



# MOTIVATING YOUR GIFTED CHILD

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# For more information on Motivation and Underachievement

- Go to:
- [www.sylviarimm.com](http://www.sylviarimm.com)

# What is the definition of Underachievement?

- 1. A discrepancy between potential achievement and actual achievement.
- 2. A discrepancy between predicted achievement and actual achievement.
- 3. A failure to develop or use potential.

“The main difference between high ability achievers and high ability underachievers is that the achievers have learned the attitudes and strategies that enable them to be successful in a school setting.”

Joanne Rand Whitmore

# What does lack of motivation look like in the gifted population?

- Disorganized
- Day dreamy
- Not bringing work home
- Careless errors
- Poor study skills
- Focus on anything, but the task at hand
- Boredom
- Excuses
- Defensiveness



# Why does the gifted population struggle so much with lack of motivation

- They have a social disability. They can learn to read at the age of 1, but they can not learn to do motivation.
- As children they show that they do not want to do something by having a full out tantrum with so much intensity that we pick up the pieces for them.
- The typical approach to motivation is doing things for other people feels good. This is not the case for gifted children. It's like they have an allergy to this.
- They have not had to learn to work until they are older. Everything comes easy for them.
- Their intensity leads others to fix the problems and then they miss the opportunity to grow.

# A note to the parents:

- These are extremely hard children to raise.
- You can not make them do it. They have to own this skill development.
- It is essential to recognize your limits of power!
- Do have reasonable consequences. (In our family, we do our homework and then watch tv. If you don't do your homework, you don't get to watch tv.) Don't be mad, but be matter of fact.
- This is not your fault. You can only guide them in the right direction.
- Be patient and don't give up hope.
- Beneath all the defenses, they do trust you and do believe that you know best. They just don't want to admit it.

- The key to motivation is that the child must own it themselves.

- If I cooperate with the world, I will be happier.
- They must find the reason for happiness, talk to themselves about it and picture it in their mind. They must persevere through their natural desire to not work.
- You can not find it for them. Remember, you can not make them do this.



# Special concerns around motivation and underachievement

- The Twice Exceptional student
- Lack of executive skill development (organization, prioritization, focus, planning, etc.)
- Gender Underachievement
  - For Girls
  - For Boys





# Perfectionism and Motivation

- Healthy perfectionism is a strive for excellence in an area of interest.
- When perfectionism becomes pervasive and compulsive, it becomes a problem.
  - Gifted children are under a tremendous amount of pressure to be perfect and/or are highly competitive.
- Underachievers typically have unrealistic goals whether they are too high or too low.
  - This leads to low self-esteem, fear and avoidance, procrastination, quitting early, and opposition.
  - Perfectionism affects those who love the child. They may feel not good enough and angry.
  - As parents, we give them these messages without even knowing it. (Keep in mind, children who are not gifted would not be as affected by this. Raising a gifted child involves counterintuitive actions.)
    - Extreme praise.
    - Praising outcome instead of effort.



# Perfectionism... What can we do?

- Don't steal their dreams, but temper them to be realistic.
- Encourage children to do their best, not be the best.
- Use words of moderate praise.
- Encourage perseverance and working hard when challenges or failures arise.
  - You will start at the bottom and work up.
- Teach self-evaluation skills and encourage receiving feedback/criticism from others.



“In my experience...achievement depends on willingness to accept a challenge, take risks, make errors and the believe that one has control over the outcomes. Achievement is hindered by perfectionism, fear of failure, and the belief that control, credit and/or blame belong to someone else.”

P. Theroux

# Perfectionism...What can we do?

- Encourage humility.
- Encourage congratulating others on their successes.
- Set realistic social expectations. Not everyone will like you and that's ok.
- Share the mistakes you have made.
- Encourage flexibility in daily life.
- For underachievers who don't give effort for fear of not being perfect, gradually increase the level of effort and talk about the progress that this has made.
- For the child who works and works to achieve perfectionism, encourage balance, reasonable grades, and setting limits.

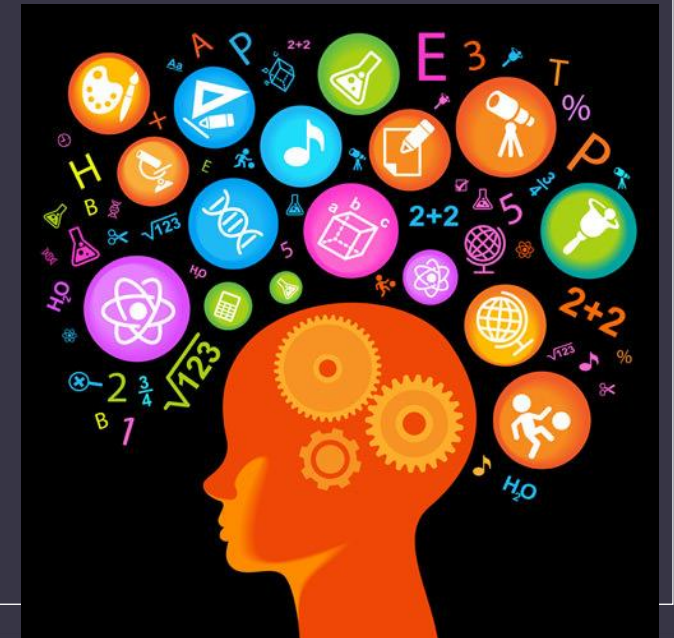


# The creative underachiever

- The child complains that school is too boring, teachers are not creative enough in teaching, or the curriculum is not focused in their area of strength.
- We agree with them.
- They then feel powerful.
- This brings about noncompliance or opposition in school.
- This brings about focusing solely on areas of creativity.
- The child is marching to the beat of a different drummer...the nonconformist (Excellent artist, but failing academic classes.)
- There is praise for this.

# The Creative Underachiever...What do we do?

- Do not ally with the child against the teacher or the parent.
- Encourage hard work and relay the message that we all have to be bored. It's part of life.
- Find mentors and peers with similar creative gifts.
- Use the creative strengths to build in areas of weaknesses (or boring areas).
- Join with teachers to find creative solutions.
- Plan futures in creative careers.



# The Oppositional Underachievers

- They resent rules and responsibility.
- They are oppositional and argumentative and run the family.
- They trap you into battles of the will.
- It is all about them.
- They are highly competitive.

# The Oppositional Underachievers...What do we do?

- Use the V method to determine control. Start with a few choices and little power and gradually increase as they mature and show they can handle the responsibility.
- Be an advocate for your child, but remember it takes a village! Join together with family and educators to make changes.
- Teach humility.
- Teach the value of studying, learning, asking questions, and persevering is the way to success.

# The Oppositional Underachievers...What do we do?

- Do not reason. They want to win.
- Tell them that you are gifted also and have much more experience and know much more. If you don't feel confident in this, pretend.
- Don't be afraid to set limits.
- Let them know you are not the enemy and you are in alliance with them.
- Teach them healthy relationship dynamics (you don't have to always be right, always win, always argue)
- Talk about the social and educational consequences to their behavior as they occur (and they will!)
- Keep calm and parent on.
  - Remember these children are so so so hard to raise!



# Over-sensitive Underachiever

“Each time we steal a student’s struggle, we steal the opportunity for them to build self-confidence. They must learn to do hard things to feel good about themselves.”

Sylvia Rimm

- Pull for dependency.
- Appears helpless.
- Often an internal sense of too high of expectations which then leads to little effort.
- Based in fear and anxiety often times due to perfectionism.
- They are less willing to take risks.

# Over-sensitive Underachievers...What do we do?

- Respond counterintuitively. As parents we are there to help our children. When we feel the pull, we do it. With this type of temperament, do not!
  - Do not rescue your child. They need to learn to cope with failures, with not having the perfect school, with being bored, with friends who are not completely into them.....
- Determine a realistic plan of action to face the fear. Remember this is not a goal of perfection. This is a reasonable goal. You can make an A if you try versus you can improve your grade if you try. Everyone will laugh at me if I make a mistake versus everyone may not like it but I bet some of them will.
  - Be flexible. If the first goal does not work, adjust it.

# Over-sensitive Underachievers...What do we do?

- Set small effort goals. (Getting the phone number from a new friend versus making them make the phone call and set up the playdate.)
- Find tools to assist in facing the fear. Change bad habits that are enforcing the fear.
- Celebrate the small victories. Talk to the child and to others about the progress. Help the child feel proud and empowered!



*Self-care is not about  
self-indulgence, it's  
about self-preservation.*

*- Audrey Lorde*

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It is so very hard to raise gifted children. Every day a new challenge arises. Every day the strategy to help you child grow may change. So take care of yourself!