

# Optimizing Overexcitabilities

Dr. Brandi L. Klepper  
aplacetogrowinc@yahoo.com  
(417) 848-8402

“Parents often feel inadequately prepared to meet the needs of a gifted child.”

Silverman, 2000, p. 162

“Parents... worry about their child’s extreme sensitivity, intensity, idealism, or concern with fairness, knowing that these traits can lead to difficulties for the child later in life.”

Webb, Gore, Amend, and DeVries, 2007, p. xvii

**“If a child has even one adult with whom she can communicate freely and who accepts and values her, she can withstand a fair amount of frustration from the larger world outside.”**

(Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007, pp. 40–41)

**“...the quality and quantity of trust in the classroom is the key to everything that happens inside its walls.”**

(Ferland, 2011, p. 54)

**“It’s critical that gifted children be able to trust and rely on a minimum of two to three significant adults. They must know that these adults will act consistently and will always have their best interests at heart, even during periods of frustration and disagreement.”**

(Strip, 2000, p. 133)

# Overexcitabilities (Dabrowski)

## Psychomotor

energy, movement,  
acting out,  
enthusiasm

## Intellectual

curious, analytical,  
probing, philosophical,  
theoretical, existential

## Sensual

sense and perceive,  
all five senses,  
physical, aesthetics

## Imaginational

creativity, fantasy,  
metaphors, dramatic  
perception, animism,  
mix truth and fiction

## Emotional

complex, extreme  
emotions; sensitivity;  
strong attachments,  
somatic symptoms

(Cross & Cross, 2012; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Neihart, Pfeiffer, & Cross, 2016; Moon & Reis, 2004; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Silverman, 2000; Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005; Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007)

# Parental Characteristics

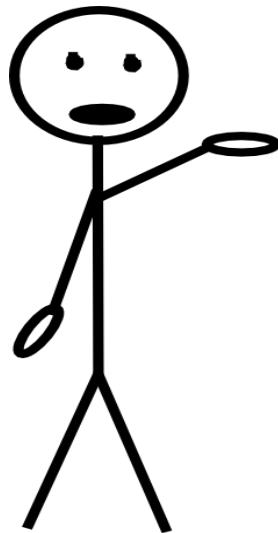
- ▶ Any of the overexcitabilities
  - Psychomotor: pacing, physically winding up kids at bedtime, feeling restless, being athletic, nervous habits
  - Sensual: sharing sensation, too much/too little stimulation
  - Intellectual: avid reading, more curious than kid about results of science fair experiment, excessively high expectations, perfectionism/idealism
  - Imaginational: creative, daydreamy, dramatic
  - Emotional: social causes, morality, teary, erratic, over-reacting, attached to people and things
- ▶ Helps to (reasonably) model and verbalize how you experience, cope with, and regulate intensity

(Cross & Cross, 2012; Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Neihart, Pfeiffer, & Cross, 2016; Moon & Reis, 2004; Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Silverman, 2000; Webb, Amend, Webb, Goerss, Beljan, & Olenchak, 2005; Webb, Gore, Amend, & DeVries, 2007)

# Overexcitabilities Strategies

- ▶ Aid them in self-understanding.
  - Reflect to them their overexcitability.
  - Help them identify it.
  - Discuss positives of it.
  - Address need to regulate it at times.
- ▶ Teach them self-advocacy.
  - Help them with what to say to people to help others understand them.

I know I'm talkative. Let me know when I talk too much for you to talk too.



# Psychomotor OE

## ► What to say:

You need extra time to move your body.

Do you ever notice your body itching to move?

Do you get told to sit still?

I'm impressed with the energy you put into this project. Your enthusiasm will help you accomplish a lot.

You're the kind of person who prefers to move rather than be still.

I can see that you learn best when moving.

You have awesome energy!

Sometimes our bodies need to relax.

To get along well in the world, sometimes we have to be still.

To grow our brains and bodies best we need to have rest sometimes.

Be sure to find time to move your body everyday.

# Psychomotor OE

## ► What to do:

Get them out of the room and moving.

Plan plenty of physical movement.

Help them recognize when they need to move.

Get them with like others.

Talk about the positives of energy.

Minimize activities that require lots of sitting.

Consider PT or OT.

Teach them to explain and self-advocate.

Model soothing and calming activities.

Teach relaxation.

Help them recognize when they need rest.

Teach them to take personal time outs.



# Intellectual OE

## ► What to say:

Your curiosity makes your brain grow.

I love your curiosity!

It's good that you stay with ideas that are interesting to you.

You have lots of interests.

You need to make time to just think.

I've noticed you're good at explaining yourself.

Do you ever notice people not listening to your details?

To grow our brains and bodies best we need to think about uninteresting things sometimes.

What do you know about X?

That's a good example of how you're good at learning new information.

To get along well in the world, sometimes we have to think about what others are contemplating.

# Intellectual OE

## ▶ What to do:

Allow them to create and work on personal projects.

Talk about the benefits of being curious.

Humor their need for understanding, questions, comments, and answers.

Get them with intellectual peers.

Work with them regarding cognitive control.

Teach them to find answers to their questions.

Get them access to resources.

Take them to the library to research (and talk to the librarian).

Remember that intellectual quests may not match their emotional maturity.

Work with them regarding metacognition and self-reflection.

# Sensual OE

## ► What to say:

Do you ever notice people not listening to your details?

What kind of clothing and situations make you feel most comfortable?

Have you noticed you don't like textures/smells/etc. that are Y?

What do you notice here?

It's neat that you notice so much detail.

It's good to try something new. Do you want to try A or B?

It seems like you really like textures/smells/etc. that are X.

I think you observe more about the world than some people.


You're good at color combinations. Will you help me pick out colors for this?

To get along well in the world, sometimes we have to ignore sounds/sights/smells.


Every day you should stop and notice the world around you.

# Sensual OE


## ▶ What to do:



Have them sort books according to weight.



Talk about the positives of sensing nuances in the world.



Engage with them in enjoying sensation; admire how the light falls.



Consider PT or OT.




Allow them to create and dwell in a pleasing space.



Teach relaxation.




Help them articulate what is a pleasing environment for them.



Have them doodle, draw, paint, write, sculpt, knit, and create.

Help them describe and find comfortable clothing.

Try to limit offensive stimuli.



Get them with like others.

Offer soothing stimuli.

# Imaginational OE

## ► What to say:

It seems you think more about pretend worlds than some people.

How many solutions can you imagine for this problem?

Do you get told to pay attention?

You keep things interesting.

Do you ever notice that what you're thinking about seems more interesting than what others want you to think about?

You have good ideas. What do you think about this?

You come up with great stories; what fun!

You're the kind of person who has an amazing imagination!

When I was a kid I also had an imaginary friend.

I love the way you view the world.

You need to make time just to think up stories.

To get along well in the world, sometimes we have to think about what others are contemplating.

# Imaginational OE



## ▶ What to do:

Discuss the fun in imagination.

Provide opportunities to use their imagination.

Help them use their imagination to solve problems.

Join them in creative expression.

Help them use their imagination to elicit relaxation.

Help them recognize the line between the real and the imaginary.

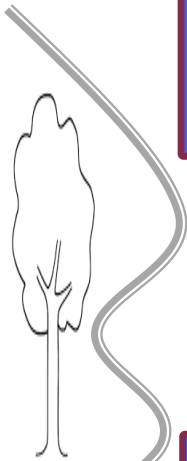
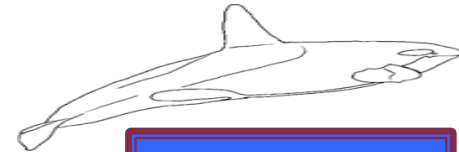
Have them doodle, draw, paint, write, sculpt, knit, and create.

Teach them cognitive regulation.

Encourage them to share their fantasies.

Create/Keep a portfolio.

Get them with like others.



# Emotional OE

## ► What to say:

You can develop relationships with anyone/anything.

You have such a range of emotions.

I've noticed you have intense feelings.

You have lots of different feelings. I think you need more words to describe them.

It's neat how loyal you are.

I can see that one of your strengths is your deep capacity to feel.

You should consider volunteering at the Humane Society. Do you want me to contact them about it?

To get along well in the world, sometimes we have to separate ourselves when we feel emotional.

That's a good example of you being able to tell how others feel.

What are some of the things you are doing or thinking when you feel calm?

Did you know not everyone feels the way you do?

# Emotional OE

## ▶ What to do:

Have them practice their body settling onto the chair like jelly.

Teach them to self-monitor and regulate their emotions.

Help them develop an emotional vocabulary that reflects the nuances of their feelings.

Teach them to separate themselves as needed.

Model soothing and calming activities.

Teach them to share their emotions in productive and appropriate ways.

Help them respect others' less intense emotions/reactions.

Teach them to explain and self-advocate.

Give them an "upset" stuffed animal to soothe.

Humor attachments.

Provide them opportunities to express their empathy and social concerns.



# Web Resources

- ▶ The Association for the Gifted: [www.cectag.org](http://www.cectag.org)
- ▶ Davidson Institute for Talent Development: [www.davidsongifted.org](http://www.davidsongifted.org)
- ▶ Duke Talent Identification Program: [www.tip.duke.edu](http://www.tip.duke.edu)
- ▶ Gifted Association of Missouri: [www.mogam.org](http://www.mogam.org)
- ▶ The Global Center for Gifted & Talented Children: [www.gcgtc.com](http://www.gcgtc.com)
- ▶ Great Potential Press: [www.greatpotential.com](http://www.greatpotential.com)
- ▶ Hoagies Gifted Education Page: [www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)

# Web Resources

- ▶ Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth:  
<http://cty.jhu.edu>
- ▶ National Association for Gifted Children:  
[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)
- ▶ Northwestern Center for Talent Development:  
[www.ctd.northwestern.edu](http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu)
- ▶ Stanford Education Program for Gifted Youth:  
<http://epgy.stanford.edu>
- ▶ Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted:  
[www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)
- ▶ World Council for Gifted & Talented Children:  
[www.world-gifted.org](http://www.world-gifted.org)

# References

- ▶ Cross, T. L., & Cross, J. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook for counselors serving students with gifts and talents: Development, relationships, school issues, and counseling needs/interventions*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- ▶ Daniels, S., & Piechowski, M. M. (2009). *Living with intensity*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc.
- ▶ Moon, S. M., & Reis, S. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Social/Emotional issues, underachievement, and counseling of gifted and talented students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- ▶ Neihart, M., Pfeiffer, S. I., & Cross, T. L. (Eds.). (2016). *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know? (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Washington, DC: Prufrock Press, Inc.
- ▶ Neihart, M., Reis, S. M., Robinson, N. M., & Moon, S. M. (Eds.). (2002). *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* Washington, DC: Prufrock Press, Inc.

# References

- ▶ Silverman, L. K. (Ed.). (2000). *Counseling the gifted & talented*. USA: Love Publishing Company.
- ▶ Webb, J. T., Amend, E. R., Webb, N. E., Goerss, J., Beljan, P., & Olenchak, F. R. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- ▶ Webb, J. T., Amend, E. R., Beljan, P., Webb, N. E., Kuzujanakis, M., Olenchak, F. R., & Goerss, J. (2016). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- ▶ Webb, J. T., Gore, J. L., Amend, E. R., & DeVries, A. R. (2007). *A parent's guide to gifted children*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.