

OVEREXCITABILITIES – DISCUSSION GUIDE

What are Overexcitabilities?

Insatiable love of learning, capacity to care intensely for people and ideas, boundless energy, vivid imagination.

Heightened sensitivity and response to internal/external stimuli.

Can result in creativity and advanced emotional/ethical development in adulthood.

Overexcitabilities are found more frequently in the gifted population.

Cannot be unlearned, but can be managed.

The Five Overexcitabilities¹

Psychomotor	<p>Surplus of energy Rapid speech, marked excitation, intense physical activity, pressure for action (e.g. organizing), competitiveness</p> <p>Psychomotor expression of emotional tension Compulsive talking/chattering, impulsive actions, nervous habits (tics, biting), workaholism, acting out</p>
Intellectual	<p>Intensified activity of the mind Curiosity, concentration, capacity for sustained intellectual effort, avid reading, keen observation, detailed visual recall, detailed planning</p> <p>Penchant for probing questions and problem solving Search for truth and understanding, forming new concepts, tenacity in problem solving</p> <p>Reflective thought Thinking about thinking, love of theory and analysis, preoccupation with logic, moral thinking, introspection, conceptual and intuitive integration, independence of thought (sometimes very critical)</p>
Sensual	<p>Enhanced sensory and aesthetic pleasure Seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing, delight in beautiful objects, sounds of words, music, form, color, balance</p> <p>Sensual expression of emotional tension Overeating, buying sprees, wanting to be in the limelight</p>
Imaginational	<p>Free play of the imagination Frequent use of image and metaphor, facility for invention and fantasy, facility for detailed visualization, poetic and dramatic perception, animistic and magical thinking</p> <p>Capacity for living in a world of fantasy Predilection for magic and fairy tales, creation of private worlds, imaginary companions, dramatization</p> <p>Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension Animistic imagery, mixing truth and fiction, elaborate dreams, illusions</p>
Emotional	<p>Feelings and emotions intensified Positive feelings, negative feelings, extremes of emotions, complex emotions, identification with others' feelings, awareness of a whole range of feelings</p> <p>Strong somatic expressions Tense stomach, sinking heart, blushing, pounding heart, sweaty palms</p> <p>Strong affective expressions Inhibition, enthusiasm, ecstasy, euphoria, pride, shame, feelings of unreality, fears/anxieties, feelings of guilt, concern with death, depressive moods</p> <p>Capacity for strong attachments, deep relationships Strong emotional ties and attachments to persons, living things, places, difficulty adjusting to change, compassion, loneliness</p>

¹ From Daniels & Piechowski (2009), *Living with Intensity*

Strategies for Managing Overexcitabilities

In general...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the child's OEs • Foster self-awareness of OEs • Emphasize positive aspects of OEs • Teach and use clear verbal and nonverbal communication skills • Teach stress management • Accept and validate child's sensitivity and intensity--free them from feeling isolated ("You have wonderful enthusiasm and energy") • Share strategies that work with teachers.
Psychomotor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and teach relaxation techniques • Help child notice exhaustion or need for quiet time • Avoid activities that require long periods of sitting • Taking time-out can be a choice, not a punishment.
Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor the child's need to seek understanding, regardless of age • Accept and provide for sustained effort (alter sleep patterns if needed) • Help the child learn/practice inquiry methods and communication skills • Interest-based projects at home • Encourage setting and working towards goals • Time with intellectual peers.
Sensual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide environments that limit disturbing stimuli • Co-create a pleasing, comfortable aesthetic environment • Allow time to relish pleasures • Comfortable clothing • Understand and allow for prolonged attachments to objects • Move outside into the natural environment.
Imaginational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cherish creative/imaginational expression • Encourage the child to share imaginings (stories, drawings, photos) • Allow opportunities to design and invent • Distinguish between imaginary and real world • Journaling • Open-ended activities.
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a "feeling vocabulary" • Teach listening and responding skills • Anticipate emotional experiences - rehearse responses and strategies • Learn/practice relaxation techniques (breathing, stretching, quiet time) • Do "emotional temperature taking" - "How do I feel right now?" • Seek opportunities for the child to provide empathy and social concern for others.

Resources

National Association of Gifted Children

<http://www.nagc.org>

Pages on parenting, publications, special programs, etc.

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted

<http://www.sengifted.org>

Pages addressing parenting, diagnosis, finding a qualified psychotherapist, gifted adults, and multicultural outreach

The Theory of Positive Disintegration - Kasmirez Dabrowski

<http://www.positivedisintegration.com/>

Articles relating overexcitabilities to differences in personality development.

“Highly sensitive people are too often perceived as weaklings or damaged goods. To feel intensely is not a symptom of weakness, it is the trademark of the truly alive and compassionate. It is not the empath who is broken, it is society that has become dysfunctional and emotionally disabled. There is no shame in expressing your authentic feelings. Those who are at times described as being a 'hot mess' or having 'too many issues' are the very fabric of what keeps the dream alive for a more caring, humane world. Never be ashamed to let your tears shine a light in this world.”

— Anthon St. Maarten