Gifted and Talented Children

Introduction

In psychology, there is a great deal of emphasis on pathology. However, recently, there has been a shift in focus to the “other end of the bell curve” namely the gifted/talented (GT) child. This unique subgroup of children requires a special understanding from an educational, social, emotional and parental viewpoint. This overview provides a basic introduction to the GT child.

Overview

The gifted and talented (GT) are, “individuals who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude or competence in one or more domains, and their development of ability or talent is a lifelong process (NAGC, 2010).” These individuals tend to be overlooked by many health care providers. For example, G/T children often experience overexcitabilities, which cause them to “overreact” or “act out” in certain situations. Yet it can be difficult for them to obtain information to help them differentiate overexcitabilities from the symptoms of ADHD.

G/T children run a higher chance of being misdiagnosed and/or receiving the wrong treatment. With gifted/talented children, many classmates or teachers can view their overexcitabilities as excessive or find the individual to be “over the top.” These children suffer both academically and socially. Academically, although they possess the knowledge to do well, they are at risk for underachievement; whereas socially, issues arise more with maintaining relationships.

Gifted/ talented children tend to have very high self-criticism and to put themselves at risk without realizing. About 15-20% are considered disabled at some point in their academic career because of the high expectations they have set for themselves. However, with the proper attention, G/T children can excel, provided they are not misdiagnosed.

Gifted/Talented Children:

- Demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude in multiple disciplines
- Tend to “overreact” or “act out” in certain situations
- Are often perfectionistic and idealistic
- May experience heightened sensitivity to their own expectations and those of others
- Feel bored in their classes
- Think in abstract terms and may find difficulty with basic schoolwork
- Define success in school as getting an ‘A’, and failure as getting any grade below an ‘A’.
Gifted/Talented Children/ADHD

Many G/T individuals are treated as if they have ADHD. One of the main reasons for this misdiagnosis is the strong similarity between overexcitabilities and the symptoms of ADHD. This recurrent misclassification is due to a lack of awareness of the characteristics of giftedness and the predisposition to view their behaviors under the umbrella of ADHD. When G/T children are treated as if they have ADHD, inappropriate behavioral and academic interventions may be employed. As a result, the child may begin to feel uneasy and to withdraw, ultimately leading them to not realize or reach their full potential.

Although many gifted children are misdiagnosed with ADHD, there is also a subset of G/T children with the disorder. Gifted children with ADHD tend to struggle the most academically. Often these children are judged based on their “negative” ADHD behaviors while their giftedness is overlooked. The gifted child with ADHD may also begin to struggle academically and develop a negative attitude toward school due to peer relationship problems. Gifted children who have ADHD may feel like they do not fit in with anyone else when placed in an inappropriate classroom setting that is not sufficiently challenging nor supportive.

G/T children with ADHD struggle to succeed in a classroom that is unable to manage their intellectual and/or emotional ability. For children with ADHD, G/T children can make them feel challenged yet at the same time; they may feel stressed by their lack of maturity compared to their classmates. In addition, their peers may become annoyed with the G/T student with ADHD because of their disruptive behaviors in class. As such, it is imperative that G/T students’ classroom placement be carefully selected to provide the appropriate amount of challenge and support to meet each child’s individual strengths and needs.

Gifted/Talented children require extra attention when facing challenges in school, social life, and personal growth. Here at LifeSpan, the Neuropsychological Examination (NPE) is used to objectively assess cognitive abilities, such as memory, attention/concentration, and language skills. The NPE helps to identify strengths and weaknesses and provides clarity regarding brain functioning and areas of expertise that the child possesses. Information from the NPE is then used to develop comprehensive recommendations to support the child’s learning. In addition, we collaborate directly with the child’s school through consultation and development of IEP and 504 plans.

References: