

# PEAK Fact Sheet

## Overexcitability

Does your child cry easily or worry a lot? Complain about smells and sounds or about clothing being uncomfortable? Fidget and squirm? Spend a lot of time fantasizing? Ask question after question? If so, your child may have one or more overexcitability. Gifted children are often described as intense, emotional and full of energy. This passion and intensity cause the gifted to react differently than most do to the surrounding world.

First described by Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski, these overexcitabilities (OE's) are familiar to parents and teachers of gifted children. The five OE's are psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional. Parents can get a better understanding of their gifted children by matching their child's behavior with the characteristics of each of these intensities.

<b><u>Psychomotor</u></b> <b>Has surplus of energy</b> <b>Might be misdiagnosed as having ADHD</b>	Rapid speech
	Impulsive behavior
	Competitiveness
	Compulsive talking
	Nervous habits and tics
	Sleeplessness
<b><u>Sensual</u></b> <b>Has heightened senses</b>	Appreciation of beauty ~ in writing, music, nature and/or art
	Might include appreciation of objects like jewelry
	Sensitive to smells, tastes and texture of food.
	Bothered by things others don't notice
	Bothered by feel of some materials on skin (tags, fabric)
	Craving for pleasure, need for comfort
<b><u>Intellectual</u></b> <b>Seem to be thinking all the time. Wants answers to deep thoughts</b>	Might ask intense questions of adults
	Deep curiosity, always asking "Why?"
	Love of knowledge and learning, love of problem solving
	Avid reader
	Asks probing questions
	Independent
<b><u>Imaginational</u></b> <b>Vivid imagination</b>	Vivid imagination
	Fear of the unknown
	Good sense of humor
	Magical thinking
	Love of fantasy. Love of poetry, music and drama
	Daydreaming. Vivid dreams at night.
	Imaginary friends
	"Worst case scenarios" thinking. Afraid to try new thing

<b><u>Emotional</u></b> <b>Very sensitive. “He is too sensitive for his own good.”</b>	Extremes of emotion
	Anxiety, depression
	Feelings of guilt and sense of responsibility
	Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
	Timidity and shyness
	Loneliness
	Concern for others
	Heightened sense right and wrong, of injustice and hypocrisy
	Strong memory for feelings
	Problems adjusting to change
	Need for security
	Physical response to emotions (stomach aches caused by anxiety, for example)

Having overexcitabilities can be frustrating for parents as well as for the gifted child, not just because of the intensity but also because others may not understand. But OE’s can also make life richer and fuller.

It’s possible to live with and love the overexcitabilities! The following are some guidelines for supporting the gifted child with overexcitabilities:

- Allow time for your child to express his or her overexcitability. Make time for daydreaming, for physical activity, for spontaneity.
- Teach your child and people important in your life about the OE’s.
- Encourage your child to focus on strengths and to see his or her OE as strengths.
- Teach your child skills to manage his or her overexcitabilities effectively. For example, teach your child emotion regulation techniques (e.g., deep breathing exercises for dealing with stress or anger) or how to effectively cope with offensive stimuli (e.g., politely declining a certain food or avoiding certain smells). Teach your child to watch for “early warning signals” and how to deal with them.
- Be realistic in your expectations. Telling an emotionally intense child to ignore teasing or not let the teasing bother him is impossible advice for the child to follow.
- Emphasize that differences are positives and not negatives. Help your child understand that being different is okay. Everyone is unique.

**Want more information?** The SENG website [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org) has many articles on emotional issues and gifted children.

*Sources:*

[www.giftedkids.about.com](http://www.giftedkids.about.com)

*Parenting gifted kids* by James R Delisle

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