's frustrating when others misinterpret your intentions or actions. Throughout this section, there are some tips on working with the school so that hopefully the road ahead is a little less bumpy.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE I REACH OUT TO A SCHOOL?

Once you've decided to contact the school, you might consider taking the following steps first:

**Know Your Rights. Be Informed.** As discussed in Section C, in developing a plan for your child, it's important to do your research. In the [Davidson Gifted Database](#), you can find resources on

federal and state law. When advocating with a particular school, it's also valuable to learn about the district's policies and the school's practices. Read through your school's student or parent handbook. Look up the school and district's mission, vision and/or teaching philosophy. Are there statements made in these texts that you agree with or that are applicable to your child? For example, many mission statements include a line about helping students realize their potential, challenging students with a rigorous curriculum or preparing students to reach their goals. If you find statements like these that align with your values and advocacy goals, this can be helpful in demonstrating that you and the school share a similar mission.

It can also be helpful to know the school's culture and personnel organization. Who makes decisions about gifted education and special education? Who has the power to implement changes? How much autonomy do teachers have? What's the school's track record with students who have unique needs? Are there families who have asked for similar things; can you reach out to them to hear about their experiences? Fellow parents are sometimes good sources of information for these questions. However, it's important to remember that school culture can vary a lot year-to-year and grade-to-grade, especially if there has been a big change in administration, district policy or funding.

**Identify needs and wants.** As discussed in Sections C and D, it can be valuable to reflect on all parts of a child's situation to identify what areas you would like to see adjusted. It can be helpful to categorize these into needs and wants. What does your child absolutely need right now to progress in school? What would make things significantly better?

**Brainstorm solutions.** Once you've identified your child's needs and wants, it can be helpful to think about how you would like those needs and wants met. In your ideal situation, what would happen? What steps could be taken to build toward that ideal situation? What ideas does your child have? It may be useful to research what others have done in similar situations. Parent groups and organizations that advocate on behalf of specific groups (gifted, 2E, learning differences, etc.) may be helpful here.

Judy Galbraith and Dr. James R. Delisle, authors of several books on gifted education, suggest that it may be valuable to get your solutions down in writing (2011, p. 129). To formalize your thoughts, Galbraith and Delisle suggest the following structure (2011, p. 130):

- Goal – the change you want to see
- Steps – the actions needed to achieve the goal
- Resources – who can help achieve the goal and what is needed to achieve the goal
- Roadblocks – possible impediments to achieving the goal
- Rewards – the positive impact you hope to see after the goal is achieved

**Prioritize.** In a first meeting, it's unlikely that you'll be able to move ahead on all your child's needs and wants. Consider thinking strategically. What is the most important piece to address? You can apply similar thinking to your proposed solutions. What's your ideal solution? What's Plan B? Plan C? In prioritizing, you might think about the school's perspective on the solutions. Which cost money? Which is going to be the most time- or staff-intensive? Presenting the solutions in a particular order (perhaps pie-in-the-sky and then a good middle ground) can be one strategy to employ.

Once you feel prepared, it's time to reach out to the school.

# SIDE NOTE

## ON STARTING THE CONVERSATION

When parents embark on the advocacy process, many are unsure where to begin. How do you get the conversation started? Geri Coleman Tucker offers the following suggestions for opening up the dialogue with your student's educators in his article, "8 Sentence Starters to Use When Talking to Teachers." This article first appeared on Understood.org.

### 8 SENTENCE STARTERS TO USE WHEN TALKING TO TEACHERS

BY GAIL COLEMAN TUCKER

**"I'm concerned about my child's..."**

Saying "I'm concerned about my child's progress in math" is a lot less confrontational than saying, "You need to do more to help my son with math." Using "I" statements instead of "you" statements can let the teacher know that you want to work together as partners and that you're not playing the blame game.

**"Help me understand..."**

Even in moments when you disagree with a teacher, saying "Help me understand" is a constructive way to move a conversation forward. It also makes it clear that you're listening and engaged.

**"What was the goal of this assignment?"**

It's important to make sure you and the teacher are working toward the same goals. Clarifying those goals is key. It's also important to emphasize that you share those goals. A good follow-up to this question would be to ask, "Do you have any suggestions for other activities my child could do to work on those skills?"

**"Have you considered..."**

This is a polite way to share information the teacher might not know. It's also a good way to ask questions without making the teacher feel defensive.

**"I've noticed..."**

This phrase allows you to share information and respectfully acknowledge that parents and teachers often see children from different perspectives. For example, you could say, "I've noticed my child can retell a story with more detail after she reads it aloud. Are there opportunities for reading aloud during classroom reading instruction?"

**"It seems as if she has a harder time doing \_\_ when \_\_."**

Seems and appears are useful words when trying to reach a shared understanding about a child's strengths and needs. These words allow you to present your take on the situation without making a harmful or incorrect assumption. For example, you could say, "It seems as if my child has a harder time showing what she knows when the worksheets mix operations" or "She appears to not complete homework when the assignments involve multi-part directions."

**"Her IEP provides her with \_\_. How does that look in the classroom?"**

This is a good way to ask about accommodations without accusing the teacher of failing to provide them. Remember the goal is to work together. Avoid making assumptions that could damage your relationship.

**"How can I help?"**

Teachers have a classroom full of students. These four words let the teacher know you're willing to play a role in your child's education rather than just leaving it up to her.

*This article is reprinted with permission from Understood.org.*

## HOW DO I SET A MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL?

As the previous article explains, it can be hard to know how to kick start the advocacy process. Beyond figuring out what words to use, you might have some of the following questions:

**Who do I reach out to?** Look at the areas you want addressed. Who, at the school, can attend to these concerns most directly? When a student has one or two main teachers (such as in many elementary schools), it can be helpful to start with the teachers as they are often the person who knows your child best. When a student has several teachers, starting with a teacher may still be helpful, especially if the area of concern is specific to a certain class or subject. However, some issues require different people to get involved such as a gifted or special education coordinator, a guidance counselor or an administrator. If you have

established a good relationship with a staff member, you can also reach out to that person first and ask for advice on whom to approach next.

**When should I reach out to them?** There are fairly natural times to discuss areas of concern with a school such as the beginning or end of a term, parent-teacher conferences and course selection periods for older students. However, you don't have to wait for one of these times to contact the school. School meetings can happen at any point.

**How should I reach out to them?** Many families start with a short email, briefly explaining why they want to meet and offering a few times they're available. If you've talked to a staff member in person about meeting, it might be a good idea to follow up with an email to schedule the meeting. If you haven't heard back from the person in a few days, it's okay to follow up with a phone call.

**When scheduling a meeting what should I keep in mind?**

- **Attendance.** While initial meetings may be only between you and the staff member, it may be helpful to think about who should attend in other meetings. Would it be helpful to have your child attend? If you have a partner, would it be helpful to have you both attend? Depending on the topic of discussion, would it be appropriate to have others attend, either from the school itself or an outside person (such as the professional that evaluated your child)? It's also important to note that sometimes the school may decide that additional staff members should join the meeting; they may or may not notify you of this in advance of the meeting. While an unexpected attendee at the meeting may be awkward at first, you can always use the phrase: "I'm so glad that there are more people joining my child's team! Thank you for taking time to be here today." This sets a positive tone and also gives the attendee an opportunity to explain what his or her role in the meeting.
- **Length.** How long do you think you need to explain the situation and discuss possibilities? It may be helpful to mention the length of the meeting you're hoping for when you reach out to a school as some schools schedule meetings for brief amounts of time such as ten or fifteen minutes.
- **Timing.** Considering how long you hope the meeting is and who will attend, when is the best time for this meeting? Before or after school are common choices, but there may be other periods during the day that staff members are available such as planning periods.

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR A SCHOOL MEETING?

Once you've set a time for the meeting or as you wait for a response from the school, you can begin on the following steps:

**Collect evidence.** In preparing for your meeting, it can be helpful to collect and organize the

important information on your child. This is information you could share if the staff member is open to it or something you could refer to in the meeting if questions come up. This packet could include your child's evaluation reports, evidence of their strengths (independent projects done at home, school work, etc.) or research on your child's profile.

If you decide to share research, it may be helpful to follow the advice of Meredith Warshaw, special needs education advisor and former contributing editor to the 2e Newsletter. Warshaw reports that she often "hear[s] parents complain that they gave their child's teacher a book or a list of websites, but the teacher never found time to read it" (2004, para. 2). She says that this is sometimes understandable because teachers have many students and families vying for their time. As parents, she says that one of your roles is to make it easy for teachers to access important information (2004, para. 2). She suggests the following steps:

1. Prepare a short summary page listing the most important points in the articles and reference the page numbers where they can be found.
2. Find the shortest articles that you feel provide the most crucial information.
3. Choose articles from the experts in the field or sources that are known and respected in the educational community. Limit yourself to as few articles as possible – no more than two to three.
4. Use a colored highlighter pen on the most important points in each article.
5. Present the articles in order of importance (2004, para. 3).

While these tips specifically relate to sharing research with teachers, these tips could be applied to other parts of the packet you prepare. For example, if you have a long evaluation report to share, it may be helpful to write a one-paragraph summary of the report and highlight important parts.

Finally, you might reflect back on previous feedback you've received from your child's school (such as in parent-teacher conferences) or correspondence you've had with the school. What can you glean for this information? For example, you might learn that there's been a change in staff. A new hire might mean that the person is still figuring out how things run; it might also mean someone with lots of new ideas. Or perhaps there has been a new curriculum introduced or funding structures have changed. All these could affect your advocacy efforts. With feedback you've received from teachers, you might learn about that teacher's style, what he or she values, or how your child is perceived in the classroom. This can all be valuable to consider as you think about your advocacy strategy.

**Make an agenda.** This isn't necessarily an agenda you must share with the staff member. An agenda can just be a document you have to remind you of what you want to accomplish during the meeting. It can also be helpful to write down any key words or phrases that you want to use. For example, Section A discussed building your own definition of twice-exceptionality. You could write that definition down so you remember exactly the way you wanted to present twice-exceptionality.

**Coordinate with other attendees.** If your partner, your child or an outside professional will be in attendance, it may be helpful to set aside time to plan together. What will each of you contribute to the meeting? How can you help each other out during the meeting? For example, during meetings it's often easy to get pulled into tangents or get off topic. Is there a signal that could be used to alert each other that the conversation is going off course?

# PARENT TOOL

## ANTICIPATE CONCERNS

As mentioned in the last subsection, reflecting on the information you've received from the school can be helpful. You may be able to anticipate concerns or hesitations in regards to what you're asking for. It can be helpful to think of responses to potential concerns. For example:

If the teacher says...	You might respond...
"I can't make an exception for your student."	"I understand. Can you tell me more? What can be done within the curriculum/classroom to support my child?"
"It's always been done this way."	"I'm sure there are probably some very good reasons for that. Can we try this solution for a set amount of time—perhaps six or eight weeks—and then evaluate whether this is working?"
"It would cause chaos in my classroom."	"I'd be willing to help see that this doesn't happen. I can volunteer my time in the classroom, collect resources, or support you in any way I can from home."
"Your student has straight As. Why not be satisfied with that? After all, what more could you ask for?"	"I know that my child gets straight As, but, the thing is, I feel that she could be learning so much more. I know that you teach because you love to help students grow. I see your dedication. I really need your help and support to help my child reach her potential."
"We don't have the resources for that." Or, "That's not going to work out logistically."	"Okay. Can we brainstorm some ways to work around that? What resources can we leverage? What are the obstacles to making this happen?"

*Adapted from The Gifted Teen Survival Guide (2011) by Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle (p. 134).*

## WHAT SHOULD I DO DURING A SCHOOL MEETING?

Even with all the best preparation, you won't know exactly how a meeting will play out. Thus, during the meeting, you may want to keep the following in mind:

**Be action-orientated.** Some meetings are about getting to know each other, getting on the same page and exploring possibilities. However, many times parents walk away from meetings without a clear idea about what will happen next. If you come to a consensus that something should be done, try to steer the conversation to specifics:

- What, specifically, will be implemented? What will this change look like in practice?
- How will this change be implemented? What steps will be taken to implement this change?
- Who will implement this change?
- When will this change be implemented? When will we evaluate whether or not this change is effective?

**Document the meeting.** Having a record of what was discussed can help ensure that everyone remains on the same page. Records are also helpful to reference for future meetings and when tracking a child's accommodations or progress. Even if the school is documenting the meeting, it can be useful to have your own notes.

## WHAT STEPS SHOULD I TAKE AFTER A SCHOOL MEETING?

One meeting typically doesn't accomplish everything needed. If that's the case, some next steps you can take are:

**Follow up.** Send a thank you email with your summary of the meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page. You can include what was discussed, action items and decisions that were made. Be sure to express your appreciation for their time and their willingness to work with you.

**Re-evaluate throughout the school year.** Has the plan been implemented? How is it going? Does another meeting need to be scheduled? Do any short or long term goals need to be re-addressed? You can bring in your documentation from your previous meeting to support any decisions that were made and that the school should be following through on.

**Be persistent.** While no one wants to be the pushy parent, advocacy does take persistence. Sometimes it does take a couple emails or a phone call to get a response. At some point, you may need to go beyond a teacher or principal and talk to staff members at the district level. At the same time, you will also want to reflect on the bigger picture. You may be working with these individuals in the future either because your child has a few more years in this particular

school or siblings who will be attending the same school. Thus, you may want to consider what steps can be taken while also maintaining a positive relationship with the school.

## WHEN DO I FOLLOW UP WITH ANOTHER MEETING?

During your first meeting, you may have decided on a plan to follow up or set a time for a second meeting. If there wasn't a concrete plan established, then scheduling a follow up meeting may depend on your goals. If you're assessing the progress made on a new strategy or program implemented, it may take six to eight weeks to really see impact. However, there are situations that demand a tighter timeframe. Look back at the action items agreed on during the meeting. What makes sense with those items?

Sometimes, if you have gotten to a point where things are going smoothly, you may not need a follow-up per se. Perhaps at that point, there are just periodic check-ins to keep everyone on the same page. This might be a good time to acknowledge the positive changes you are seeing and to thank the educators involved for their effort.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

There are many resources to explore supports and accommodations for a student's areas of weakness. If you're looking for how to stretch a student in her areas of strength, you could begin with the **Acceleration Institute**. The Acceleration Institute is an organization dedicated to supporting new research on different methods of acceleration as well as synthesizing past research about supporting intellectually advanced students. Their research and publications have been used by families in the gifted and 2E worlds when advocating at schools.

One of their works, *A Nation Empowered*, digests what educators and psychologists have learned over a decade about cultivating the talents of gifted students in school. For example, in this document, they outline 20 different acceleration methods.

The report is available as a free download through Belin-Blank's IDEAL Solutions website. Volume 1 of *A Nation Empowered* is a brief overview of their findings. This volume was written for educators, administrators and policy-makers and may be a valuable document to share with your child's educational team. Volume 2 contains the research reports of the studies discussed in Volume 1.

On their website, you can also find answers to frequently asked questions about acceleration and stories from individuals who have experienced acceleration.

# PARENT TOOL USE ADVOCACY LANGUAGE

Word choice can really impact the tone of any conversation. Once the advocacy process has begun, many families find that it can be helpful to have alternatives to potentially loaded terms. Below are a few examples to consider.

Instead of...	Try...
Using the word "gifted"	Referring to specific talents and strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kelsey has a 1000 Lexile score; a late middle-school reading level; is reading <i>The Hobbit</i>, <i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i>, and <i>20,000 Leagues Under the Sea</i>.</li> <li>• Kelsey is passionate about math; seems to intuitively understand concepts and patterns; helps her older brother with his fifth grade math homework.</li> <li>• Kelsey is a budding naturalist; reads <i>Muse</i>, a science magazine meant for students at least three years older than her; collects, preserves and catalogs leaves, flowers, rocks and minerals.</li> </ul>
Using the word "bored"	Using the word "unengaged."
Using "you statements" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You haven't been challenging Taylor.</li> <li>• Your approach hasn't been engaging Taylor.</li> </ul>	Focusing on the child and using "I statements" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taylor has been feeling under-challenged in reading. I'm worried that he may be losing interest; he's been such an avid reader up to this point.</li> <li>• Taylor has been disengaging in math. He has been putting up a fight at home when it comes to math homework though he has been getting As on the chapter tests.</li> </ul>
Framing traits negatively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picky</li> <li>• Stubborn</li> <li>• Impulsive</li> </ul>	Finding the positive side to your child's traits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precise</li> <li>• Assertive</li> <li>• Spontaneous, instinctive, energetic</li> </ul>



# WHAT IF I HIT A WALL OR GET BURNT OUT?

## Ryan's Story

If you have a resistant school like I have had, it's a long, hard road. I have contemplated moving to another area and interviewing other schools. Every year, you have to start over with a new teacher and nothing seems to get done all year. You try not to be the pain-in-the-neck mother, but there's no way they can serve a student like Ryan in a regular classroom without some adjustment. Every year as he matures, I try to teach respectful self-advocacy, but it's a work in progress. (Anonymous personal communication, April 17, 2015)

Advocating over a long period of time can be exhausting and frustrating. Rarely are changes made the first time a parent advocates for their child. It is common for parents to have to make several advocating attempts before a simple change is made. You may hit a wall—an unyielding administrator, a teacher that doesn't respond to emails or calls, a convoluted bureaucratic process. Even when changes are made, it seems like constant vigilance is needed to make sure those changes stay in place.

In these types of situations, burn out is bound to happen. What can you do in those moments?

**It's okay to take a break.** When you're feeling burnt out, consider taking a step back and looking at how much energy and time you've been putting into advocating. Are you feeling burnt out because there is an imbalance in where you are putting your energy? Is there something outside of advocating that you feel needs more effort? Are you stretching yourself thin by putting energy into too many things? Is there something that you could cut back on temporarily?

Sometimes what has to give is your level of involvement in the advocacy process. Are you too close to the situation? Taking a step back may help you do better work in the future.

A break can mean different things. In some instances, it may mean holding off on sending (another) reminder email; perhaps you wait ten days to see if a reply comes through. In other cases, you may decide that you're not going to set up any meetings or communicate with the school for a month. If you've been focusing on academics, you could speak with your child about other areas that might make the overall school situation better such as social connections or extracurriculars; could your child benefit from you supporting him or her in those areas? Look at the calendar. How close to the end of the school year are you? Can you finish out the year as is and start fresh in the fall? Some families also decide to pull their child from school for a few weeks, a semester or a year to regroup, reconnect and try something new as a family.

Taking a break can seem like a risky decision. There may be factors at play that make it impossible to take a break—like a situation where a child is being physically bullied or when an

IEP process is on a timeline. However, you might zoom out and look at the big picture. What are you and your child going to lose if you take a break for a few days, a couple weeks or a month? What could you both gain with that time?

**Take a fresh look at your team.** If it's a particular obstacle you are facing, perhaps there is someone else you can reach out to for support. Look at the people in your network and the possible people that could help. Is there another person you could add to the team that might be able to work around this obstacle?

Sometimes this means taking the situation to the next level. If you have been only working with teachers, it's time to involve an administrator or counselor. If you have been working at the school level, move on to the district level.

Other times, it means looking for support outside of school. Are there outside professionals or community members that could help? Is there a gifted group, a learning difference association or another organization that could offer guidance? The professional field of help is also vast and varied. Could your child try a new type of therapy or assistance?

Finally, it is also important to recognize that parents need a support network. How can you broaden and strengthen your own support structure? Section C has tips on assemble a broad team.

**Reflect and refocus.** When your advocacy efforts aren't achieving the desired result, you may need to reevaluate your strategy. Is there another path to your goal? Is there a goal that is more achievable in this moment that may get you partway to your overall objective?

You may decide that there needs to be a bigger shift. This may mean looking at different school options or looking at alternative education paths (discussed in Section G). It can be scary to consider such options. However, many families in the 2E community do successfully pivot every year.

Finally, sometimes burnout happens because parents doubt themselves. But you can do this! You have raised an amazing child for many years and bringing up a child who is 2E isn't always easy. Advocacy can be overwhelming, confusing and just plain hard. Reflect on what you have learned and your successes along the way.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

If you're looking for additional support in your advocacy journey, **Twice Exceptional Children's Advocacy, Inc. (TECA)** is one place to start. The organization "assists parents in finding and advocating for the education and resources their children require... TECA seeks to provide parents, educators and professional care providers with research-based information to help them understand and provide appropriate interventions for the social, emotional and academic support of twice exceptional students" (TECA, n.d.). The organization was founded by parents, and they run several online parent support groups and workshops. In addition, TECA can refer parents to professional advocates to help families work with their school. TECA also hosts an annual conference for parents and professionals to learn directly from one another.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Though many parents feel unprepared to take on the role of advocate, you (and your child) are the expert on your child. There are also numerous resources to support you in your efforts.
- Preparation can make you feel more equipped to successfully advocate in a school meeting.
- Advocacy can be a long road. It's okay to take a break when you need to.
- As the side note below explains, involving your child in the advocacy process can be beneficial.

## SIDE NOTE ON SELF-ADVOCACY

Self-advocacy can be an effective strategy in getting a child's needs met in the classroom. In *The Power of Self-Advocacy for Gifted Learners*, Deb Douglas explains that there are several benefits in self-advocacy: more appropriate academic challenges, increased motivation, greater independence and self-direction, improved academic performance and less frustration (2018, p. 22-25).

Though self-advocacy has many benefits, most students don't engage in it: "92 percent of students never/almost never/occasionally talked with a teacher about differentiating work for them" (Douglas, 2018, p. 28). According to Douglas, the reason for the lack of self-advocacy is that "[t]oo often students feel that education is something that is done *to* them, not *with* them. It simply doesn't occur to them that things could be different if they ask" (2018, p. 29). It can also be hard to understand what that "different thing" could be if you've only been exposed to one way of doing school.

For this reason, students often need coaching on how to advocate in a polite yet effective way, and there are resources, such as in the [Davidson Gifted Database](#), that can help. For some students, self-advocacy involves speaking with their teachers directly, attending portions of meetings or writing letters to educators introducing themselves, their goals, strengths and challenges.

In thinking about self-advocacy, many assume that only older students can advocate on their own behalf. However, as Jennifer Ritchotte, Hasan Zaghlawan and Chin-Wen "Jean" Lee demonstrate in the article below, younger students can make meaningful contributions.

Ritchotte, Zaghlawan and Lee also discuss some tips for parents in the advocacy process. This article first appeared in the March 2017 issue of *Parenting for High Potential*, a publication of the National Association of Gifted Children.

## PAVING THE PATH TO MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT FOR HIGH-POTENTIAL CHILDREN BY JENNIFER RITCHOTTE, HASAN ZAGHLAWAN, & CHIN-WEN "JEAN" LEE

Although Ryan was being considered for gifted and talented services in second grade based on his performance in reading and math, he greatly disliked in-class reading. He was disengaged in class because he was forced to read books that he didn't find interesting, and he felt he already knew what was being taught. He stopped reading the books his teacher chose for him. He learned quickly that he could do fine on the computerized reading tests without reading those "boring" books.

Several months after Ryan made this choice, his teacher attempted to engage him in a conversation on yet another book he had not read. It surprised her that Ryan could not answer simple questions about the book, but had earned a high mark on his reading test. After a little more questioning, she realized that Ryan had also not read the other books she had chosen for him earlier in the school year. Ryan's parents received the phone call that every parent dreads. The teacher informed them that Ryan would be placed on a behavior plan for his dishonesty. His parents accepted this consequence, punished Ryan by taking away his video games for a month, and did not attempt to uncover *why* Ryan chose to behave in such a way.

Like many well-intentioned parents, they did not realize that uncovering *why* could prevent similar problem behaviors from reoccurring in the future and help place Ryan on a path to engagement in school.

### Tools to Use

It's essential for children to record and track their feelings, ideas and action plans in order to achieve meaningful engagement. Use the templates and prompts on the following pages to guide your child every step of the way.

### What is Meaningful Engagement?

Research has shown that when children feel engaged with learning, they are more likely to flourish socially and academically<sup>1</sup> and less likely to exhibit problem behaviors.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have distinguished three different types of engagement: behavioral, emotional and cognitive.<sup>3</sup> *Behavioral engagement* focuses on participation in academic, social and out-of-

school activities. *Emotional engagement* centers on how connected children feel to their teachers, peers and what they are learning in school. Lastly, *cognitive engagement* occurs when children are invested in their learning and put forth effort into understanding challenging material (see below).

Types of Engagement	
TYPES	EXAMPLES
Behavioral	"I complete homework on time." "I work hard to do well."
Emotional	"I feel happy to be part of my school." "I enjoy the classes I am taking."
Cognitive	"I want to learn as much as I can at school." "School is important for future success."

(Fredricks et al., 2011)

### Why Are All Children Not Meaningfully Engaged at School?

Unfortunately, it's not always so simple for teachers to support meaningful engagement in school. First, teachers may not recognize whether a particular learning activity is "meaningful" for a child. Knowing if a child is feeling connected to what he is learning or craving more challenge in a classroom of 25 or more students can be difficult. This leads to the second issue, time. In an era of high-stakes testing, it may not always be easy for teachers to provide children with opportunities to meaningfully engage in true *learning* for extended periods of time because *schooling* takes precedence. Preparing children for material they will be tested on may seem like more of a priority than allowing children to dig deeper into content that interests them. However, there are ways parents can support teachers in meaningfully engaging their children at school.

### The Path to Meaningful Engagement

Often, parents ask their children about their school day only to receive answers that are not very telling like "good," "fine," "I don't know" or "I don't want to talk about it now." Second, well-intentioned parents often put "Band-Aids"—a temporary solution—on children's problem behaviors. A Band-Aid solution to a problem behavior might consist of rewards for modifying the behavior (e.g., I earn an inexpensive toy if I turn in my homework on time for an entire week) or consequences for continuing to engage in the problem behavior. Typically, problem behaviors will continue to resurface if the underlying cause of a child's problem behavior has not been addressed.

The first step to placing children on the path to meaningful engagement at school happens at home.




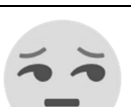
### Help Children Identify How They Feel

Helping children identify their feelings is commonly referred to as *emotional literacy*. Children

may not always understand how they are feeling or have the words to explain their feelings.<sup>4</sup> Developing children's emotional vocabulary provides them with appropriate language that is used to articulate both simple and complex feelings. Children with a strong foundation in emotional literacy are able to explain *why* they engaged in a particular behavior. With that said, it is equally important that children are also able to identify and explain positive feelings (e.g., pride, empathy). Ultimately, children need to learn that expressing feelings with appropriate language is a powerful tool that not only promotes healthy communication, but also helps them get their individual needs met.

One way parents can help their child identify how he feels about schoolwork he is not excited about and *why* he feels this way is by using an *Emotional Literacy Chart* (below). Parents can model or act out these different feelings, brainstorm examples of the different feelings, and even find "teachable moments" throughout the day to explain their own feelings. Parents can use the Emotional Literacy Chart during homework time or downtime or whenever the child feels most comfortable reflecting on his day at school.





Using the chart as a tool, children are encouraged by the adults in their lives to use and grow their emotional vocabulary. Once they master a basic emotional vocabulary, their parents can help add complex feelings and advanced vocabulary. It's important to point out that complex feelings are described using more than one word. For example, "sad" is a basic feeling, while "*I don't feel confident right now*" is a more complex phrase that might be associated with sadness. Helping children accurately identify and explain their feelings at home is the first step to meaningfully engaging children at school.

STEP 1: Identify Feelings			
Help children identify why they feel a certain way using an Emotional Literacy Chart.			
EMOTIONAL LITERACY CHART			
In _____ (school subject)	I feel...	This means...	Here are some examples
4 	frustrated, annoyed, angry, _____ (add your own)	What I am learning is too hard. I might not be able to make it. _____ (add your own)	
3 	challenged, interested, positive, _____ (add your own)	What I am learning takes extra effort, but I can handle it. _____ (add your own)	
2 	confident, sure of myself, _____ (add your own)	What I am learning is just right for me. _____ (add your own)	
1 	bored, annoyed, distracted, _____ (add your own)	What I am learning is too easy for me. _____ (add your own)	

## Communicate with the Child's Teacher(s)

Effective communication between parents and teachers is essential. Ongoing verbal and nonverbal communication between parents and teachers is the cornerstone of a successful partnership. Communicating only when a problem presents itself is reactive and not proactive. When faced with a problem, blaming others—or even ourselves—is very unlikely to lead to positive outcomes. Ongoing communication through occasional phone calls, emails or a school-home communication notebook can prevent the emergence of future concerns.<sup>5</sup> These various means of communication are simple but powerful because they promote the sharing of ideas and feedback about the child's level of engagement at school and home—and keep both parents and teachers informed about the child's evolving interests and motivation toward learning.

Parents might start a conversation with their child's teacher(s) by sharing the child's Emotional Literacy Chart. In addition, parents should encourage their child to share her feelings with her teacher. The teacher might have a different perspective, so listening is always important. Keeping copies of the Emotional Literacy Chart and *Feelings Tracker* (below) in the child's folder, on his desk or in his school planner will help keep track of communication over a longer period. The chart may be laminated and reused each day.

STEP 2: Monitor Feelings							
Track feelings over time using a timeline or calendar.							
FEELINGS TRACKER							
Subject/Activity:		Oct. 1	Oct. 2	Oct. 3	Oct. 4	Oct. 5	Date
Reading							
4							
3							
2					✓	✓	
1		✓	✓	✓			

Offering children a simple way to begin a conversation with their teachers about their engagement lays the foundation for self-advocacy in the future. Gifted children, especially, need to learn at a young age how to express when they have learning needs in a way that is appropriate and comfortable for them. As children get older, it becomes increasingly more

difficult for parents to advocate on their behalf at school. Modeling effective adult communication between parent and teacher, in addition to giving children an opportunity to express how they are feeling, are proactive strategies that support continued meaningful engagement in school.

## Collaborate on a Plan

Once a child's feelings toward a particular subject are identified, the next step is to brainstorm practical solutions. Brainstorming solutions should always be a collaborative effort that includes parents, teachers, and, of course, the child!

Shared input results in greater investment and buy in on everyone's part, especially if all voices are heard and honored during the process. Conversations between a child, teacher, and parents begin by using insights gleaned from the Emotional Literacy Chart to complete a *Collaboration Guide* (below). The Collaboration Guide is an organizational tool used to help facilitate a discussion around an issue and to brainstorm solutions that address the components of meaningful engagement. The Collaboration Guide is comprised of sections that align with the components of meaningful engagement:

- **Identifying the Issue**, where information is taken from the Emotional Literacy Chart and Feelings Tracker previously completed by the child and confirmed during the meeting.
- **Brainstorming Possible Solutions**, where the team creates a list of possible solutions that might address the issue.

STEP 3: Brainstorm Ideas	
Use the Collaboration Guide to brainstorm solutions and create a plan together.	
COLLABORATION GUIDE	
<b>Identifying the Issue</b>	
When I am asked to _____ (fill in task/work/activity), I feel _____.	
I feel _____ for these reasons:	
<b>Brainstorming Possible Solutions</b>	
For <b>Behavioral</b> Engagement:	
I would want to participate in _____ if:	
Write at least one idea that would help with this:	
For <b>Emotional</b> Engagement:	
I would feel more connected to _____ if:	
Write at least one idea that would help with this:	
For <b>Cognitive</b> Engagement:	
I would give my best effort to _____ if:	
Write at least one idea that would help with this:	

Simply agreeing to try an idea is often not going to lead to hoped-for outcomes. The child needs to reflect on why she wants to try this idea and identify the steps she will take to implement it. If a child is not invested in trying a particular idea, it is destined to fail because he/she will most likely not put forth the effort needed to make it work.

After brainstorming ideas for solutions, the team helps the child complete the *Meaningful Engagement Plan (below)*. This tool helps the child understand why he is intrinsically motivated to try this idea. Intrinsic motivation or buy in is a critical component.

**STEP 4: Create a Meaningful Engagement Plan**

After brainstorming solutions, help the child complete the Meaningful Engagement Plan, which helps the child understand why he is intrinsically motivated to try this idea

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT PLAN	
This week I will try this idea:	<i>Reading a book that is harder and more interesting.</i>
I want to try this idea because...	<i>I want to like in-class reading time and become a stronger reader.</i>
This is how I plan to try this idea...	<i>I will talk to my parents and teacher about things that I like, so they can help pick better books for me. I will give the new book a chance and if I still am not happy with in-class reading, I will tell my teacher and parents.</i>
My teacher(s) will support me by...	<i>My teacher will listen to the things I like to read about and use the tests I have taken to come up with books for me.</i>
My parent's will support me by...	<i>My parents will also listen and help my teacher pick books for me.</i>
This should happen if I try this idea....	<i>I should be happy during in-class reading time, finish the new book and do well on the test I take on the book.</i>
Child Signature	_____
Parent Signature	_____
Teacher Signature	_____

Use the Collaboration Guide to brainstorm solutions and create a plan together.

With the help of his team, the child explains how he will try this idea and how his team members will support him. Getting as specific as possible with details is important.

Finally, the last piece is determining what should happen if everyone does their part. These are the outcomes the child, teacher and parents can measure. For example, if a child is resistant to reading a book, an Emotional Literacy Chart can help gauge his feelings about the book and a reading assessment will ensure he read the book and understood it.

Throughout the implementation process, it is important to set checkpoints to ensure the child is on the path to reaching the goal he set and to determine if adjustments need to be made. The team can use a simple *Progress Monitoring Chart (below)*. Checkpoints might include mini-goals and deadlines, and could either be done by parents or teachers—but shared with both.

**STEP 5: Monitor Progress**

Set checkpoints to ensure the child is on the path to reaching the goal he set and to determine if adjustments need to be made.

PROGRESS MONITORING CHART		
I want to participate in _____ now.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Why:
I feel connected to _____ now.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Why:
I want to give my best effort to _____ now.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Why:

If adjustments are needed to help the child achieve his goal, the Meaningful Engagement Plan can be adapted at this point with everyone's input. The team can meet again in person, on the phone or over email. Typically, if the child does not make a goal (as recorded on the Progress Monitoring Chart), then the Emotional Literacy Chart, Collaboration Guide and Meaningful Engagement Plan tools may need to be reexamined.

**Concluding Thoughts**

When a child stops engaging in learning, parents and teachers need to feel empowered to change the path the child is on. Band-Aid solutions lead to frustration. A shared partnership between parents, teachers and the child, on the other hand, leads to empowerment for everyone involved. Without a doubt, it takes a village to help a child maximize his or her full learning potential. High-potential children should never be considered the exception to this rule. They, too, require the support of caring adults in their lives and opportunities to feel meaningfully engaged in learning.

**Authors' Note**

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engagement in naturalistic environments, and supporting families in preventing and managing challenging behaviors.

**Chin-Wen “Jean” Lee, M.Ed.**, is a doctoral student in the School of Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado. Her research emphasis is on twice-exceptionality. She is interested in teacher preparation, professional development and program evaluation. During her free time, she likes cooking, baking, hiking, and visiting small towns in Colorado.

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# SECTION F

## IEPS & 504 PLANS

### Madeline's Story

My high-achieving daughter was repeatedly denied a 504 evaluation due to good grades. I did lots of research, got info from different listserves, and consulted with experts. We finally succeeded and got her 504 last month, March of her third year at a three year middle school. Seems maddeningly late but still worth it: I was able to walk a copy of it over to the high school she will be attending in the fall, and they took it and said they will immediately put it in place without going through any additional procedures—amazing after all the struggles and fighting we went through with her current district. (Anonymous personal communication, April 13, 2015)

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*This section explores IEPs and 504 Plans and the policies associated with them. None of this should be interpreted as legal advice. Only trained professionals can offer such advice. The following is for informational purposes only.*

The last section focused on general school advocacy. This section narrows in on the formal supports you may advocate for in a school environment: an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan. Not every student who is twice-exceptional (2E) has or needs an IEP or a 504 Plan. Does your child need one?

IEPs and 504 Plans are formal plans for supporting your student in school that are protected by law. Some, but certainly not all, situations in which an IEP or 504 Plan may be useful are:

- If your advocacy efforts are not progressing productively. An IEP or 504 Plan can lay out a concrete plan of support that must be followed according to law.
- If your advocacy efforts have been successful to a point but your child's needs aren't being met with the informal accommodations in place or there is inconsistency in the support your student receives. For example, if your child has multiple teachers but all are assisting him differently or to different degrees. An IEP or 504 Plan can set clear expectations on how your student should be supported.
- If your child needs supports that require specialized instruction, equipment or additional time from staff members. Schools receive some funding to help with these types of supports when a student has an IEP.
- Your child needs a formal record of the supports he or she needs to be successful in school. For example, your child may need some sort of record to request additional time on standardized tests. An IEP or 504 Plan can serve that capacity.

There isn't an easy answer to the question of whether or not an IEP or a 504 Plan is necessary. The information in this section is designed to help you explore whether an IEP or 504 Plan could be useful in your specific situation.

## WHAT'S AN IEP? WHAT'S A 504 PLAN? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM?

IEPs and 504 Plans are the ways in which students with disabilities gain access to specific modifications, accommodations, supports and services. They are the result of two federal laws: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Both laws were designed to protect students who have disabilities and their right to obtain an education. Students who qualify for and receive an IEP or 504 Plan are more likely to have what they need to be successful in school.

However, there are differences between the two. In brief, an IEP can address a student's whole education experience at school. An IEP is about "meeting the unique educational needs of an individual student with a disability" (Parenting Your Twice-Exceptional Child, 2010, p.16). A 504

Plan outlines how a student will access the learning opportunities at her school. In other words, a 504 Plan doesn't include specialized instruction or classes. It's about making changes so that a student "can get benefit from his education the same as other kids in [his] classroom" ("The Difference Between," n.d.). Its overall goal is to establish "equity between students with and without disabilities" (Parenting Your Twice-Exceptional Child, 2010, p.16).

It takes time and research to become fluent in the laws surrounding education within the United States. As a brief introduction, the chart below compares IEPs and 504 Plans and highlights some of their main differences. This chart was created by Understood.org and originally appeared in the article "The Difference Between IEPs and 504 Plans."

	IEP	504 Plan
<b>Basic Description</b>	A blueprint or plan for a child's special education experience at school.	A blueprint or plan for how a child will have access to learning at school.
<b>What It Does</b>	Provides individualized special education and related services to meet the unique needs of the child.  These services are provided at no cost to parents.	Provides services and changes to the learning environment to meet the needs of the child as adequately as other students.  As with IEPs, a 504 Plan is provided at no cost to parents.
<b>What Law Applies</b>	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)  This is a federal special education law for children with disabilities.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973  This is a federal civil rights law to stop discrimination against people with disabilities.
<b>Who Is Eligible</b>	To get an IEP, there are two requirements: 1. A child has one or more of the 13 specific disabilities listed in IDEA. Learning and attention issues may qualify. 2. The disability must affect the child's educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum.	To get a 504 Plan, there are two requirements: 1. A child has any disability, which can include many learning or attention issues. 2. The disability must interfere with the child's ability to learn in a general education classroom. Section 504 has a broader definition of a disability than IDEA. That's why a child who doesn't qualify for an IEP might still be able to get a 504 Plan.

	IEP	504 Plan
<b>Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)</b>	<p>Parents can ask the school district to pay for an IEE by an outside expert. The district doesn't have to agree.</p> <p>Parents can always pay for an outside evaluation themselves, but the district may not give it much weight.</p>	Doesn't allow parents to ask for an IEE. As with an IEP evaluation, parents can always pay for an outside evaluation themselves.
<b>Who Creates the Program/ Plan</b>	<p>There are strict legal requirements about who participates. An IEP is created by an IEP team that must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child's parent</li> <li>• At least one of the child's general education teachers</li> <li>• At least one special education teacher</li> <li>• School psychologist or other specialist who can interpret evaluation results</li> <li>• A district representative with authority over special education services</li> </ul> <p>With a few exceptions, the entire team must be present for IEP meetings.</p>	<p>The rules about who's on the 504 team are less specific than they are for an IEP.</p> <p>A 504 Plan is created by a team of people who are familiar with the child and who understand the evaluation data and special services options. This might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child's parent</li> <li>• General and special education teachers</li> <li>• The school principal</li> </ul>
<b>What's in the Program/ Plan</b>	<p>The IEP sets learning goals for a child and describes the services the school will give her. It's a written document.</p> <p>Here are some of the most important things the IEP must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child's present levels of academic and functional performance—how she is currently doing in school</li> <li>• Annual education goals for the child and how the school will track her progress</li> <li>• The services the child will get—this may include special education, related, supplementary and extended school year services</li> <li>• The timing of services—when they start, how often they occur and how long they last</li> <li>• Any accommodations—changes to the child's learning environment</li> <li>• Any modifications—changes to what the child is expected to learn or know</li> </ul>	<p>There is no standard 504 Plan. Unlike an IEP, a 504 Plan doesn't have to be a written document.</p> <p>A 504 Plan generally includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific accommodations, supports or services for the child</li> <li>• Names of who will provide each service</li> <li>• Name of the person responsible for ensuring the plan is implemented</li> </ul>

	IEP	504 Plan
<b>What's in the Program/ Plan (cont.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the child will participate in standardized tests</li> <li>• How the child will be included in general education classes and school activities</li> </ul>	
<b>Parent Notice</b>	<p>When the school wants to change a child's services or placement, it has to tell parents in writing before the change. This is called prior written notice. Notice is also required for any IEP meetings and evaluations.</p> <p>Parents also have "stay put" rights to keep services in place while there's a dispute.</p>	The school must notify parents about evaluation or a "significant change" in placement. Notice doesn't have to be in writing, but most schools do so anyway.
<b>Parent Consent</b>	A parent must consent in writing for the school to evaluate a child. Parents must also consent in writing before the school can provide services in an IEP.	A parent's consent is required for the school district to evaluate a child.
<b>How Often It's Reviewed &amp; Revised</b>	<p>The IEP team must review the IEP at least once a year.</p> <p>The student must be reevaluated every three years to determine whether services are still needed.</p>	<p>The rules vary by state.</p> <p>Generally, a 504 Plan is reviewed each year and a reevaluation is done every three years or when needed.</p>
<b>How to Resolve Disputes</b>	<p>IDEA gives parents several specific ways to resolve disputes (usually in this order):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediation</li> <li>• Due process complaint</li> <li>• Resolution session</li> <li>• Civil lawsuit</li> <li>• State complaint</li> <li>• Lawsuit</li> </ul>	<p>Section 504 gives parents several options for resolving disagreements with the school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediation</li> <li>• Alternative dispute resolution</li> <li>• Impartial hearing</li> <li>• Complaint to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR)</li> <li>• Lawsuit</li> </ul>
<b>Funding/ Costs</b>	<p>Students receive these services at no charge.</p> <p>States receive additional funding for eligible students.</p>	<p>Students receive these services at no charge.</p> <p>States do not receive extra funding for eligible students. But the federal government can take funding away from programs (including schools) that don't comply. IDEA funds can't be used to serve students with 504 plans.</p>



# SIDE NOTE

## ON FEDERAL LAW & 2E STUDENTS

One question that comes again and again is: Can 2E students qualify for an IEP or 504 Plan? The short answer is: YES!

The long answer is that some families have a difficult time initiating the evaluation process and establishing eligibility. This can occur for several reasons including the following:

- Some educators and administrators incorrectly interpret the laws; some think that a student has to be performing below grade-level to qualify. (This is discussed in more detail in the article below.)
- There is still a persistent myth that, if a child is intellectually gifted or advanced, he can't have a learning difference or disability.
- A child's gifts may mask her other exceptionalities.
- Evaluating a human being—especially a young individual who is rapidly growing and changing—is complex and challenging. Professionals, educators and administrators may not have experience or knowledge of this population, which makes understanding the child's learning profile and needs difficult.

For these reasons, part of this process may include educating teachers and administrators about twice-exceptionality through advocacy (the topic of Section E), learning more about masking (discussed in Section B), and finding an effective ally or evaluator to support your understanding of your child. (Section B also covers evaluation more in depth.)

If the sticking point becomes that your child doesn't qualify because he or she is performing at or above grade level or is making satisfactory progress in the school's eyes, then the following handout and the documents referenced in it may provide you with some guidance.

This handout was adapted by Barbara Gilman and Kathi Kerney from a 2016 National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Convention presentation and published by 2E Newsletter. The [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#) includes a link to the original handout where you can view the documents discussed in the handout.

## CLARIFICATIONS OF FEDERAL LAW AS IT APPLIES TO TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS BY BARBARA GILMAN & KATHI KERNEY

Following are descriptions of clarifications of federal law made by the Department of Justice and the Department of Education to guide practice. These clarifications relate to gifted students with disabilities and should be used to guide school policy. According to the Wrightslaw website, "Opinion/policy letters [such as those described below] are not law, but represent the position of a federal or state agency."

### ADA Guidelines Regarding Standardized Testing

In January of 2016, the Department of Justice released guidelines that address twice-exceptional children specifically. They require a reduction in periodic re-evaluations required for the continuation of accommodations, and testing accommodations designed to allow the student to demonstrate full potential. The guidelines include the following:

- **A person with a history of academic success may still be a person with a disability who is entitled to testing accommodations under the ADA.** For example, someone with a learning disability may achieve a high level of academic success, but may nevertheless be substantially limited in one or more of the major life activities of reading, writing, speaking or learning, because of the additional time or effort he or she must spend to read, write, speak or learn compared to most people in the general population.
- **If a candidate previously received testing accommodations under an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan, he or she should generally receive the same testing accommodations for a current standardized exam or high-stakes test.**
- Testing entities must **ensure that the test scores of individuals with disabilities accurately reflect the individual's aptitude or achievement level** or whatever skill the exam or test is intended to measure. A testing entity must administer its exam so that it accurately reflects an individual's aptitude, achievement level or the skill that the exam purports to measure, rather than the individual's impairment (except where the impaired skill is one the exam purports to measure).

(For more information, see "Dyslexia and Accommodations – New ADA Guidelines 2016 for School and Work," by Fernet Eide, January 18th, 2016.)

### Department of Education Clarifications of Federal Law

The chart [on the next page] describes clarifications of federal law that the Department of Education has issued. Each is available online.

Document	Issue	Description
Letter to Anonymous (2/29/12)	FAPE, the Free Appropriate Public Education guaranteed to children with disabilities by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	Clarifies that: "Each state must ensure that FAPE is available to any child with a disability who needs special education and related services, even though the child has not failed or been retained in a course, and is advancing from grade to grade. 34 CFR §300.101(c). A State has an obligation to make FAPE available to an eligible child with a disability even if that child meets the State's academic achievement standards."
Letter to Anonymous (1/13/10)	Being gifted does not disqualify a student from eligibility for special education and related services under the IDEA.	States: "...the IDEA and its regulations do provide protections for students with high cognition and disabilities who require special education and related services to address their individual needs." Therefore, students with high cognition and disabilities such as Asperger's syndrome or autism spectrum disorder "could be considered under the disability category of autism and the individualized evaluation would address the special education and related services needs in the affective areas, social skills and classroom behavior, as appropriate."
Letter to James Delisle (12/20/13)	A child need not be failing to get special education services.	States: "...it would be inconsistent with the IDEA for a child, regardless of whether the child is gifted, to be found ineligible for special education and related services under the SLD category solely because the child scored above a particular cut score established by State policy."
Letter to Lybarger (9/14/90)	The education needs of a child with a disability can be non-academic.	States: It has been the Department's longstanding position that the education needs of a child with a disability "include non-academic as well as academic areas." The term "educational performance" as used in the IDEA "means more than academic standards as determined by standardized measures."
Dear Colleague Letter (12/26/07)	[Having a disability] does not disqualify a student from accelerated programs such as advanced placement courses.	States: "The practice of denying, on the basis of disability, a qualified student with a disability the opportunity to participate in an accelerated program violates both Section 504 and Title II. Conditioning enrollment in an advanced class or program on the forfeiture of needed special education or related aids and services is also

Document	Issue	Description
Dear Colleague Letter (12/26/07) (cont.)		inconsistent with the principle of individualized determinations, which is a key procedural aspect of the IDEA, Section 504 and Title II."
Memorandum from Melody Musgrove (4/17/15)	A reminder from the Director, Office of Special Education Programs, to State Directors of Special Education of the legal requirement to evaluate all children, regardless of cognitive skills, suspected of having any of the disabilities specified under federal law.	States: "...I am requesting that you widely distribute Letter to Delisle to the LEAs in your State, and remind each LEA of its obligation to evaluate all children, regardless of cognitive skills, suspected of having one of the thirteen disabilities outlined in 34CFR§300.8."  "Furthermore, the State must ensure that ... the evaluation is sufficiently comprehensive to assess the child in all areas related to the suspected disability, and must identify all of the child's special needs, whether or not commonly linked to the disability category in which the child has been classified. 34 CFR §300.304(c)(4)and (6)."

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## WHAT'S MY ROLE IN THE IEP & 504 PLAN PROCESS?

Another way of wrapping your head around these laws is to understand who is in charge of what. For this reason, a breakdown of the roles of different agencies and individuals is provided below.

The information discussed here is in part from Peg Rosen's article, "Special Education: Federal Law vs. State Law," and Andrew M.I. Lee's articles, "At a Glance: Your Rights in the IEP Process" and "At a Glance: Your Rights in the 504 Plan Process."

The [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#) includes links to those articles as well as other resources referenced below.

### Federal Role

- Designates who may be eligible for special education.
- Guarantees Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive

- Environment (LRE).
- Lays out procedural safeguards. For an outline of the procedural safeguards for parents, see “Important Safeguards for You and Your Child” by Andrew M. I. Lee on the 2E Guidebook resources page.

### State’s Role

There is room for interpretation within IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Thus, there are a few things that may vary by state such as:

- Who qualifies under each disability category.
- What FAPE and LRE look like. Each state can provide guidelines to districts and schools on what is “appropriate” and what is “least restrictive.”
- How school districts are set up and how special education funding is distributed.

While the state guidelines must follow the procedural safeguards outlined in federal law, they do have some control over some details. For example, the timeline you are working within may differ slightly from state to state.

### School District’s Role

- Interpret state law and develop policy for the schools within their district.
- Hire specialized staff such as therapists.
- Allocate funding for specific modifications, accommodations, supports and services.
- Provide professional development opportunities for education and administrative staff.

Depending on a district’s policies and what is allowed under state law, some districts may share some of these responsibilities with the schools within their district.

District decisions are often influenced by funding. Not all districts within a state may have the same access to the same resources.

### Role of the Educational Team at Your Child’s School

- Facilitates the IEP or 504 Plan process. Appropriately notifies all parties involved.
- Tracks a student’s progress.
- Implements the modifications, accommodations, supports or services stipulated in the IEP or 504 Plan.

### Your Family’s Role

- Participate in meetings about your child. Contribute your knowledge about your child. Make suggestions about how to meet his or her needs.
- Have the option to have an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) completed. However, your school doesn’t necessarily have to accept the results, and you may have to pay for this expense.
- Give—or do not give—informed consent on decisions about your child.
- Have the option to challenge decisions made by the educational team, school or district.
- Have the option to hire an educational advocate or attorney at personal expense.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

Learning exactly how federal, state and local policies affect you and your child can be confusing. One resource that can help you in this endeavor is **your state’s Parent Information and Training (PTI) Center or Centers**. Under IDEA, each state receives funding for and must establish at least one PTI Center (Morin, n.d.-a). The exact name of your PTI Center may differ. The Center for Parent Information and Resources has a directory of all state PTI Centers.

These centers are intended to support families who have children with disabilities from birth to age 26 (“Find Your Parent Center,” n.d.). While services and resources may vary across centers, you may find the following through your local center:

- Training on your rights and your child’s rights and on special education.
- Tips on how to effectively participate in your child’s education.
- Information on different disabilities and learning profiles.
- Support groups.
- Lists of opportunities for your child and lists of professionals that may be able to offer additional support.

## WHAT’S THE PROCESS OF GETTING AN IEP OR 504 PLAN?

As discussed above, the IEP and 504 Plan process may differ a bit between districts and between states. Below is a general overview of the broad steps typically taken in this process. The [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#) includes resources that can help you explore each of the steps in more detail as well as links to the articles referenced below.

**Step 1: Seek Understanding.** Before beginning the IEP or 504 Plan process, it’s helpful to gain as complete a picture of your child as possible. Some actions you could take at this stage are:

- Talk with your child about her school experience. What works for her? What doesn’t work?
- Make notes about what works at home for your child and insights you have as a parent about how your child learns. Remember, you have been one of your child’s main teachers since birth; you have the most complete record of his trajectory.
- Meet with your child’s teachers and ask for their observations and insights about your child.
- Volunteer in the classroom for a day to better understand your child in the context of the class as a whole. Or, shadow your child; follow her throughout a day to appreciate what her lived experience of school is.
- Talk with other parents at your school who have been through the IEP or 504 Plan process.
- Have an Independent Educational Evaluation completed.
- Gather your child’s records together. This could include report cards, outside

evaluations, reports from professionals, work that your child has completed at home that demonstrates her intellectual abilities and other documents. It could also include a letter from your child in which she describes in her own words how she learns and how she prefers to engage with information, people and the world.

- Educate yourself on your district's policies and your state laws about special and gifted education. You might reach out to your state's Parent Information and Training Center, gifted association or special education advocacy group.

If your child is currently experiencing significant challenges at school, you may have limited time for this step.

**Step 2: Request an Evaluation.** An evaluation request marks the formal beginning to obtaining an IEP or 504 Plan for your child. You or the school may initiate this step. If you initiate this step, you write a formal letter to the school explaining why you want your child evaluated and that you give consent to have your child evaluated by the school. The school can approve or deny your request ("Requesting an Evaluation," n.d.). The guidebook's resources page includes articles to guide you in writing a formal evaluation request letter, what to do while waiting for a decision and what you can do if your evaluation request is denied.

If the school initiates this step, they must give you prior written notice and ask for your consent. You do not have to give your consent (Lee, n.d.-f).

**Step 3: Your Child Is Evaluated.** This evaluation should be free, prompt and thorough. Prompt typically means within 60 calendar days of when you gave consent to have your child evaluated (either through a formal letter from you or in response to a letter from the school).

According to Andrew M. I. Lee, the evaluation "must include a variety of tests and data collected from you and his teacher. The goal is to get a full picture of his functional, developmental and academic abilities" (n.d.-d).

To be eligible for a 504 Plan, your child may not have to be evaluated to the same degree. See Dr. Judy Elliott's discussion of this in "Are Evaluations for IEPs and 504 Plans Different?"

**Step 4: Determine Eligibility.** You should receive the results of your child's evaluation and be contacted by the school about their interpretation of the results; if you do not, you can request a copy of the results. There are a range of responses you might hear (Rosen, n.d.-a). There are steps that you can take if you disagree with the results.

If your child might be eligible for services under an IEP, there will be an IEP eligibility meeting where the final determination will be made. If the school determines that your child is not eligible and you disagree, there are steps you can take including discussing if a 504 Plan could support your child (Morin, n.d.-b).

**Step 5: Develop IEP or 504 Plan.** Should it be decided that your child is eligible for an IEP or 504 Plan, there will be a meeting to develop the plan. For an IEP, you must be included in the meeting (Stanberry, n.d.-b), and most schools typically involve parents in a 504 Plan meeting, though this is not guaranteed under the law (Stanberry, n.d.-a).

If you do not agree with the plan to move forward with your child's education, you can reject

3part or all of your IEP (Lee, n.d.-e). Similarly, you can challenge a 504 Plan in a number of ways (Lee, n.d.-a).

## WHAT CAN BE INCLUDED IN AN IEP OR 504 PLAN?

Broadly a student may receive accommodations, modifications and supplementary aids and services in an IEP or 504 Plan,

- **Accommodations** allow "a student to complete the same assignment or test as other students, but with a change in the timing, formatting, setting, scheduling, response and/or presentation" ("School Accommodations," n.d., p.1). In other words, "[a]ccommodations change *how* a student learns" the same material as all other students (Strom, n.d.). Examples of accommodations include a student receiving longer time on tests or being allowed to type instead of handwrite assignments.
- A **modification** "is an adjustment to an assignment or a test that changes the standard or what the test or assignment is supposed to measure" ("School Accommodations," n.d., p.1). That is, a "modification changes what a student is taught or expected to learn" (Strom, n.d.). Examples of modifications include requiring a student to do fewer problems on an assignment or doing an alternative assignment.
- **Supplementary aids and services** are "supports to help your child learn in the general education classroom" ("IEP Terms," n.d.). These supports could include equipment (such as assistive technology), adjustments to your child's learning environment (such as preferential seating), push-in services (such as an aide that takes notes), pull-out classes (such as additional instruction in reading), therapy or professional services (such as counseling sessions), or training for the staff that works with your child amongst other things.

It can be helpful to think outside the box when it comes to what may be included in an IEP or 504 Plan. You might reach out to some parent support groups to ask what has been helpful for their children. Your child may also have some great ideas. "Our Community Weighs In: Surprising IEP and 504 Plan Accommodations" by Lexi Walters Wright might be a good place to get some initial ideas.

You might also think about how your child's strengths, talents and learning preferences can be built into an IEP or 504 Plan to support your child's areas of challenge. *To Be Gifted and Learning Disabled* (3rd edition) by Susan M. Baum, Robin M. Schader and Steven V. Owen has a number of strengths-based ideas for supporting students who are 2E in schools.

Finally, while the focus for many parents during this process is academic, IEPs and 504 Plans can also include social-emotional supports such as direct instruction in social skills, meeting with a social skills groups or other therapeutic accommodations or services (Volpitta, n.d.).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

You likely have many, many more questions about IEPs and 504 Plans. There's a lot to learn! Below are a few of the more common questions. You can find more places to explore these questions and links to all the articles mentioned below on the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

**Can students have both an IEP and a 504 Plan?** It would be unusual. As Lindsay Jones, Vice President of the National Center for Learning Disabilities, states "Everything that's in a 504 Plan can be included in an [IEP]. The IEP can also provide services and supports that would be not available in a 504 Plan. So if your child qualifies for an IEP, typically there is no reason to also have a 504 Plan" (Jones, n.d.).

**Which is better: an IEP or a 504 Plan?** It depends on your child. Andrea Bennett and Lisa Frank point out that the "contents of an IEP are specified by law" (2009). Schools also receive funding to offer special services (such as additional instruction in a specific area or therapy) through IDEA, though what special services are available will vary across districts and states. A 504 Plan can be more flexible in a number of ways including who is involved and what it can include. A 504 Plan also puts legal safeguards in place. However, there isn't federal funding for special services. Dr. Liz Matheis puts it this way: "If your child needs accommodations in the classroom—such as being seated away from windows and close to a teacher—but not an academic program," a 504 Plan may meet your child's needs, but "if your child needs related services on top of that, consider an IEP" (Matheis, n.d.). It is also important to look at what's allowed and available in your district and state.

**Can I bring other people into an IEP or 504 Plan meeting to support me as a parent?** Yes! Read about one parent's story about how additional support people helped her family in "Someone on My Side of the IEP Table."

**Will rejecting part or all of my child's IEP or 504 Plan mean that my child won't receive any services or supports?** No! Read one parent's story about how rejecting her son's IEP worked out well in "The Day I Rejected My Son's IEP." On the guidebook's resources page, you can also find "5 Ways to Politely Decline the School's IEP Draft" by Kristin Stanberry. While these stories and tips discuss IEPs, many ideas from them can be applied to 504 Plans.

**What do I do if an IEP or 504 Plan isn't being implemented?** You have many options for recourse. There are some articles and resources to guide you on this issue on the guidebook's resources page.

**Are private schools required to implement IEPs and 504 Plans?** No, but they are required to provide some limited accommodations for students ("Public, Private and Charter," n.d.).

**Can my child receive support at school without an IEP or 504 Plan?** Yes! This is called an informal accommodation or support. Many students, at some point in their school careers, receive some informal accommodations or support. These are typically short-term, simple adjustments to a student's way of going about the school day (Rosen, n.d.-b). For example, a

student that forgets homework assignments may have an informal arrangement with a teacher where the teacher checks to make sure the student has homework assignments in her bag or may allow the student to take a picture of the homework directions written on the board.

Informal accommodations and support don't require a diagnosis or a formal evaluation process. However, a teacher is not required to grant these requests, and there are limits to what a teacher can do without an IEP or 504 Plan in place (Rosen, n.d.-b).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Students who are 2E can be eligible for IEP and 504 Plans. This is true even if they are working at or above grade-level. Students that receive gifted services can also receive special education services and vice-versa.
- Understanding the laws surrounding IEP and 504 Plans takes time. It's also helpful to research how the law is interpreted by your state and what is available in your specific school district.
- For some, the process of obtaining an IEP or 504 Plan can be challenging. However, students who do have an IEP or 504 Plan are more likely to receive the support and services they need to be successful in school. As a parent, your role in this process is to be your child's main advocate.

# SECTION G

## EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

### Katherine's Story

Now that we're homeschooling, Katherine can take Art of Problem Solving Pre-Algebra 1 and 2 without getting held back to grade-level math because she wouldn't be able to "pass" timed math facts drills. She can take fifth grade literature classes without having to endure second grade spelling tests. She can code a text adventure in C# even if her spelling isn't perfect. We talk a lot about the benefits of having a dyslexic brain rather than dwelling on the negatives. Dyslexia is still incredibly frustrating for her sometimes, but we are persevering together. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 10, 2015)

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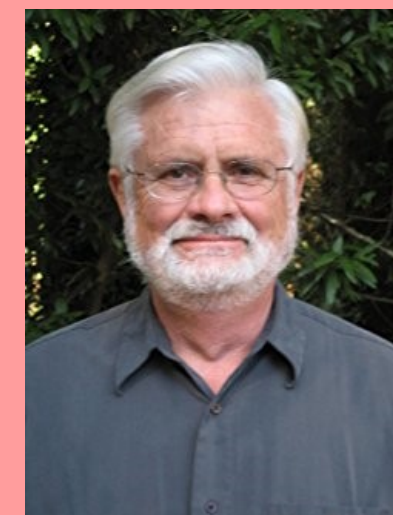
Much of the discussion on education in this guidebook has, up to this point, focused on traditional, brick-and-mortar options. However, many families explore other options for meeting the educational needs of their children who are twice-exceptional (2E). Wes Beach has guided many students on unique paths toward success, and, below, he shares his advice on choosing the road less traveled.

Homeschooling, in its many varieties, is one popular choice. In the second expert highlight in this section, Suki Wessling discusses the benefits of homeschooling for children who are 2E and how to get started.

You can find links to the resources and organizations mentioned below in the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

## EXPERT Q & A WITH WES BEACH

During the last ten of the 32 years I was employed in the public schools, I was the director of a program for gifted and talented high school students, and, for the past 23 years, I've been the director of a private high school that consists of a home office with the legal standing of a school. I've worked with thousands of teens (and a few pre-teens) who have modified and/or skipped over traditional high school studies in order to design an education that's appropriately challenging. Many pathways can lead to the highest levels of formal education without including the preparatory steps that are commonly thought to be necessary.



Through Beach High School, I assist families in designing fitting educational paths that may include acceleration in school, homeschooling, distance learning, independent learning, tutoring and mentoring, enrollment in college classes and/or early college admission. I can also help with college choice, college admission and preparation of transcripts and other documents that accompany applications to colleges and universities.

**Q.** At what point should parents consider alternatives to their current educational path? How can parents determine when the path they're on isn't working?

**A.** Listen carefully to your student, observe her behavior closely and take into account any advice you've received from professionals. Most important, I think, are the intensity, breadth and consistency of your student's complaints and/or signs of distress. A kid who hates everything about her schooling and does not suffer from a serious and independent-of-school

psychological problem needs a change, possibly a radical one. Another who has conflicts with a certain teacher or difficulties with a specific subject may need only to have his program tweaked. I've described ends of a spectrum, and, in some cases, any decision may be not be an easy one. Think hard, and then go with your informed intuition; change direction when necessary.

**Q. For parents who are beginning to think about alternative educational options, where do they start? How can they create a balanced and strengths-based educational program for their student?**

**A.** Start by trying to empty from your head all assumptions, practices and timelines of traditional education. Focus instead on your kid(s) and what you judge that they need to nurture their strengths. Paying attention to college admission requirements will provide sufficient balance. A "high school" record can show both traditional and nontraditional subjects, and even the traditional subjects need not be studied in traditional ways. I assigned a year's English credit for a student's participation in an immersive, 30-day retreat during which she read a lot and wrote a 38,000-word novella. The same student was credited with a course titled "Alternative Education Studies."

**Q. What non-traditional options are available to students today? How can a parent research more about these options?**

**A.** Options include modified and/or augmented traditional programs, nontraditional schools or a set of learning experiences outside of schools. You may be able work out a modified program with school officials or locate a local nontraditional school. Augmentation and outside-the-system programs can include:

- Any mix of classes at schools, colleges and in your community,
- Online and on site classes,
- Community activities,
- Self-teaching,
- Volunteer work or employment, and,
- Travel.

Possibly the best starting point for research would be an online search for the resource pages at homeschooling sites. But think widely and without traditional restraint. One of my students talked her way into doing research at a major university at age twelve. Another, beginning early, traveled globally with her parents.

**Q. What steps can parents take to create a path that truly fits their student's needs and how do they know if the new path is working?**

**A.** Work with school officials, being both unfailingly polite and doggedly persistent, or take charge yourself. To find out how to do the latter, do an online search for homeschool support organizations in your state. Laws in your state will, to a lesser or greater degree, allow you to design a fitting education program using the elements described above. Homeschooling does not necessarily require parents to play primary roles as teachers. You may find co-ops, private tutors, homeschooling support programs in schools and many other outside-the-home resources. You will know your plan is working when your student's serious complaints and

signs of distress are substantially reduced or, hopefully, disappear altogether. The best possible outcome is enjoyment and deep engagement.

**Q. Many parents are hesitant to step off of a traditional education path. What are the pros and cons of doing so? How can parents balance long-term and short-term academic goals for their student(s)? What are the prospects for college admission for young people who have prepared in non-traditional ways?**

**A.** No matter what you do, you may need to spend extra time focusing on your student's education. If you take matters into your own hands, there may also be extra expenses involved. Keep in mind, however, that it's your kid's education and happiness that are at stake. When you find an appropriate path, the young person you're concerned about will have gained a great deal.

Having worked with many hundreds of young students who have created their own paths, I can say that everyone who has wanted to go to college has been able to. Many have begun at community colleges, often at young ages, sometimes starting as part-time students. In your state you may find "open admission" or very minimal requirements for admission. Transfer admission to four-year colleges and universities can depend entirely on one's community college record. See "A Story of Academic Acceleration and Success" for one student's story. Seven detailed stories of other students' successes are in my book *Forging Paths: Beyond Traditional Schooling*. Some of these gifted people went directly to four-year colleges.

After completing a do-it-yourself education, direct admission to four-year colleges and universities, including the most prestigious ones, can be gained; it depends in large part on careful and detailed documentation of substantive achievements. See "Tips for Parents: Creating Effective Transcripts" and "Writing Transcripts-Excerpt from *Forging Paths: Beyond Traditional Schooling*." There's a chapter and more on writing transcripts in my book *Self-Directed Education: Documentation and Life Stories*. This book also includes more than two dozen stories of people who have followed extremely varied paths, some of whom have found fulfilling and rewarding vocations without having attended college at all.

Most of the time, when you exit the traditional brick-and-mortar school world, you enter into some sort of homeschooling. As Mr. Beach mentions above, homeschooling can take many forms. It may mean mostly recreating school at home—keeping the same structure overall, but allowing you to select curriculum for your child and allowing him to move at his own pace. On the other hand, some forms of homeschool eschew school structures and opt for more child-led activities. Perhaps one of the more popular forms in the 2E community is "eclectic homeschooling" in which families borrow bits and pieces from different types of schooling. A child might:

- Take in-person classes through a school, community college, university, homeschooling co-op or community organization,
- Participate in online classes and other online learning opportunities,
- Be instructed by a parent in a couple of areas,
- Have a mentor or tutor in other areas, and/or
- Pursue independent study, courses and projects.

The main benefit of homeschooling is flexibility. You can set up a system that works for your child—her interests, her learning style, her pace, etc. It can also work around any other areas of your child's life such as therapy and pre-professional study of the arts or athletics. For these reasons, within the Davidson Young Scholars program, about a third of the children are homeschooling at any one time. For some, homeschooling is their long-term educational plan. Others homeschool for a period as they take a break from a school system, transition to another situation, or take some time to focus on a few specific things.

Even though a large percentage of the Young Scholar community is homeschooling, for many this wasn't part of the plan for their child. Most didn't believe they ever would or ever could homeschool. Suki Wessling was one of these parents as she describes in her book, *From School to Homeschool: Should You Homeschool Your Gifted Child?* Below, she answers some questions specifically about homeschooling children who are 2E.

## EXPERT Q & A WITH SUKI WESSLING



Suki Wessling is a writer of widely published poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. She has worked as a college English teacher, small press publisher, graphic designer, and journalist. Suki writes about gifted children, education, and homeschooling, with an emphasis on serving the emotional and academic needs of unusual learners. Her books, *From School to Homeschool* (Great Potential Press) and *Exploring Homeschooling for Your Gifted Learner* (National Association for Gifted Children), introduce parents seeking alternative educational approaches for their gifted children to the basics of homeschooling. Suki is also the author of *Hanna, Homeschooler*, a chapter book. Her latest book, *Homeschool with*

*Confidence*, is a goal-setting guide for teens. Suki teaches writing, literature, and education classes for children and adults in person and online at Athena's Advanced Academy. She writes a blog about learning for children at <http://kidblog.sukiwessling.com/> and one for adults at <http://blog.sukiwessling.com/>.

**Q. Is it possible to homeschool a child who is 2E? What are the advantages of doing so? What should I consider before making the decision to homeschool a child who is 2E?**

**A.** Homeschooling can be uniquely suited to 2E students. Schools are set up to serve the needs of "average" students, while 2E students are outside of average in multiple directions. Since homeschooling serves the needs of individual students, the approach can be designed around the student's asynchronies. There are, of course, important considerations:

- *Will your student continue to receive services from the public school system if you*

*homeschool?* The answer to this question will vary widely from district to district.

- *Do you feel that you are equipped to support your student?* Bearing in mind that all of us feel ill-equipped to meet our own high standards as homeschoolers, make sure that you have the time, focus and resources you need. If you currently work, you may need to cut down or change your work schedule. If you live in an area without immediate resources, you may need to drive. And of course you need to feel emotionally equipped to meet this challenge, hopefully supported by a spouse, family and/or friends.
- *Finally, are there appropriate resources in your community for homeschooling a student with unusual needs?* Be aware, in any case, that many homeschoolers have twice-exceptional students although they might not identify them as such. You won't be alone in homeschooling a student with special needs.

Resources:

- *Exploring Homeschooling for your Gifted Child*—This booklet I wrote for the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) covers the basics of homeschooling gifted and 2E children.
- "Exacerbating Asynchrony: Why Homeschooling 2E Kids Makes Sense" by A Tree House Education—This blog post explores the concerns the author had and why she decided to homeschool her 2E son.
- 2e Newsletter—The fee-based newsletter and the free email briefing contain valuable insights into educating and raising 2E learners.

**Q. What are the first steps I should take after making the decision to homeschool?**

**A.** The most important tool you will have as a homeschooler is your community. These days, community can take a variety of forms. Getting connected online with like-minded homeschoolers is very important; you will be able to get the widest variety of information and viewpoints by connecting with people who have common values, concerns and issues. But don't ignore your local community, as well. Lonely homeschoolers are often frustrated homeschoolers. Are there local parents you feel connected with? Are there co-ops, community centers, public homeschool programs and other ways to connect with local homeschoolers? Are you aware of the social needs of your student?

Many new homeschoolers believe that they need to plan out academics before they start. Although this sometimes works, it often backfires because homeschooling is not just a change of education; it's a change of paradigm. What worked for your student in school may not work in homeschool. What appeals to you as a parent may not appeal to your student. Make sure to expect that you will take time to ramp up to homeschooling. If you expect to "hit the ground running," you may quickly be disappointed. It's always better to set yourself up for success rather than failure!

Resources:

- *From School to Homeschool* by Suki Wessling—I wrote my book because I realized that so many parents needed to move from a school-based to a homeschool-based mindset in order to be successful homeschoolers.



- “Dear New Homeschooler” by Mary McCarthy—This article was written in the homeschooling dark ages (pre-Web!) but her advice still holds true today.
- *Deschooling Gently* by Tammy Takahashi—This is a lovely book about changing to a homeschool-based mindset.

#### Q. What legal information is important to know when homeschooling a student who is 2E?

A. The United States educational code is a state-by-state patchwork. Although all public schools have to follow certain guidelines concerning registered students with disabilities under the ADA, states are otherwise allowed to structure their school systems as they see fit. The result is that there is no one answer to this question. The first place you should go for legal information about your state is your state homeschool association. Larger states often have multiple organizations; the differences may be ideological (i.e. “unschooling”/“structured”), political (liberal/conservative), religious (Christian/inclusive), or they may just be regional. These associations almost always have local representatives that you can talk to about your particular situation.

Your state educational code may or may not have clear and complete information about homeschooling. Once you have information from one source, be sure to check it with another source. Homeschoolers around the country regularly report getting biased, incomplete or erroneous information about homeschooling from Department of Education employees, so be sure to check the validity of information you receive. Public homeschool programs, such as charter schools, can sometimes offer local homeschooling information as well. There is no one national homeschooling organization that represents all homeschoolers. Be sure to find out what services you will receive before paying dues to an organization that promises legal representation.

Resources:

- “Homeschooling Regulations by State” by ProPublica—This is a fine place to start, but be sure to contact your state homeschooling organization for legal particulars.
- “Homeschooling in the US”—Wikipedia’s information page about homeschooling has some good basics.
- “State Homeschool Organization Directory”—Homefires is a site maintained by homeschool writer Diane Flynn Keith and has lots of useful information.

#### Q. How do I find, evaluate and adapt curriculum for a student who is 2E?

A. The first step is to know your student. Limited or comprehensive testing, evaluations from your child’s teachers and limited trials of different types of learning can help you narrow down your student’s needs. After that, realize that all curriculum is adaptable; very few professional teachers start on page one of a curriculum and continue through to the end. As a homeschooler, you will very seldom do this.

You may find that curriculum is easiest to find in your child’s areas of strength. For example, an avid math student might be willing to self-teach just using textbooks. However, some students resist using curriculum in their areas of strength because it can be limiting. Curriculum written for children seldom explores the deep concepts that a passionate young gifted learner will need, so they often seek out supplementary materials, college-level texts and

real-world experiences in their areas of passion.

Your main emphasis should be on flexibility: If using a certain curriculum requires you to spend your entire education budget on a year’s subscription, you should seek out another curriculum first! Open resources are becoming available in all subject areas, and you can feel free to adapt these. Khan Academy, for example, offers free curriculum in a variety of areas so that you can try it without risk. A search for “open textbook project” will lead to numerous nonprofits that host free, downloadable curriculum.

Don’t forget that you can supplement any curriculum using Internet resources and real world exploration. Many a homeschooler has cobbled together great courses just through YouTube and their public library.

Finally, use your community to get recommendations; specify your child’s needs and preferences to get the highest quality advice.

Resources:

- “Adapting Curriculum for your Homeschooler”—This is a full article I wrote on the topic of curriculum, which is a concern of all homeschoolers with gifted students.
- SEA Homeschoolers Facebook Group—I believe that this is currently the most active and useful forum for getting structured homeschooling recommendations. There are others, but this is a good place to start. They also have a closed group 2E Facebook Group for additional resources.

#### Q. How do I motivate my student in areas of weaknesses or areas that my student is less interested in?

A. The nature of homeschooling is that all students will have a tendency to become more asynchronous in their learning; they will zoom ahead in their areas of passion and tend to lag in their areas of disinterest or weakness. But remember that improving skills in one area tends to drag along lagging skills as well. For example, a child who loves programming but hates writing might join a programming community that has active text-based forums. Don’t forget to value this type of communication as “writing,” even though it’s not formal.

Students tend to resist most vigorously when they are being “pushed” in their areas of weakness. Look for activities that combine areas of weakness with areas of passion, that involve pleasurable components such as social time, and that emphasize creativity over drudgery. For most children, group activities that promote fun and social interaction are the best way to tackle weak areas. The exception is a student who has high anxiety or very specialized needs in a certain area.

Starting with the early teen years, students should feel invested in their own learning. Involve them in planning so that they can see the connection between their goals (e.g. getting into a university that offers the subject they are interested in) with the immediate tasks (such as studying a subject that they are weak in or are uninterested in).

Always remember that you might not be the adult that your child will be most receptive to. Use teachers, tutors, mentors, family members and friends to help support your student’s learning.

Also remember that changing course in homeschooling is natural and shouldn't be seen as a "failure." When online learning doesn't work out, for example, you now have more information about how your child learns. A discarded curriculum has still helped you both narrow down what your child responds to. You may love your child's math teacher, but it's time to move on if the teacher doesn't engage your child directly.

Resources:

- "Homeschooling Twice-Exceptional Kids"—This blog post by a homeschooling mom details the progression of her homeschool experience with her 2E son.
- "Strengths, Weaknesses, and Homeschooling" by The Homeschool Sisters—This podcast episode addresses the idea of "standards" and how you can keep from worrying about your 2E child.
- *Homeschool with Confidence: A Goal-Setting Guide for Teens* by Suki Wessling—A guide I wrote to help homeschooled teens plot their educational and personal paths.

#### Q. What other advice do you have for a family just starting the homeschooling journey?

A. Remember that homeschooling is not just a change of education; it's a paradigm shift. This sort of change doesn't usually happen immediately, and it doesn't happen without a few growing pains. Go easy on yourself, your student and other family members. Some of you may take longer to come around to homeschooling than others.

Make sure that your student gets appropriate amounts of time away from home, with other children and adults. (Of course, this will vary with the child's needs.) Make sure that the primary homeschooling parent gets sufficient time to take care of their own needs. New homeschoolers often think that it's time to give up on their beloved work and hobbies; it's actually time to make sure that you keep up your other interests and social time.

If there is a non-homeschooling parent in the home or one not living with the student, make sure that this parent feels supported and included as well. It can be really easy for a spouse to take on too much or to feel that they can't confide worries and joys from the day.

Finally, the primary homeschooling parent should make sure to have a place to vent to other supportive adults, preferably other homeschoolers, who know that venting is necessary and healthy but doesn't always mean that a homeschooler is ready to throw in the towel! I call homeschooling the ultra-marathon of parenting—it's a non-stop, unpaid, demanding and very rewarding job.

Resources:

- *Homeschooling and the Voyage of Self-Discovery* by David Albert—Albert homeschooled two very different gifted girls, one of them clearly 2E though he doesn't define it that way. This book is about the journey parents take when they choose to homeschool.
- *If This is a Gift, Can I Send it Back?: Surviving in the Land of the Gifted and Twice Exceptional* by Jen Merrill—Jen writes in a fun, humorous way about her trials and tribulations with gifted, 2E homeschooling.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

Beyond the resources mentioned above, the **Gifted Homeschoolers Forum** has lots of ways to help you explore homeschooling further. They have a press which publishes short, conversational guides on many topics within homeschooling. They also have an online community, a regular blog, a quarterly newsletter, a list of local gifted-focused homeschooling groups and other resources—including a special resource page just for twice-exceptional families. GHF even has online classes for gifted and 2E homeschoolers!

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There are many educational paths a child can take. Thinking outside the box may allow you to find a path that suits your child and his learning style, pace, challenges, interests and talents.
- Homeschooling offers lots of flexibility. Homeschooling doesn't necessarily mean recreating the school at home with you as the main teacher. There are many ways of homeschooling.
- There is a growing number of resources and a growing community to support you and your child if you choose the road less traveled.

# SECTION H

## LIFE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

### Jonathan's Story

Jonathan's mind is always active. He hears and notices everything going on around him. He sees so much more than others in each person and empathizes oddly well. At this point, the greatest benefit of this 2E journey is that Jonathan has learned about his strengths and weaknesses. He is self-aware, continually seeking knowledge, helping others and working toward good things that will benefit many. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 30, 2015)

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Though much of this guidebook has been about how to support a child intellectually, it is equally important to nurture a child's emotional and social life. As you've likely experienced, twice-exceptionality doesn't just impact your child's academic life but all other aspects as well.

This section looks at supporting your child's emotional needs at home, helping your child build social skills outside of a school setting and developing your child's executive functioning skills. Also discussed is how to balance the needs of your child who is twice-exceptional (2E) with the needs of other family members. Finally, this section also touches on leveraging summertime to benefit your child and life after high school.

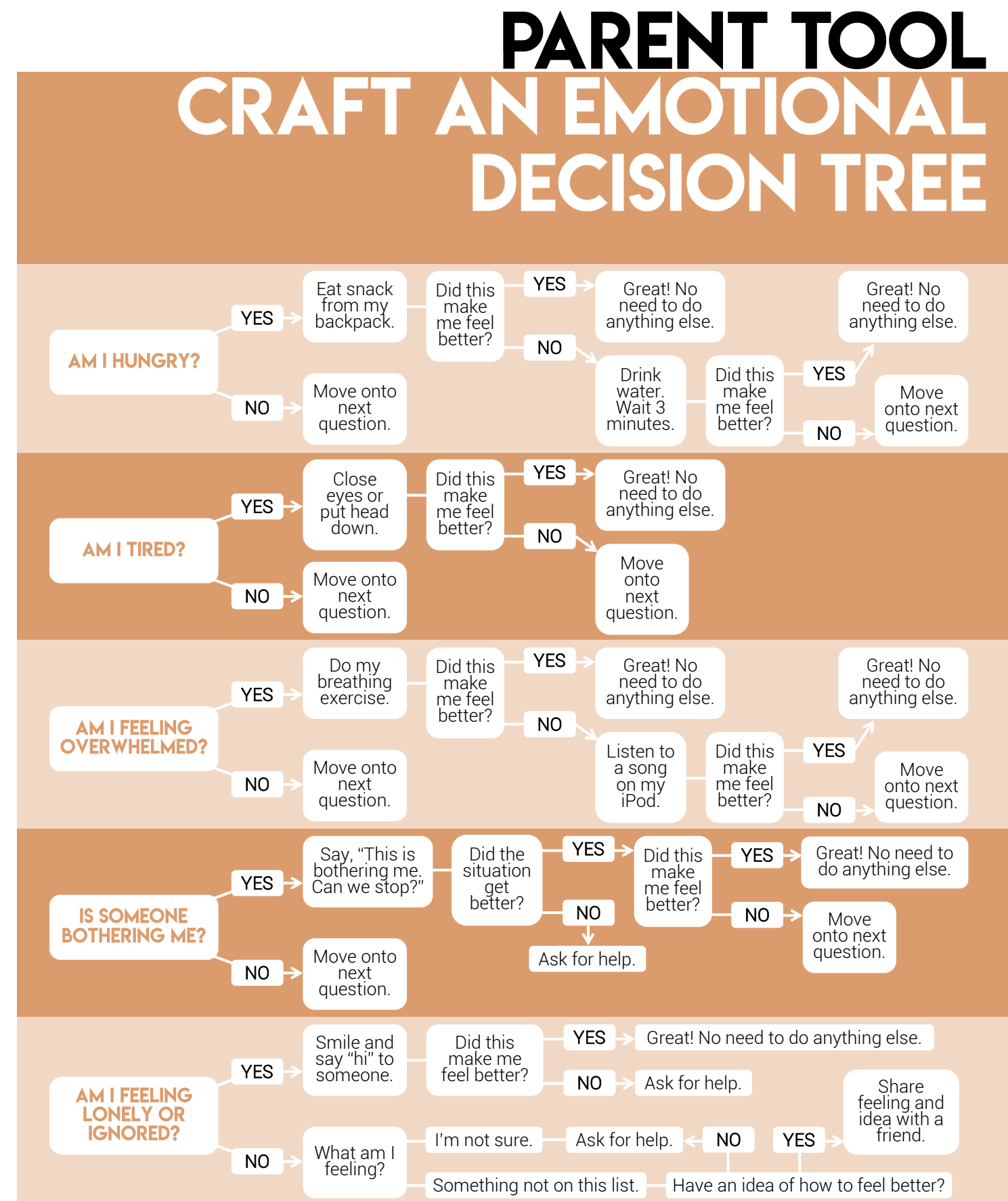
## HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD'S EMOTIONAL NEEDS AT HOME?

For many children, home is fundamental to building and sustaining emotional well-being. Although there are many ways to encourage a child's emotional health at home, below are ten general strategies you may find helpful:

1. **Determine how involved you need to be.** How much you participate in your child's daily tasks may change over time and may look different for each family. How much encouragement, advice or support does your child need from you to feel successful? Are you helping your child develop the skills she needs to be more independent in specific areas?
2. **Set realistic goals and expectations.** Understanding what is on your child's plate is an important step. Scheduling time for unstructured play or leisure time can help your child feel balanced. Before committing to activities, evaluate what your child is currently involved in. What are the time commitments? Will he have to sacrifice other things to participate in this activity? If so, how does your child feel about that? Is he currently feeling overwhelmed with activities, school, competitions, etc.? How does your child do with time management? Does he need explicit help in this area?
3. **Keep the line of communication open.** Setting aside time to specifically discuss how your child is doing can create a safe space for self-expression and enables parents to be confidants for their children. For example, you could hold weekly family meetings or go on a short walk after school with just your child. If your child struggles with direct communication, you could find alternatives such as co-journaling. Co-journaling involves a child and a parent sharing a journal, each writing down thoughts or feelings and responding to one another's entries.
4. **Encourage self-expression and exploration.** One way children find comfort in their emotions is through self-expression. However, some children need more structure or prompting to learn how to express themselves. Finding creative pursuits—such as acting, writing, painting and singing—can be an outlet. Other children may express themselves more physically through dance, martial arts or other sports. If a child is encouraged to express himself, he is more likely to develop an understanding of his own emotions.

- 5. Create a calm zone within your home.** Having a designated calm zone in the home for your child can help support her emotional well-being. When a child is feeling overwhelmed or upset, this can be a space she can retreat to and reset. For some children, this may be their room. However, others need less sensory input or a smaller space to feel relaxed. This space can include items they enjoy, make them happy or bring them comfort.
- 6. Set aside special time.** Scheduling quality one-on-one time with your child helps to nurture your bond. This time can be spent walking together or working on a project, skill or hobby. You could even go on “dates” and alternate between activities your child picks and ones you select. Sharing places and activities you enjoy lets your child know who you are outside of “mom” or “dad.” Setting aside time to do and learn about something your child loves lets her know that you value her pursuits.
- 7. Be observant.** Look for trends in your child's behavior in an effort to determine what triggers undesirable emotional responses. Knowing how your child reacts to their surroundings can help parents form an appropriate response and, in turn, make their child feel understood or valued. You may wish to keep a private written log of your child's behavior as you begin to learn more about your child's needs.
- 8. Be consistent.** A child can be confused when receiving mixed messages, and it can be challenging to be consistent as a parent. If you or your spouse are not on the same page, it may be worth exploring your reasoning and finding common ground. Additionally, it can be helpful if strategies used at school are used at home and vice versa. If expectations are the same across different environments and with different people, a child can focus on meeting that one expectation. Once a child is consistently successful at that, then more nuanced expectations can be implemented.
- 9. Be a mirror.** Children learn about the world around them through observation. How you carry yourself can affect how your child understands and expresses their own emotions. Being aware of how emotions are expressed within the home can help you to identify any areas of concern. For example, a parent may bite their nails when anxious and notice this same behavior in their child. By modeling healthy coping strategies and open communication, you can instill these skills in your child as well. You may even wish to be more verbal with your emotions—positive and negative. You can demonstrate your emotional inner life with phrases like, “I tried something new for dinner. I'm proud of how it turned out,” or, “I'm feeling overwhelmed. I'm going to my bedroom to lay down for five minutes.”
- 10. Build emotional literacy.** Some children need explicit instruction in identifying and articulating their feelings. One tool that can facilitate this is an emotion chart. Emotion charts can include words, animals, real-life photos and/or more abstract elements like colors. It's important to use a chart that makes sense to your child. A child could even create her own chart.

Another option may be to create a decision tree. This tool can be utilized to help your child identify actions to take when she isn't sure why she is feeling the way she does. See the next page for an example of such a chart. This chart could be completed just as an exercise to demonstrate that your child has options for coping. It could also be something posted in the house or pasted inside a school notebook.



## HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD'S SOCIAL NEEDS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?

Creating a meaningful social life for your child is an important aspect of his development. Children who are profoundly gifted and 2E do face some challenges in finding people who “get” them (Probst, 2011). They may have difficulties feeling accepted in gifted or differently-abled communities due to the fact that they possess at least two unique needs.

It's okay if your child's social life doesn't match up with that of a social butterfly. What is important is that your child has a network that supports her for who she is. For some children, this may mean having a small social circle—perhaps one or two really good friends. For others, they may have a few circles that they move between—the children that she plays soccer with, the children she does robotics with, the children that she goes to the homeschooling co-op with, etc. There may not be a lot of socializing outside of the activities she does with each circle, and, in that way, her social life may look more like an adult's social scene.

Of course, the social needs must be balanced against other needs. For example, many children who are profoundly gifted and 2E have rich inner lives and need time alone to imagine, invent and discover.

Depending on your child's unique needs, there are a range of factors to consider when planning activities outside of the school. Below are a few general tips.

**Model at home.** You can begin practicing good relationships at home. Modeling conversation, providing friendship-building skills and role-playing can lay the foundations for your child's future friendships. For example, you may want to preview social situations with your child, such as discussing possible situations that could arise on the first day back to school and brainstorming strategies for different scenarios.

**Promote self-awareness.** Just like in school, having conversations about your child's challenges and strengths will help develop their sense of self-understanding. Coupled with self-acceptance, your child will be better equipped to recognize limitations and take healthy risks in social situations (“Helping 2e Students to Draw on Their Inner Resources,” 2013). For example, if your child knows that she has a hearing sensitivity, she can prepare for being in loud environments by bringing sound-cancelling headphones or ear plugs.

**Engage with interests.** What is your child excited about? Depending on your location, there may be lots of enrichment options that will allow them to interact with like-minded peers. While programs prepared to deal with your child's unique needs may not be available, college-affiliated programs are typically equipped to make reasonable accommodations for learning and physical needs. Colleges may be good places to look for programs, classes or camps that interest your child. Don't forget to find options that can highlight your child's strengths. For example, for a tech-minded child, a computer programming and coding club could provide a valuable outlet for socialization and a chance for your child to shine.

**Find volunteer opportunities.** Volunteering may be a great place for children to interact in a meaningful way. It may be a chance to work on an issue that your child is passionate about.

Volunteering can also be a way to practice social interactions, especially if given a role to fulfill or a task to complete. For example, putting together a box of donations at a food pantry could be a rewarding way to socialize with a task-oriented role.

**Seek mentorships.** A mentorship is a great option for intellectual and interpersonal connections. A mentor can share academic interests as well as offer encouragement. Mentorships don't have to be only academic; pairing your child with an older mentor who is also 2E can be a source of hope and understanding. You might try reading through the *Mentoring Guidebook*, published by the Davidson Institute, to learn more about beginning a mentorship.

**What happened to the theater?** Participating in theater productions can provide a fulfilling way to interact with others for children who have difficulty processing social information. Individuals that struggle with social situations may “find theater a welcoming home that provides comfort with the scripted interactions, and also learn about social interactions from that scripting” (Warshaw & Wayland, 2013). If your school doesn't have a theater program, many community theaters offer acting, improv and technical theater classes throughout the school year and may also offer summer camps.

**Build an online community.** Because in-person activities may be limited, online groups can serve as a social outlet too. Children who are 2E can make connections with others through online gaming forums, for example. There are also online communities specifically designed to foster connections between 2E families. As a parent, you can seek out support through organizations (such as Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG), the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC), state gifted associations, 2e Newsletter, Understood.org) and find connections to other young people through these platforms.

**Think outside of age.** You may be searching for social opportunities within your child's classroom or grade, but it's important to remember that friendships in both the gifted and differently-abled world often cut across age. Your child may gravitate towards older children based on maturity level or interests just as she may gravitate towards younger children because of their openness and imagination. One characteristic that seems more universal than age is the ability to accept and empathize with one another. As one mother wrote about her son:

Although his social interactions have been limited to a few individuals, I have noticed that David responds well to those few people. Perhaps it is because those few people have been a constant throughout his life; perhaps because of the empathy or acceptance he feels from those few individuals; perhaps because those feelings of acceptance are so rare, they mean more. (Brulles, 2011)

## HOW CAN I ASSIST WITH DEVELOPING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS AT HOME?

Many children who are 2E, regardless of their diagnosis, struggle with executive functioning. Executive functioning is the “ability to organize cognitive functions. This includes the ability to plan ahead, prioritize, stop and start activities, shift from one activity to another activity, and

monitor one's own behavior" ("Glossary," n.d.) Overall, this means that children may find it difficult to carry out daily tasks on their own.

If your child struggles with executive functioning, you may find the following strategies beneficial to review.

### In General

- **Work with your child.** When your child is part of the conversation, she may be more inclined to follow through on the plans you both develop. Your child may also come up with strategies you hadn't considered.
- **Look for patterns.** When looking at what your child struggles with, do you notice anything that exacerbates or improves your child's executive functioning abilities? Is your child better able to focus at certain times of day? Does hunger really affect your child? Knowing what outside factors can affect your child's executive functioning abilities can help you develop more targeted strategies and lead to a deeper understanding of how your child works in the world.
- **Tackle one thing at a time.** You can model how to prioritize tasks with your child by deciding on one area to focus on first, perhaps the area that's having the biggest impact or causing the most stress. Getting one thing a bit more under control can lend momentum for making other changes.
- **Be consistent.** If your child is receiving accommodations at school, consider whether it's possible to build in similar supports at home. If you find something that really works at home, think about sharing that with your child's teachers and support team. You might also consider how to be consistent when life looks a little different. For instance, family vacations can sometimes be hard on children who are 2E. What can you utilize from your normal routine?

### Organization

- **Include your child in the organization process.** Make a special "appointment" with your child to go to the store to buy supplies needed to help them stay organized. Make sure the process fits your child's preferences and plays to your child's strengths. For example, a visual learner may respond better to a color-coding organization system. Your child could color-code all of his notebooks, three-ring binders and book covers that correspond to a specific subject (i.e., red = social studies, blue = math, yellow = language arts, etc.).
- **Create a designated homework space** at home away from clutter and other distractions. You may wish to schedule specific times to complete homework and other tasks. This enables the child to be able to focus better and get in a routine.
- **Use a whiteboard** to write nightly homework assignments and other tasks.
- **Keep an extra set of textbooks at home.** Children sometimes forget their books at school; having an extra copy of these books can help your child avoid late work and

missed assignments. This is a request that can be built into an IEP or 504 Plan; it could also be an informal accommodation that can be arranged with your child's teachers.

- **Pick out clothing the night before.** This can reduce stress during your morning routine.
- **Designate a spot for your child's backpack** (maybe by the front door). Establish a rule that the backpack has to be ready for the next day in that spot before your child goes to bed.
- **Find time to "re-group."** Take time to have your child organize her backpack on a regular basis. Throw away unneeded papers. Put papers in the appropriate binders and folders. Check to see if there are any supplies needed for school (paper, pencils, materials for big projects, etc) and check to see if there are any permission slips that need to be signed. Set aside a specific time for them to only do that task (maybe every Tuesday and Thursday before dinner).

### Focus & Attention

- **Observe the circumstances that allow your child to focus best.** Do you notice any trends? Some children are able to focus better in distraction-free zones; others may need manipulatives, white noise or other tools to focus.

Sometimes, before a child can focus, he needs to unfocus and relax productively. For example, specific sensory experiences may calm a child. Compression blankets, showers or certain smells can be helpful.

Beyond the designated homework space, where else do you want to foster focus? For instance, do you want to see increased focus at the dinner table? If so, you could give your child a ball or rocking chair, play light music in the background, dim the lights or allow a fidget manipulative at the dinner table, depending on your child's needs.

Even adults struggle to sustain focus over long periods of time. Developmentally, young people build their attention spans as they grow. Observe how long your child can productively work and schedule frequent breaks to accommodate those limits. You can create a signal with your child to indicate when he needs to take a break, perhaps the same signal that he uses in the classroom if that is part of his learning plan.

### Time Management

- **Maintain a consistent schedule in the home.** Your child can create a visual schedule reminder and place it on the fridge or other high traffic area in your home.
- **Utilize a timer.** Visual, tactile or auditory timers can help a child with their time management.
- **Think outside the box in regards to time-management techniques.** If your child doesn't work well with written or visual schedules, she could use an auditory schedule. One strategy could be for your child to create a morning playlist and assign a specific task to complete during each song.

## HOW DO I BALANCE THE NEEDS OF MY 2E CHILD & THOSE OF MY OTHER CHILDREN?

Finding a happy medium between your child who is 2E and your other children can be challenging. Difficulties within a family tend to arise when one child feels less important compared to another. It may be difficult for some parents to ensure all children feel supported and get the same amount of time with each parent. In some family dynamics, the 2E child may require more attention. This may cause other children to withdraw from the family. Michelle Muratori points out, "If you notice certain family members withdrawing, ask them for their ideas about how to restore balance in the family. Listening goes a long way in reducing tension and letting family members know that they are an important part of the family" (2011, para. 3).

Parents typically want to treat all children equally, but this can cause problems within the family dynamic. Trying to treat each child equally can cause them to feel pressured to all be the same. Keeping the lines of communication open and being transparent can help children understand the situation. One way to establish why each child receives different amounts of attention may be to "tell children from the start that you try to be fair to all, but fair isn't equal. They have some similarities and differences, and you, as parents, will always try to provide fairly for their special talents and needs" (Rimm 2008, para. 15).

And, don't forget to consider your own needs when balancing the needs of all household members. Giving yourself to space to recharge and reflect is necessary—good modeling for your children as well! This is similar to the airplane axiom: Make sure you put on your own oxygen mask before helping the person next to you. If take care of yourself, you will be in a better position to help your child.

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT

**Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)** is an organization dedicated to understanding and supporting the emotional and social needs of gifted and twice-exceptional individuals. Their website has a vast library of resources on this topic, and they regularly publish new articles. SENNG also helps support and facilitate SENNG Model Parent Groups, which "bring individuals and families together to discuss the challenges associated with raising a gifted child." They also have SENNG Connect (an online version of a Model Parent Group) as well as SMPG PLUS+, a one-day Model Parent Group retreat. SENNG also hosts webinars on a variety of topics.

## HOW CAN THE SUMMERTIME BENEFIT MY CHILD?

Summer presents many opportunities for your child to socialize. Fortunately, summer camps

have come a long way from the stereotypical competitive canoe race in the wilderness. There are many that support the unique needs of children who are 2E. Find opportunities that fit your child's interests and strengths and that provide support for their areas of weakness.

There are three main types of camps that you may want to consider.

**Academic camps** are oriented towards providing challenging material in a supportive environment. This experience should allow your child to explore high-level material that will stretch their mind. It is also a great place to meet other peers with similar interests. These camps may focus on STEM subjects, the social sciences and/or the arts. Some examples of academic camps geared towards children who are 2E are Academic Fun & Fitness Camp in Ohio, Druidawn Summer Fantasy Camp in Colorado, and Satori in Washington.

**Social camps** place an emphasis on building interpersonal skills. These may include therapeutic interventions, confidence building workshops or structured recreation. Your child may even find a lasting friendship among their fellow campers. Some examples of social-oriented camps are Aspire Summer Camp in Massachusetts, Buddy Building Camp in California, and The Quad Manhattan Summer Camp in New York.

Lastly, there are also **camps that are structured around emotional development**. Whether it is the opportunity to take on a challenge in a safe environment or a self-exploration workshop, your child may be surprised at how much he learns about himself. The personal development and self-awareness gained during these programs can have a lasting impact on your child's social-emotional health. Some examples of these camps are Yunasa in Michigan, SOAR (Success Oriented Achievement Realized) in North Carolina, and Camp Summit for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative in California.

As you narrow down your camp options, you may want to keep the following in mind:

- Is my child ready for a residential camp or would a day camp be a better fit?
- What is the ratio of counselors to campers?
- What training process do the counselors go through?

For additional questions to ask, please see the article, "Questions to Ask When Researching a Summer Camp" by Rachel Knox.

Finances can be one obstacle to children participating in summer programs. Some programs offer financial aid and scholarships. If a program's website doesn't list such options, it may be useful to reach out to the organization because financial support may not be advertised. You could also reach out to local organizations such as your state gifted organization, disability association or other community groups to see if they sponsor summer scholarships or know of groups in your area that do.

If your child is not able to participate in summer camps, summer can still offer great opportunities! Your child may be able to find structured social interactions through local programs and classes. Colleges and universities often offer subject-specific summer day programs that may pique your child's interest. The Boys and Girls Club of America also offers specialized programs that your family may be able to take advantage of. A low-stress art or cooking class may be just the place to make a new friend. See what's out there!

## WHAT ABOUT LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

### The Buckleys' Story

My profoundly gifted children were very adept at compensating for their 2E issues before college. So adept, in fact, that the issues were not "issues," and, therefore, they weren't diagnosed until one was in college and the other was in professional school. It wasn't until my children reached a threshold—a threshold at which their innate means of compensating could no longer overcome the challenges they faced—that they were tested and diagnosed. The story doesn't end when the kids turn eighteen. For some of these kids, it doesn't even begin until then. (Anonymous, personal communication, April 11, 2015)

The Buckleys are exactly right. Twice-exceptionality doesn't magically work itself out at age eighteen. Individuals continue to grow, change and make decisions about their education and life after leaving high school. Another whole guidebook could be devoted to that topic! At this point, though, please check out the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#) where you'll find some resources on college planning and life after high school for young people who are 2E.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Children who are 2E need support outside of school and the academic arena. There are many ways you can nurture your child's emotional, social and executive functioning skills.
- It's important reflect on the bigger picture of who your family is and how everyone works within that family unit. There will be situations where one person's needs must be the focus for a while, but, overall it's healthy for a balance to be maintained so that everyone is supported in the ways that work for them.
- Twice-exceptionality doesn't stop at high school graduation. It's something to consider as you and your child plan for life after school and further education.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you for reading *Twice-Exceptionality: A Resource Guide for Parents*. We hope that you've found understanding and support in the information and stories shared here. We also hope that you feel more empowered and knowledgeable as you move forward with your child.

There's no "one path" through the 2E world. As your child's path evolves, you are always welcome to return to this guidebook; you may find some strategies or resources are more applicable down the line. We also encourage you to share this guide with others you meet along the way. Please visit the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#) page on the Davidson Gifted Database to find further books, articles and organizations to support you and your child.

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# **TWICE-EXCEPTIONALITY**

## **A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

The Davidson Institute for Talent Development  
Last Updated: May 2018

For additional resources and for information on the sources cited within this guide, please refer to the [2E Guidebook: Resources and Bibliography](#).

For general questions, please contact us at [info@davidsongifted.org](mailto:info@davidsongifted.org).

This guidebook can be accessed on the Davidson Institute's public website at <http://www.davidsongifted.org/Young-Scholars/Free-Guidebooks>.

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