

Director's Corner

Finding the Right Mental Health Provider for Your Gifted/Talented Child

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Parents of gifted and talented (G/T) children often find themselves searching for guidance to help them deal with the academic and social/emotional needs of their children. Many G/T children show signs of extreme sensitivities and/or weaknesses in social skill development early in their development, which may negatively impact the daily functioning of the child in home and/or at school. As a result of the latter, parents of G/T children often scramble to find professionals in the mental health field to help them navigate these choppy waters.

Parents of G/T children are highly invested in ensuring their children reach their potential academically but are equally invested in increasing the probability their children will also enter adulthood as well rounded and socially and emotionally healthy individuals. Although most parents are able to negotiate successfully for and/or find appropriate services to address the academic needs of their children, they are often less successful finding services to address the social/emotional needs of their children. When parents of G/T children conduct their initial search for a mental health professional with a specialization in servicing G/T children, they learn quickly their choices are very limited.

Parents of G/T children often find it very challenging to find mental health professionals knowledgeable about the unique and specialized needs of G/T children, which presents a very seri-

ous dilemma for them and their children. Extreme levels of frustration coupled with significant stress are often experienced by these parents seeking assistance for their children, and many times they feel like they have reached a dead end. However, the vast majority of parents of G/T children are often unaware of the paucity of training provided to mental health professionals, such as psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers, and therapists, related to addressing the social/emotional needs of G/T children.

In our society, a stigma surrounds the concept about who the G/T child is and the type of services they require to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, many professionals in the mental health field also feed into the stigma about G/T children and often are not cognizant of the research or theories related to G/T children. As a result of this lack of awareness among mental health professionals, G/T children are at risk for misdiagnosis or under diagnosis at the hands of these professionals who are lack the awareness of the specialized needs of this population of children.

It is imperative for parents seeking professional help for their G/T children to locate a mental health professional who specializes in addressing the needs of this population of children. Here are some recommendations for how to proceed:

- I strongly encourage parents to ask potential mental health providers for an obligation free consultation.
- During the consultation with the mental health provider, parents should inquire about the professional's experience working specifically with G/T children.
- Parents should ask to see the resume or curriculum vitae of the professional and ask about attendance at professional development workshops and/or conventions related to gifted children. They can also ask to see copies of written or published work by the counselor/clinician about the social-emotional needs of gifted children, and/or copies of handouts or slides from presentations.
- It is very important for the parent to establish the level of competence of the mental health provider and to determine if they have the background knowledge necessary to be an effective service provider for their children.
- Parents should also seek a professional who is sensitive to the G/T child's unique perspective of the world around them.

It is very important that mental health providers of G/T children help parents understand their children better and help these children cope with being gifted and talented in a society that appears "anti gifted, anti intellectual, and anti talented."