Parent Session

Overexcitabilities

in

Twice-Exceptional Children

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PROJECT2EXCEL

University of St. Thomas
PARENT DISCUSSION

Overexcitabilities

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

When: Day, Date, 2010
7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Where: Your School
Your School Address

Facilitators: Your choice

Preparation: Pre-reading assignment attached

Potential Topics:

- Five types of overexcitabilities
- Positive disintegration vs. pathology
- Relevance of theories to own experience

Essential Questions:

1. Do we understand how overexcitabilities appear in the gifted and twice-exceptional?
2. What are family and school perceptions of overexcitabilities?
3. What are some ways parents can deal with overexcitabilities?

Objective: Establish an environment in which parents of twice-exceptional children can receive and provide support, guidance, and professional advice through discussion with other parents and trained leaders.
Notice of Parent Forum on Overexcitabilities in Twice Exceptional Children

Pre-Reading

Two Readings

Discussion Rules

Pre-Reading Overview

Discussion Notes

Discussion Questions

Food for Thought

Rules for the Road

Further Reading

Session Evaluation

Attendance Sheet

Overexcitabilities
Pre-Reading

- To be completed prior to Parent Session, if possible.
- Readings are listed in the order of relevance to the discussion so that participants may select which to read before the parent forum.
- An “Overview of Pre-Reading” follows if you do not have time to do all of the reading.


Overexcitabilities
Discussion Rules

1. What’s 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.
Pre-Reading Overview


- The chapter begins with a story of a gifted boy who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. He is in an educational environment that is not challenging to him and reacts with frustration, showing mood-related difficulties and explosive tendencies. His family (and he) had come to believe that his behavior was pathological and not related to giftedness or overexcitability in any way.
- A discussion follows of the differences between Dabrowski’s views and those of traditional mental health professionals. Dabrowski believes that “genuine mental health involves both disintegration of internal psychological structures and active developmental processes or dynamics.”
- Following is a discussion of the difficulty in diagnosing accurately since many characteristics associated with giftedness are also associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), or Asperger’s Disorder. This is where overexcitabilities (OE) are difficult to discern from more pathological behaviors.
- A recommendation is made to “address the child’s giftedness, foster growth and development” and see if the problematic behaviors diminish or disappear. If so, there may not be a twice-exceptionality.
- Dabrowski asserts that giftedness must be an element in the diagnostic process and that diagnosis only be made by someone who understands overexcitabilities as they pertain to giftedness.
- “…giftedness and OE are accepted as healthy parts of herself to be shaped and nurtured rather than extinguished.”
- OE behavior “is not excused but rather reframed, embraced, and addressed in a positive way that allows for further development.”
- A detailed description follows of each type of OE and how it may be perceived pathologically or as a normal step toward Dabrowski’s “disintegration” and growth.
- The authors provide two tables at the end of the chapter:
  i. How Do I Know if My Child Needs to See a Psychologist or Therapist?
  ii. How Do I Find an Appropriate Practitioner?

Overexcitabilities

- "Excitabilities are modes of experiencing. ... Talents are richer and more fecund by the strength of these excitabilities."
- "For highly excitable people this is the natural and normal way of being, nothing out of the ordinary, except when they realize that other people don’t respond in the same way."
- The author discusses the positive and negative aspects of overexcitability (OE) and people’s perception of those exhibiting OE.
Discussion Questions for the Facilitator

Prior to tackling the questions of the night, perhaps the facilitator would like to ask the parents to introduce themselves and to share what brought them to this discussion group.

Note: Following the Discussion Questions is a note-taking form for parents to use during the discussion.

The facilitator then begins by sharing the following story with the group:

Children exhibiting strong overexcitabilities are often made to feel embarrassed and guilty for being ‘different.’ Here is an eloquent expression of the ever-present feeling of differentness written by a highly gifted boy living in a rural area:

Anywhere I go, no matter if it is school or home, there is always a little block that separates me from everybody else. The signs of it are subtle, like people not understanding a word I use, or everybody jumping to work with me in group projects, but there they are, isolating me from them, making it hard to make friends. Some people would laugh at this, saying it’s nothing, but the thing they don’t realize is that it isn’t nothing. The barrier is there, and not being able to get past it is sometimes painful. I try to ignore it, to forget the fact that I go nowhere on weekends and don’t see the few friends I have until Monday. I try, by playing video games or reading, to offset it, but it’s still there, and when I think about it, it hurts. It’s not like a sharp stinging pain that you get from a paper cut. It’s dull, almost unnoticeable, but it hurts more because it doesn’t get better over time. The distance between me and other people is hidden, but still there if you know where to look. That block hurts me, and there is only one way to make it stop, and that is to spend time with a person who also has to deal with this barrier, this wall.”

— D.J. Gallenberger, age 14

Overexcitabilities
Discussion Questions:

1. The boy in the story speaks of a block that separates him from everybody else. Do you sense that your child may or may not feel that way?

2. According to Dabrowski, (1967) and later Piechowski (1999), there are distinct types of overexcitabilities. The first is **Psychomotor** (surplus of energy or psychomotor expression of emotional tension).
   a. Have you seen your child exhibit this type?
   b. What is the difference between an active child, a child with ADHD, and one exhibiting a Psychomotor overexcitability?
      i. Rapid speech
      ii. Marked excitation
      iii. Intense physical activity – almost always
      iv. Pressure for action
      v. Marked cometiciveness
      vi. Compulsive talking and chattering
      vii. Impulsive actions
      viii. Nervous habits (tics, nail biting)
      ix. Workaholism
      x. Acting out

3. The second type of overexcitability is **Sensual**. Have you seen your child exhibit this type?
   a. Enhanced sensory and aesthetic pleasure
      i. Seeing
      ii. Smelling
      iii. Tasting
      iv. Touching
      v. Hearing
      vi. Delight in beautiful objects, sounds, of words, music, form, color, or balance
   b. Sensual expression of emotional tension
      i. Overeating
      ii. Sexual overindulgence
      iii. Buying sprees
      iv. Wanting to be in the limelight

4. Another overexcitability is **Intellectual**. Do you think we view the child with this overexcitability in the same way we view those with other overexcitabilities?
   a. Intensified activity of the mind
      i. Curiosity
      ii. Concentration
      iii. Capacity for sustained intellectual effort
      iv. Avid reading
      v. Keen observation
      vi. Detailed visual recall
      vii. Detailed planning
   b. Pecuance for probing questions and problem solving

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i. Search for truth
ii. Search for understanding
iii. Joy in forming new concepts
iv. Tenacity in problem solving
c. Reflective thought
   i. Thinking about thinking
   ii. Love of theory and analysis
   iii. Preoccupation with logic
   iv. Moral thinking
   v. Introspection (but without self-judgment)
   vi. Conceptual and intuitive integration
   vii. Independence of thought (sometimes very critical)
5. The fifth type of overexcitability is Imaginational. Have you seen your child exhibit this type?
   a. Free play of the imagination
      i. Frequent use of image and metaphor
      ii. Facilitation for invention and fantasy
      iii. Facility for detailed visualization
      iv. Poetic and dramatic perception
      v. Animistic and magical thinking
   b. Capacity for living in a world of fantasy
      i. Predilection for magic and fairy tales
      ii. Creation of private worlds
      iii. Imaginary companions
      iv. Dramatization
   c. Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension
      i. Animistic imagery
      ii. Mixing truth and fiction
      iii. Elaborate dreams
      iv. Illusions
   d. Low tolerance of boredom
      i. Need for novelty
      ii. Need for variety
6. The final category of overexcitability is Emotional. Have you seen your child exhibit this type?
   a. Feelings and emotions intensified
      i. Intense positive or negative feelings
      ii. Extremes of emotion
      iii. Complex emotions and feelings
      iv. Identification with others’ feelings (highly empathetic)
      v. Awareness of a whole range of feelings
   b. Strong somatic expressions
      i. Tense stomach
      ii. Sinking heart
      iii. Blushing
      iv. Flushing

Overexcitabilities
v. Pounding heart
vi. Sweaty palms
c. Strong affective expressions
   i. Inhibition (timidity/shyness)
   ii. Enthusiasm
   iii. Ecstasy
   iv. Euphoria
   v. Pride
   vi. Strong affective memory
   vii. Shame
   viii. Feelings of unreality
   ix. Fears and anxieties
   x. Feelings of guilt
   xi. Concern with death
   xii. Depressive and/or suicidal moods
d. Capacity for strong attachments, deep relationships
   i. Strong emotional ties and attachments to persons, living things, or places
   ii. Strong emotional attachment to animals
   iii. Difficulty adjusting to new environments
   iv. Compassion
   v. Responsiveness to others
   vi. Sensitivity in relationships
   vii. Loneliness
e. Well-differentiated feelings toward self
   i. Inner dialogue
   ii. Self-judgment

7. As a parent, how do you choose to deal with your child's overexcitabilities?
8. Do you see overexcitabilities in yourself?
   a. Are they the same ones you see exhibited in your child?
   b. If they are different, do they help you to better understand your child's overexcitabilities?
9. How do schools look at the child with various types of overexcitability?
10. Has this discussion changed the way you look at certain behaviors? If so, which ones and in what way?
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<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Discussion Ideas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Separation from others because of a sense of overexcitabilities</td>
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<td>Psychomotor Overexcitability (surplus of energy or psychomotor expression of emotional tension)</td>
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### Discussion Notes

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<td>Emotional Overexcitability (feelings and emotions intensified, strong somatic expressions, strong affective expressions, capacity for strong attachments, well-differentiated feelings toward self)</td>
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<td>Individual way of dealing with child’s overexcitabilities</td>
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<td>Identify personal overexcitabilities? Same as child’s?</td>
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<td>School’s perception of various types of overexcitabilities</td>
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Further Reading

Books:


Articles:


Overexcitabilities


**Web Sites:**

http://www.2enewsletter

http://www.borntoexplore.org/overexcite.htm

http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/dabrowski.htm

http://www.sengifted.org

http://www.stephanietolan.com/dabrowskis.htm

*Overexcitabilities*
SESSION EVALUATION
Overexcitabilities

Please take a few moments to let us know if this was useful to you or if there are changes you would like to see in the next session.

1. What were one or two techniques discussed that will be useful to you?

2. Was this session what you expected it to be? In what ways was it better? In what ways was it worse?

3. What subjects were broached that you would like to explore more?

4. What changes would you suggest we implement for the next session?

5. How frequently would you attend these sessions if they were offered?

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# PROJECT2EXCEL

## ATTENDANCE

**Date:**

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