Parent Session

Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress

in

Twice-Exceptional Children

Carol Malueg and Nancy Cohen

PROJECT2EXCEL

University of St. Thomas
Parent Discussion

**Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress**

**What:** Guided discussion group for parents whose children are participating in PROJECT2EXCEL

**When:** Monday, May 2010
6:30-8:30pm

**Where:**

**Facilitators:**

**Preparation:** Pre-reading assignment attached;

**Potential Topics:** Intensity
Perfectionism
Stress

**Questions:**
1. My child is so intense about some things! Is this normal?
2. What causes perfectionism?
3. How can I help my child manage stress?

**Objective:** Establish an environment in which parents of twice-exceptional children can receive and provide support, guidance, and advice through discussion with other parents and trained leaders.

*Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress*
Discussion Rules

1. What is said in the group stays in the group.
2. There are no wrong ideas.
3. Stay on topic.
4. The facilitator is the guide, not the expert.
A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children

Chapter 6 overview – Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress

• Asynchronous development may cause stress
• Some stress (challenge) is desirable; learn to manage it
• Types of perfectionism
• Self-talk (our inner voice) can cause stress
• Importance of balancing self-talk; parents model self-talk
• Blame and irrational beliefs leave us helpless
• Use the Socratic method ("What is the worst thing that could happen?")
• Prioritize activities
• Manage stress through relaxation, diet, or exercise
• Use immediate, calming techniques and "HALT" (hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
• Ask, "Whose problem is it?"
• Expect progress, not perfection (idealism to excess)
• View problems as opportunities
• Learn when to ignore and when to compartmentalize
• Relieve tension with humor
• Don't teach stress management skills during crisis times
• Develop resiliency

Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress
**PROJECT2EXCEL**

**Discussion Directions for the Facilitator**

The facilitator of the discussion may use the numbered questions to guide the discussion. The questions may be broken into three separate sessions, or one topic, perfectionism, can be chosen as the main focus with intensity and stress as sub-topics if time allows. The attached articles can be used as following:

**Intensity** - Dabrowski’s Over-excitabilities A Layman’s Explanation by Stephanie S. Tolan

**Perfectionism** - Enabling Our Children by Deborah Thorpe

**Stress** - If Gifted = Asynchronous Development, then Gifted/Special Needs = Asynchrony Squared by Lee Singer

*Ask parents to introduce themselves and share what brought them to this discussion group. The facilitator begins by sharing the following stories with the group:*

“The Charlie, age thirteen, is always feeling pressured by deadlines. He gets an assignment in school or volunteers for a project in his church youth group, and at first he’s very excited about these things … but then days go by when he doesn’t do anything about them. He can’t seem to get started. As the deadlines near, he starts to worry. The dates get closer and closer, and he gets more and more upset and over whelmed. He just can’t make himself settle down to do the assignment, and he keeps thinking about how he won’t have enough time to do it in a way that will satisfy him—perfectly. Of course, that makes it harder to get started. Eventually, he ends up turning in sloppy work that he did at the last minute, and he feels terrible.” (Greenspon, p17).

“April is in sixth grade, but it’s hard for her to be in class, or to be in a group of people who are talking about something, because she believes she isn’t very smart. That’s why she never speaks up in class or with friends: she’s afraid she might say something that proves she’s dumb. She actually does well in school, but she says to herself, “That’s just because the work is really easy” or “I just got lucky.” Why does she think she isn’t very smart? Because sometimes she makes mistakes. “If you’re really smart,” she thinks, “you don’t make mistakes. Mistakes are what stupid people do!” April thinks smart people are able to figure things out right away, and they always know enough to get the right answer the first time.” (Greenspon, pp. 23-24)

**Discussion Questions**

Intensity

1. What is my child intense about?
2. How could this be a good thing when she grows up?
3. How am I intense?
4. What aspects of my life does this intensity help or hurt?
5. Is intensity ‘fixable’? Does it need fixing?
6. How can I help my child channel this intensity into something positive?
Perfectionism

1. What is the difference between trying to do your best and perfectionism?
2. What is the difference between having high expectations and perfectionism?
3. What do you feel you have to do perfectly?
4. What do you feel your child has to do perfectly?
5. What kind of perfectionist is my child? (Adelson, 2007)
   a. The Academic Achiever
   b. The Risk Evader
   c. The Accuracy Assessor
   d. The Image Manager
   e. The Procrastinator
6. What kind of perfectionist am I?
7. What causes perfectionism?
   a. Role models
   b. High expectations
   c. An ability to see how things could be
   d. Competitive nature
   e. Media
8. What can we do about the messages the media gives our kids?
9. How do I help my child change the self-talk that fuels her perfectionism?
10. What does my self-talk sound like?
11. What does my child enjoy that he isn’t perfect at?
12. How do I let my child risk failure?
13. How do I teach my child to take responsibility for her own actions?
14. Am I enabling my child by helping too much?
   a. Is my help aligned with her needs?
   b. Does my help ‘even the playing field’?

Stress

1. What causes my child stress?
2. Do the same things cause me stress?
3. How does my child cope with stress?
   a. Tries to take control
   b. Shuts down or turns off
   c. Jokes
   d. Cries
4. How do I cope with stress?
   a. Counting
   b. Deep breathing
   c. List making
   d. Exercise
5. What do I want to model?
6. How can I help my child show himself some compassion?
## Discussion Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Strategies to try</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do you already do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do you want to try?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Share ideas from the reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does your child deal with the divide between the ideal and the possible?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do you deal with that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does your child become frustrated when reality doesn’t live up to its potential?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you get frustrated when your child doesn’t live up to his or her potential?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does it drive your child to work too hard?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does it keep your child from trying new things?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does it cause feelings of guilt?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inborn or Learned?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Modeling perfectionism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Result of learning style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Product of intensity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Further reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Related topics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress*
Rules for the Road

- Gifted kids can be pretty intense. Read up on Dabrowski’s Overexcitabilities and see if you recognize them on your child, or yourself! See the attached description of the 5 OEs by Stephanie Tolan.

- Think of ways to make your child’s intensity into a positive.
  - Get him involved in a community service project. Making a difference in the world can lessen a child’s worries by giving him some control.
  - Help her learn to express her feeling through art, music, poetry, or movement. Intense emotion can be felt in great performances or great works of art.
  - Harness that excess energy. If he has to sit and listen, can he also knit, practice tying knots, or weave on a hand-held loom?
  - Give her thirst for knowledge new scope. Leave books lying around, find new skill-building games to play, check out computer programming classes for the tireless gamer.

- “A child can ask three questions to help develop a healthy attitude toward her perfectionism: (1) Is it good enough? (2) In the long run, will it really matter? And (3) What is the worst thing that could happen? Things usually fall into perspective after considering these three questions.” (Webb, p.126).

- Pay attention to how you handle your own mistakes. Try to acknowledge them, practice being kind to yourself about them, and model how you go about remedying them.

- Work on self-talk. In order to teach our kids to show themselves compassion when they make a mistake, we need to show them how. “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.” ~Dalai Lama

Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress
• Talk about the unrealistic messages the media inundates us with every day, from Kelly Ripa’s perfect kitchen to the Pantene model’s perfect hair. Help your kids understand why the advertisers use ‘perfect’ to sell their products.

• One of the issues gifted kids, and particularly twice-exceptional kids, face is asynchronous development. “Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.” (The Columbus Group, 1991)

• “So what does it mean to be gifted/special needs? If Gifted = Asynchronous Development, then Gifted/Special Needs = Asynchrony Squared.” (Singer, 2000). Article attached.

• Try out stress management techniques with your kids.
  o Counting to 10
  o Repeating a positive mantra
  o Writing it out
  o Talking it out
  o Breathing techniques
  o Exercise

*Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress*
Food for Thought

Striving for excellence motivates you; striving for perfection is demoralizing.

~Harriet Braiker
No one is perfect... that’s why pencils have erasers.

~Author Unknown
Gold cannot be pure, and people cannot be perfect.

~Chinese Proverb
Better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without.

~Confucius, Analects
Once you accept the fact that you’re not perfect, then you develop some confidence.

~Rosalynn Carter
Have no fear of perfection – you’ll never reach it.

~Salvador Dali
As long as the world is turning and spinning, we’re gonna be dizzy and we’re gonna make mistakes.

~Mel Brooks
Making mistakes simply means you are learning faster.

~Weston H. Agor

Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress
If you don't make mistakes, you're not working on hard enough problems. And that's a big mistake.

~F. Wlkzhek

I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.

~Pablo Picasso

You'll always miss 100% of the shots you don't take.

~Wayne Gretzky

Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.

~Robert F. Kennedy

It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, it is because we do not dare that they are difficult.

~Seneca

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything,
That's how the light gets in.

~Leonard Cohen

Striving to be better, oft we mar what's well.

~Shakespeare (King Lear)

Living in an age of advertisement, we are perpetually disillusioned. The perfect life is spread before us every day, but it changes and withers at a touch.

~Joseph Priestley

A beautiful thing is never perfect.

~Proverb

Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress
Further Reading

Books


"Are you a high achiever? A straight-A student? A procrastinator? A workaholic? Are you hard on yourself? Always anxious about your abilities? Worried about being "good enough"? Are you a perfectionist? This book helps you find out if you are. It explores some of the possible reasons why you are. And it offers lots of useful strategies for learning how to ease up on yourself and get your perfectionism under control."


"...provides a humorous, engaging, and encouraging look at raising gifted children today. Dr. James R. Delisle offers practical, down-to-earth advice that will cause parents to reexamine the ways they perceive and relate to their children. Delisle puts forward 10 tips to parents of gifted children—ideas that reflect attitude more than action and allow for introspection and change, rather than quick, do-it-tonight solutions."

Delisle, J.R. (2002). When gifted kids don't have all the answers: How to meet their social and emotional needs. Waco, Texas: Prufrock Press, Inc.

Gifted kids are so much more than test scores and grades. Still, it's sometimes difficult to see past all that achievement and potential to the child, adolescent, or teen who may be filled with anxiety, pressured to be perfect, lonely, alienated, confused, and unsure of what the future might bring. Written for teachers, gifted coordinators, guidance counselors, and other adults working with gifted kids (including parents), this book offers proven, practical suggestions for encouraging social and emotional growth among gifted, talented, and creative children and youth."


"No parent thinks "I wonder what I can do today to undermine my children, subvert their effort, turn them off learning, and limit their achievement." Of course not. They think "I would do anything, give anything, to make my children successful." Yet many of the things they do boomerang. Their helpful judgments, their lessons, their motivating techniques often send the wrong message.

In fact, every word and action sends a message. It tells children—or students or athletes—how to think about themselves. It can be a fixed mindset message that says: "You have permanent traits and I'm judging them." Or it can be a growth mindset message that says: "You are a developing person and I am interested in your development"..."

"Written with help from hundreds of gifted teenagers, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide is the ultimate guide to surviving and thriving in a world that doesn't always value, support, or understand high ability. Full of surprising facts, step-by-step strategies, and practical how-tos, and inspiring quotations, featuring insightful essays contributed by gifted young people and adults, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide gives the gifted young reader the tools needed to understand their giftedness, accept it as an asset, and use it to make the most of who and what they are. Of special value is the section on dealing with a troubled gifted youngster contemplating suicide, how to be "net smart" and have safe, fun online relations, and how to handle teen angst. Incidentally, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide is also very valuable reading for the parents, teachers, and counselors of gifted kids as well!" -- *Midwest Book Review*


"Being excluded from peers can be confusing, even for the brightest young minds. Now in a revised, updated, and expanded third edition, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide: For Ages 10 & Under is a guide for young gifted and talented children who may not think their talents are a gift. With much advice for young people about understanding their gifts and learning that being brainy is not a detriment, The Gifted Kids' Survival Guide is the perfect gift for the under-confident and over-skilled young reader." --The Midwest Book Review, Reviewer's Choice


"Perfectionism is a problem for many families. The good news is, you can free your family from perfectionism. This accessible, encouraging book is your guide. First, you'll learn that perfectionism is not about doing your best. It's not about the struggle for excellence, or the striving for high goals. And it's not the key to success. In fact, perfectionism can block your ability to do well. It is a burden that takes a heavy toll—on your self-esteem, performance, creativity, talents, energy, relationships, health, and capacity to enjoy life to its fullest."


"What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough emphasizes that perfectionism isn't just wanting to do well - it's an obsessive fear of performing less-than-perfect in any way, and is always harmful. Perfectionism can and often does interfere with the necessary hard work and learning process involved in undertaking any task; for example, a perfectionist might obsessively worry about a book report so much that he or she turns it in late (or not at all) because too much time was wasted trying to write it perfectly. A thoughtful, practical, down-to-earth guide, enthusiastically recommended for grade and high school library shelves." --Midwest Book Review

*Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress*

"The teen years are some of the more stressful in people's lives--high school, hormones raging, preparing for the future. Now in a fully revised and informatively updated new edition, "Fighting Invisible Tigers: Stress Management for Teens" is a guide book for teenagers who need to reduce stress in their hectic lives. "Fighting Invisible Tigers" outlines ten techniques that will assist teens in their desire to control their stress, such as breathing and relaxation exercises, time management, dealing with hostile peers/family/friends, and embracing an optimistic outlook. A top pick for community library parenting collections."—Midwest Book Review


For years, I have waited for Michael Piechowski to put together the full picture of what it means to be gifted. In this volume, Mellow Out, he does just that. Not only does Michael reveal the many intensities and sensitivities that gifted children and adults have in abundance, he devotes page after page to comments from gifted individuals who are growing up with these attributes as "original equipment." The end result is a book of magnificent proportions—it is erudite, down-to-Earth, and written with sensitivity that will cause readers to recognize in themselves the inner qualities of giftedness. Mellow Out provides information and comfort in equal proportions.

—JAMES R. DELISLE, Ph.D. Kent State University, author of Gifted Children Speak Out, Guiding the Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Youth, Gifted Kids' Survival Guide.


Raising a gifted child is both a joy and a challenge, yet parents of gifted children have few resources for reliable parenting information. The four authors, who have decades of professional experience with gifted children and their families, provide practical guidance in areas such as: Characteristics of gifted children; Peer relations; Sibling issues; Motivation & underachievement; Discipline issues; Intensity & stress; Depression & unhappiness; Educational planning; Parenting concerns; Finding professional help; and much, much more!

**Articles**


**Intensity, Perfectionism, and Stress**