

## **Forms and Expressions of Intensity**

An excellent explanation and description of how excitabilities and intensities are experienced by and affect young people is the book *"Mellow Out," They Say. If I Only Could: Intensities and Sensitivities of the Young and Bright* by Michael M. Piechowski. The following list of what intensities mean and look like is adapted and reprinted in *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Teens* from *"Mellow Out"* with the Dr. Piechowski's permission.

### **Intellectual Intensity**

What it means:

- Intensified activity of the mind
- Passion for probing questions and problem solving
- Reflective thought

How it shows itself:

- Curiosity, concentration, capacity for sustained intellectual effort, avid reading, keen observation, detailed visual recall, detailed planning
- Search for truth and understanding, forming new concepts, tenacity in problem solving
- Thinking about thinking, love of theory and analysis, preoccupation with logic, moral thinking, introspection (but without self-judgment), being able to integrate intellectual concepts and intuition, independence of thought (sometimes very critical)

### **Psychomotor Intensity**

What it means:

- Surplus of energy
- Physical expression of emotional tension

How it shows itself:

- Rapid speech, marked excitation, intense physical activity (e.g., fast games and sports), pressure for action (e.g., organizing), marked competitiveness
- Compulsive talking and chattering, impulsive actions, nervous habits (tics, nail biting), workaholism, acting out

### **Sensual Intensity**

What it means:

- Enhanced sensory and aesthetic pleasure
- Sensual expression of emotional tension

How it shows itself:

- Intensified seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing; delight in beautiful objects, sounds of words, music, form, color, balance
- Overeating, sexual overindulgence, buying sprees, wanting to be in the limelight

## **Imaginational Intensity**

What it means:

- Free play of the imagination
- Capacity for living in a world of fantasy
- Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension
- Low tolerance of boredom

How it shows itself:

- Frequent use of image and metaphor, facility for invention and fantasy, facility for detailed visualization, poetic and dramatic perception, animistic and magical thinking
- Predilection for magic and fairy tales, creation of private worlds, imaginary companions, dramatization
- Animistic imagery, mixing truth and fiction, elaborate dreams, illusions
- Need for novelty and variety

## **Emotional Intensity**

What it means:

- Feelings and emotions intensified
- Strong physical reactions to emotions
- Strong emotional expressions
- Capacity for strong attachments, deep relationships
- Clear and well-understood feelings regarding oneself

How it shows itself:

- Positive feelings, negative feelings, extremes of emotion, complex emotions and feelings, identification with others' feelings, awareness of a whole range of feelings
- Tense stomach, sinking heart, blushing, flushing, pounding heart, sweaty palms
- Inhibition (timidity, shyness), enthusiasm, ecstasy, euphoria, pride, strong emotional memory, shame, feelings of unreality, fears and anxieties, feelings of guilt, concern with death, depressive and suicidal moods
- Strong emotional ties and attachments to persons, living things, places; attachments to animals; difficulty adjusting to new environments; compassion; responsiveness to others; sensitivity in relationships; loneliness
- Inner dialogue and self-judgment

## **Perfectionism: Ideas for Parents**

- Allow your children to see the planning, process, and hard work that go into meeting goals.
- Realize that perfectionism can hide itself in a cloak of apathy.
- Avoid praising children for being smart or for results that come naturally or easily to them.
- Let your children know that wanting things to be “just so” is not a bad thing.
- Be careful not to turn parenting or homeschooling into an exercise of unhealthy perfectionism.
- Finally, let your children see you make mistakes, then show them how to deal with mistakes in healthy, even graceful ways.

## **Key Considerations for Parents of Gifted Children & Teens**

- Gifted learners are often precocious, intense, divergent, and sensitive.
- Some children function far ahead of their age peers in one or more areas; these areas can be traditional subjects, such as math or reading, or nontraditional, such as understanding mechanical systems or expertise in nature or animals.
- Asynchronous development of levels of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development that are out of sync results in unique and specific education and social needs.
- Intensity shows itself in overexcitability of the intellect, imagination, emotions, psychomotor system, and senses.
- Intensity in children is sometimes misunderstood, even punished by adults; we can make a conscious effort to accept and support a child's intensity.
- Intense children often prefer to follow their own course and do things their own self-determined way, but this inner drive is often not taken seriously by adults.

- For many children, divergent or creative thinking is an inherent part of the way they experience and contribute to the world.
- Highly creative children do not necessarily receive high test scores.
- Creativity can be nurtured as well as inhibited; parents can choose to accept and support children's divergent, creative thinking.
- Highly creative people often have complex personalities that resist categorization; highly gifted children often have the ability to learn with two or more learning styles.
- Parents can support complexity by refusing to limit or define children with words or actions; instead, adults can accommodate seemingly opposite traits, such as masculinity and femininity, or imagination and logic.
- High levels of sensitivity can cause discomfort for children and teens.
- Sensitivity is necessary for appreciation of beauty.
- We can choose not to think of sensitive children as difficult or thin skinned.
- Children and especially teens can learn to manage aspects of their environment so as better to handle high levels of sensitivity.