

SENGVINE

Changing lives. Changing futures.



November 2018

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Director's Corner Message from Laura Paul



National Emotional Wellness Month

October is National Emotional Wellness Month, and it is the perfect time to reflect and renew a commitment for emotional health for yourself, your family, and/or for your students. Now that school has begun and routines are embedded, many are finding themselves stretched to the limit whether at work, school, or home. Emotional wellness can seem like one more unwanted chore and another item for the to-do list. However, this is the exact moment in time when the wellness kit can come in handy. It can also be a bonus when done as a family activity or in a classroom where creating a wellness kit together enhances community and overall wellbeing by addressing this ever-present issue.

Building Your Wellness Kit for Home
Take a few moments either individually or as a family to consider what makes

each person feel good. Answers can range far and wide from a hug or a cup of tea to a bath every night or keeping a booklet of quotes for encouragement or motivation. Children may want items that bring comfort such as a piece of cloth, a picture, or certain memorabilia, or they may even need a jump rope to help burn off excess energy. The key to thinking about items for the kit is what is important to the individual. When it is a stressful time, putting the items in a place where everyone can go to obtain them is key to making the wellness kit a regular practice, creating an action to change the overall heaviness of stress, anxiety, and pressure. By putting the wellness kit(s) in a common space, as a parent or caregiver you are also immediately tuned into a child's needs.

Building Your Wellness Kit for Travel

Needing comfort or relief from stressful situations is often needed in more places than just at home. Putting together a **small fabric pouch or bag** with a collection of items special to you, your student, or a family member can give you tools to rely on when under pressure or when experiencing anxiety. Items that work well for travel kits include writings that are important to you on a piece of laminated paper such as words from a favorite song, a poem, a meaningful note, a roller of essential oils, a reminder to take a few deep breaths, crystals, photographs, single tea or coffee bags, a stress or massage ball, beads, marbles, a statue, a drawing book, mints or other such miniature items.

Building Your Kit Takes Time

It takes time to really discover what works in your wellness kit. Have fun experimenting with items to put inside and/or enjoy connecting with your family members or students as you learn from each other how each person handles difficulty, pressure, and stress. Most of all be proud of yourself for making your emotional health a priority. At the SENG 2018 Conference in San Diego, Dr. Patricia "Patty" Gatto-Walden touched on the importance of emotional health and wellness in her keynote speech called *Everyday Magic Restores Balance and Joy to Gifted Adult Lives*. She aptly stated, "The first step is to recognize that you are more than your mind. We need to stop living a divided self with a sole focus on our predominant intellectual realm, and learn to value and listen to the internal guidance system all five domains collectively provide." By listening and acting in the best interests of our emotional health, we enhance cohesiveness, harmony and overall holistic wellness in ourselves and when interacting with those in the community. We hope you take the time during the National Emotional Wellness Month to connect to your own inner life and to others!

Featured Article

***The Challenge of Heightened Sensitivity
in Gifted Children by Gail Post, Ph.D.***

Have you heard these comments about your gifted child?

She's just too sensitive. He overreacts to everything! Why can't she just go with the flow?

Have you even said them yourself (especially when you were particularly exasperated)? Many gifted children are highly sensitive and emotionally reactive. It comes with the territory. Their finely tuned radar for injustice, deep distress over a social slight, and torment over existential quandaries can morph into melt-downs or despair. In theory, heightened sensitivity can be viewed as emotional excitability, one of Dabrowski's **five overexcitabilities** (Dabrowski, 1966). More recently, overexcitabilities have been conceptualized as "openness to experience," a component of the five-factor model of personality (Vuyk, Krieshok & Kerr, 2016). However you label it, though, you probably witness your child's heightened sensitivity on a daily basis.

Emotional reactivity and sensitivity are not just behavioral constructs. Acevedo and colleagues (2014) found greater activity in brain regions associated with empathy among highly sensitive people. Recent research from Karpinski and colleagues (2018) has implicated giftedness as a risk factor for psychological as well as physical problems, such as autoimmune disease. The authors suggested that overly active cognitive functioning contributes to both emotional and physiological reactivity.

Heightened sensitivity and excitability can be a challenge for parents, teachers, and *especially* for the child who may feel powerless in the face of such strong emotions. Gifted children may struggle with any or all of the following:

- Strong, intense reactions to seemingly innocuous events and situations because the person, place or situation triggers a powerful memory or association
- Intense reactions that evoke strong emotions and even physical symptoms such as headaches or heart palpitations
- Feeling exhausted because of overwhelming empathy and compassion for those who are less fortunate and suffering
- Distraction from routine tasks, responsibilities and even enjoyable activities because of a preoccupation with injustices or **existential issues**
- Heightened sensitivity and fear of rejection in social interactions
- Social discomfort, unless engaged with intense and meaningful **friendships** and relationships
- Sadness or depression due to existential anxiety and a precocious concern with death and a search for the meaning of life
- Weathering criticism for being too **sensitive**, reactive, "dramatic," emotional, gloomy, introverted, pessimistic, serious, or even idealistic

As the parent of a gifted child, you may be gifted as well - and no stranger to the effects of sensitivities and excitabilities. But whether your child's reactivity is strikingly familiar or hard to fathom, there are some basic tools you can use to help navigate this territory:

1. Establish a no-shame zone

Highly sensitive gifted children are prone to feeling shame. The combination of emotional sensitivity, a strong sense of right and wrong, and a tendency toward overthinking can lead to shame and self-blame. If the parents they love and trust unintentionally minimize their feelings, they may feel ashamed of their reactions, and even of their basic nature. Even well-meaning attempts to help them gain perspective by using humor at the “wrong time” may backfire. Establish an environment where *all* feelings and reactions are acceptable, even though maladaptive thinking (such as assuming they are always to blame) can be challenged, and certain behaviors (hitting others, for example) are not permitted.*

2. Help make feelings understandable

Even young children can learn about feelings. They benefit from labeling what emotions look like and feel like, and can learn to distinguish between feeling something and acting on it. This does not mean attempting a rational discussion during the middle of a tantrum. But it does involve helping young children understand that feelings are not magical and often are triggered by real events. You might explain, for example, that it is understandable to feel angry when someone destroys your LEGO castle, or that most kids also feel a little nervous on their first day of school. Simple, reasonable explanations help gifted children make sense of their inner turmoil.

3. Find outlets for emotions

Help your gifted child feel comfortable and safe expressing feelings. Learning how to verbally express feelings in an open, appropriate and respectful manner ("I get mad when my brother gets to watch what he wants on TV") will minimize the likelihood of either acting out the anger (hitting said brother) or learning to suppress anger altogether. This also provides training for managing emotions at school, with friends, and eventually in the workplace. Appropriate, supervised physical outlets for anger can also help (such as punching a pillow or engaging in exercise). Create an environment where sad feelings are acceptable and tears are never mocked or criticized. Let your child know that you are always available to listen and offer support when sadness strikes.*

4. Explore healthy tools for managing or containing emotions

There are some situations where it is not appropriate or helpful to express one's feelings. Gifted children benefit from developing skills for containing their thoughts and emotions when necessary. Your child will learn a valuable lesson in social skills, for example, by showing humility after winning an award, refraining from telling friends they are clueless when they don't quickly grasp information, and realizing that criticizing the teacher is disrespectful (and not the best strategy for accomplishing one's goals). You also can help your child learn how to relax, remain calm, and use comforting and healthy distraction skills when upset. Deep breathing exercises, mindfulness techniques, and calming music are useful tools that even young children can learn. Reframing fears as a challenge to be overcome can be beneficial. Cognitive techniques for challenging negative thinking also can help.*

Emotional reactivity is part of who they are

Gifted children must accept and make peace with who they are. They can learn to accept their emotional reactivity as one aspect of themselves, and as a strength that can enrich their world. It can enhance their lives with great sensitivity, insight, and intensity, but also bring pain and despair if left untended.* As a parent, you can help them appreciate

and embrace this gift by showing acceptance and appreciation for their sensitivity, by offering them tools for managing their struggles, and by showing compassion when they need your support and understanding.

**Note: while there are many apps, books and tools online that offer helpful calming strategies, mindfulness techniques and anxiety management skills for children, if your child is experiencing depression, despair, excessive anxiety, acting out, or other signs of emotional distress, counseling with a licensed mental health professional is recommended.*

References

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- Vuyk, A., Krieshok, T., & Kerr, B. (2016). Openness to experience rather than overexcitabilities: Call it like it is. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 60, 192-211.

About the Author



Gail Post, Ph.D. is a Clinical Psychologist in Jenkintown, PA, in practice for over 30 years. She works with adolescents and adults, with a specialty in the areas of intellectual and musical giftedness. She offers workshops to schools and parent groups, and provides coaching for gifted adults and parents of gifted children. Dr. Post also writes a blog about the social and emotional aspects of giftedness, <https://www.giftedchallenges.com>. You can follow her at <https://www.facebook.com/GiftedChallenges/> and <https://twitter.com/giftedchnges>, or find out more at <https://www.gailpost.com>.

SENG Honor Roll of Outstanding Educators

The SENG Honor Roll provides a special opportunity to give credit to educators of all levels who demonstrate commitment to helping a gifted child or young adult. These special people are pivotal in the lives of gifted individuals.

Both the educator and the district/academic institution will receive a formal certificate, as well as information about SENG. In addition, educators nominated to the SENG Honor Roll receive:



- a letter of honor;
- listing on the SENG website, in *SENGVine*, and at the annual conference.

To make a nomination, simply [fill out this form](#). Once you submit it, you will be redirected to SENG's online donation page. If you need an alternate method for payment, please contact us: office@sengifted.org.

You will promptly receive an acknowledgement of your nomination and a receipt for your tax deductible donation. The minimum contribution to nominate an educator is \$50.

[CLICK HERE TO MAKE A NOMINATION](#)



SENG is seeking persons with knowledge and expertise in the social, emotional development and needs of gifted individuals! If you are interested in presenting at SENG's next annual conference, **Exploring New Frontiers**, at the Omni Resort Galleria in Houston, Texas, on July 19-21, please complete a [Call for Proposals](#) form no later than December 15th.

¿Quieres presentar con SENG en Houston?

[Rellene este formulario](#)

Upcoming SENGINAR



Smart is Not Easy

What Grit & Growth Mindset Really Mean for the Gifted Child

with Austina De Bonte

Join us for our next online SENGinar, "Smart is Not Easy: What Grit & Growth Mindset Really Mean for the Gifted Child," presented by Austina De Bonte. All registrants will receive a link and access to the recorded SENGinar for 30 days after the online event.

When smart kids find that everything comes easy, an essential aspect of self-development gets lost in the bargain: the development of persistence, self-discipline, and tolerance for failure. While these aspects are rarely discussed, Duckworth's seminal research on "grit" has much to say about gifted students, as does Dweck's research on "growth mindset." Many assume that high IQ predicts success, but their research showed that passion and perseverance mattered a whole lot more – and on average, the smartest kids actually had the least grit. Take a research journey from Terman to Peters, separate the insights from the hype, see the kids-eye view via the popular "James and Susie" animation – and use this fresh perspective to better guide our gifted students.

REGISTER NOW

About Austina De Bonte

Austina De Bonte is the current President of the Northwest Gifted Child Association (www.nwgca.org), the Washington State support and advocacy organization for families with gifted children. Founded in 1963, NWGCA is the oldest gifted organization in Washington state. A dynamic and engaging presenter, Austina speaks regularly at conferences, as well as conducts parent education talks and professional development for educators. She is a parent advocate who is passionate about speaking about the unique social and emotional development of highly capable (HiCap) or "gifted" children. Austina's signature style combines firsthand experience as a parent with synthesized research and cutting edge neuroscience. She often says, "There is a growing body of research out there that will change how you think about the HiCap



population – Smart is not easy.” Austina is a certified SENG Model Parent Group facilitator.

SENGinar Calendar: Thursdays, 7:30-9 PM

November 15

A Neuro-developmental Understanding of Twice-Exceptional Kids
by Beth Houskamp

November 29

Navigating Career Success: The Lifewide Learning
Experiences of Successful Gifted Adults in Early Adulthood
by Joselyn Johnson

Every SENGinar is recorded and registrants receive 30 days of access.



Join our #SENGChat on [Twitter](#) every
fourth Tuesday of each month, 8 PM EDT!

#NovemberReads





Learning Differences: Pursuing Positive Supports

by Julie Skolnick

Voices: Unknowingly Introverted

by Jennifer Cammel

I remember when I was first told about the distinction between introverts and extroverts. It was in my seventh grade gifted class called Discover. Our teacher handed us a sheet of traits and told us to check the ones that we felt were most closely related to us.

I met with a distraught client the other day. Her son, who attends an independent school priding itself on specializing in differential learners, had a very bad week. The school's disciplinary point system – an ad hoc way for teachers to let students know they are unhappy with their behavior – yielded a number of points well beyond the accepted threshold for her son.

[Read more](#)

Stress, Learning, and the Gifted Child

by Suki Wessling

Here is a snapshot of my daughter and I working on her math last year:

"I don't want to do this!" She rips up the worksheet and throws the pieces at me. "I hate math! I hate you!"

My daughter and I working on math this year:

"Please, Mommy, can we go out and do swing math? I want to do dividing fractions!" She positively bounces into her shoes and runs out the door to the swing.

[Read more](#)

[Read more](#)

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