



EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT IN CHILDREN WHO ARE GIFTED

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OVERVIEW

- ❖ The “Dark Side” (?)
- ❖ Factors contributing to motivation and emotional/behavioral adjustment in children who are gifted
- ❖ Approaches to intervention
 - ❖ Red flags (require professional involvement)
 - ❖ Individualizing strategies to promote emotional/behavioral adjustment and enhanced motivation

THE “DARK SIDE”?

- ❖ Most research suggests that the majority of gifted youth demonstrate *age-typical* emotional and behavioral adjustment
- ❖ Some aspects of being “gifted” lend themselves to above-average emotional and behavioral adjustment
 - ❖ Learning quickly and easily
 - ❖ Flexibility in thought and approaches
 - ❖ Higher-level abstract thinking

THE “DARK SIDE”? (CONT.)

- ❖ Relatively small subgroup of gifted youth demonstrate significant difficulties in emotional and/or behavioral adjustment
 - ❖ Emotional and behavioral challenges are found across all ability levels
 - ❖ *There may be unique challenges for youth who are gifted*
- ❖ Reasons for within group variability
 - ❖ Type of giftedness
 - ❖ Environmental fit
 - ❖ Personal characteristics
 - ❖ **Motivation**

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY (SDT)

- ❖ Theory of motivation
- ❖ Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985)
- ❖ Motivation and general wellness are related to three primary components
 - ❖ **Competence** (experiencing success or achievement)
 - ❖ **Relatedness** (relating to others)
 - ❖ **Autonomy** (being self-directed)

SDT: COMPETENCE

- ❖ Variability in *exceptionality* across skill areas
 - ❖ Linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal
- ❖ “Gifted” vs. age-typical vs. *underdeveloped* or *area of challenge*
- ❖ Competence vs. enjoyment/happiness
 - ❖ Dissonance → stress, frustration, confusion, avoidance of more difficult tasks

SDT: RELATEDNESS

- ❖ “Exceptionality” means you are different
 - ❖ Impact on relationships with same-age peers
 - ❖ Exposure to/placement with older peers (different phase of social development)
- ❖ Pursuing areas of interest may necessarily be an individual task
- ❖ Question of impact of early identification vs. “late bloomer”

SDT: AUTONOMY

- ❖ Lack of experience requiring or seeking adult support
- ❖ Mismatched goals and expectations
 - ❖ Within the youth – “I should be able to do this”
 - ❖ Between the youth and adults – “You are so bright, you should be able to do that on your own”

APPROACHES TO INTERVENTION

❖ “It depends”

❖ When to seek professional help: RED FLAGS

- ❖ thoughts or actions to harm self or others
- ❖ chronic irritability, sadness, anxiousness
- ❖ poor sleep and/or poor appetite
- ❖ negative views of self, world, future
- ❖ high frequency and/or intensity of tantrums, anger, or aggression
- ❖ sudden changes in behavior or habits

APPROACHES TO INTERVENTION (CONT.)

- ❖ Balancing Act: Fostering motivation and well-being
 - ❖ Resolving issues related to competence, relatedness, or autonomy
 - ❖ Provide individualized activities which foster competence in areas of exceptionality
 - ❖ Provide opportunity to practice: needing help, trying new and/or typically non-preferred activities, and having to build competence
 - ❖ Providing opportunity for peer engagement *at the appropriate social level*
 - ❖ Ensure there is time for play!

APPROACHES TO INTERVENTION (CONT.)

- ❖ ***It is important to first identify areas of possible challenge or differentiation***
- ❖ Focused intervention requires accurate identification of needs
- ❖ Identification of which aspects of functioning are within “gifted” range, versus more age-typical range

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, Q&A

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