

GATE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELING RESOURCE NEWSLETTER

February 2019 Edition: Underachievement

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As the GATE middle school counselor, I am sending a monthly newsletter with tips, resources, strategies, and interventions to support GT students. This month's newsletter provides tools to parents and educators for helping students who are underachieving.

The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) identifies underachievement as the “unanticipated difference between accomplishment and ability”. According to the book *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* by Webb, J., et. al (2007), there are multiple possible reasons for underachievement and decreased motivation, such as:

- attempt to fit in with peers
- tasks seem uninteresting or important to the child's life
- desire to show independence
- desire to express anger against parents or teachers
- fear that success will result in pressures
- a way to get attention from parents or teachers
- too much emphasis on extrinsic rewards
- inability to think about future goals, poor study habits
- impulsivity and distractibility, etc.

Although reversing underachievement is not an easy or quick task, the authors of *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children*, provide six practical steps to help underachieving students transfer motivation. The assumption is that the child is not unmotivated, but that she is just motivated in other directions that fulfill certain needs (which do not coincide with what the adults consider important). The six steps to transfer motivation are:

1. create an environment that promotes achievement and motivation
2. avoid power struggles
3. develop a positive relationship
4. provide interest, stimulation, and challenge
5. establish appropriate goals and sub-goals
6. build on gradual success.

Featured Resources (attached):

1. **“Do’s and Don’ts for Motivating Your High-Ability Child”** – by Dr. Del Siegle and Dr. D. Betsy McCoach, publication for Parent Day during NAGC 2016 Convention
2. **“Motivation: Recapturing the Joy of Learning”** – by Molly Isaacs-McLeod, article (available online) with information about motivation and underachievement for parents and teachers of gifted children <https://www.sengifted.org/post/isaacs-mcleod-motivation>
3. **“Underachievement Quiz”** – by Dr. Sylvia Rimm, great underachievement diagnosis tool for parents and teachers; it may be used in conjunction with the book **Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades**, by Dr. Sylvia Rimm (2008)

Featured Books:

1. **A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children** by Webb et al (2007) – this is a comprehensive book on topics related to parenting gifted children including an entire chapter dedicated to motivation, enthusiasm, and underachievement.
2. **Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades** by Dr. Sylvia Rimm (2008) – this book provides in-depth information about underachievement and a six-step program for parents and teachers to help reverse it.
3. **The Underachieving Gifted Child** by Del Siegle (2013) – this book explores factors that contribute to underachievement and specific strategies that can help increase student achievement. Helpful for both educators and parents.

Do's and Don'ts for Motivating Your High-Ability Child

By Dr. Del Siegle and Dr. D. Betsy McCoach

At Parent Day during NAGC's 2016 Convention in Orlando, FL, scholars and parents Del Siegle and Betsy McCoach shared successful strategies and practices for motivating gifted children.

AVOID SABOTAGE

Be careful of—even inadvertently—sabotaging your children's perceptions about themselves, their peers, and their teachers.



Do

- Model a growth mindset.
- Let your child struggle a bit, but monitor to avoid total frustration.
- Present a united front with your partner.
- Show you value education and teachers.



Don't

- Use "est" words—best, brightest, prettiest, fastest.
- Swoop in, rescue, and provide unnecessary assistance—otherwise your child will never feel "challenge."
- Let your children play parents against one another.
- Criticize teachers in front of your children.

UNDERSTAND CAUSE & EFFECT

Gifted children need to understand that they control their own destinies: They succeed because they have the skills and put forth effort, and that failures may be attributed to lack of effort.



Do

- Help your child analyze success or failures. Example: "Did we study the right things?" "What was on the test that we didn't study?"
- Counsel your child to reflect on difficult situations and discuss ways to change the environment to fit her needs or how she can adjust her behavior to the existing environment.
- Help your child break down projects and map out tasks. Through planning, children can visualize a task come to fruition.
- Model curiosity and creativity about the world around you.



Don't

- Allow him to blame others for his lack of success. Example: "The teacher just doesn't like me."
- Intervene and solve problems for your child. Rather: Involve and engage her so she is part of the solution.
- Assume that because your child is gifted, he intuitively knows how to organize tasks or manage projects. Some students need help in this area.
- Ignore opportunities to demonstrate how to transform your child's curiosity into action. Rather: "Let's look your question up on the Internet."

FIND MEANINGFULNESS

Even at a very young age, gifted and talented students need to find meaning in their lives.



- Support your child in exploring what is personally interesting to him.
- Recognize that children's motivation is linked to what they view as useful. When they value or enjoy an activity, they are intrinsically motivated.
- Help your child see beyond the immediate activity to long-term outcomes.
- Share your child's interests with the teacher or school, and find ways to incorporate those interests into school projects.
- Find peers or other role models with whom your child can relate.



- Force your child to pursue interests that you like or feel she should pursue because "all the kids are doing it."
- Overly focus on external rewards systems as the way to motivate your child.
- Set goals for your child that you value, but have little or no meaning to him.
- Be afraid to let the teacher know what your child cares about and interests her.
- Foster an environment of unhealthy perfectionism. Rather: Find examples of famous role models who struggled but persevered to success.

DISCUSS GIFTS AND ABILITIES

It's important that high-ability children understand that they have gifts and talents...but it's up to them to put forth effort, persevere, and accept challenges to grow.



- Help your child see that no one is born a Ph.D. or Nobel Peace Prize winner—it takes effort to succeed.
- Find challenging opportunities to improve skills and develop talents.
- Encourage your child to take risks; share struggles and successes.
- Document your child's growth and review periodically to build confidence.



- Devalue the importance of working hard and putting forth effort.
- Overlook the fact that your child needs to learn basic study skills such as outlining, note taking, and identifying main points—even though she has a good memory and fast processing skills.
- Equate or imply that giftedness is tied to perfect performance.
- Forget to sit down with your child to review examples of previous work to provide a visual marker of his growth—to build self-confidence and higher self-efficacy.

LISTEN AND SUPPORT INTERESTS

Gifted children want their voices to be heard.



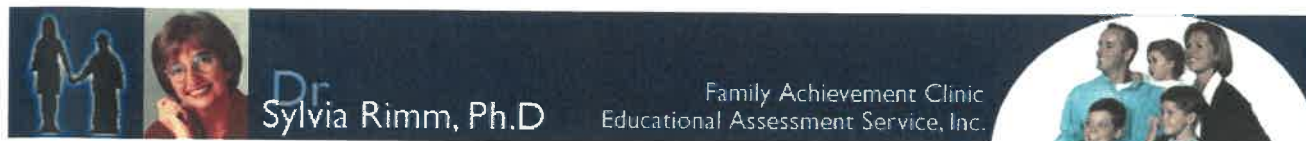
- Listen to what your child has on her mind.
- Be an active, empathetic listener. Example: "So it sounds like you are feeling x..." "What I hear you say is..."
- When providing compliments, they must be genuine, specific, and earned. Example: "I like the colors you chose here." Or, "You are providing good supporting sentences for your topic sentence in your opening paragraph."



- Solve her problems for her—give her the space and time to talk it out and problem-solve independently, but with support.
- Be distracted, dismissive, or interruptive when he is trying to share his feelings or point of view.
- Compliment your child in a general way ("good job") or for underperforming or for unchallenging tasks.

Authors' Note

Del Siegle, Ph.D., is director of the National Center for Research on Gifted Education, and D. Betsy McCoach, Ph.D., is professor and program coordinator of the Measurement, Evaluation and Assessment program, both at the University of Connecticut. Betsy and Del are married, life partners, and parents of two young gifted and talented children. They have authored numerous books and papers on a multitude of topics, including *Motivating Gifted Students: The Practical Strategies Series in Gifted Education*, and were recently co-editors of *Gifted Child Quarterly*.


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For More Information, Contact:
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Underachievement Quiz

Parents and Teachers

Do you wonder if your child (or student) is at risk for underachievement or is underachieving? To find out, ask yourself the following questions.*

Score 1 point for each "yes" response and total the points for each section. Scores are explained after each section. (If you are a teacher, substitute "my student" for "my child.")

Section 1:

Does my child forget to do homework assignments? Does my child give up easily?

Does my child avoid competitive activities unless he/she is almost sure to win?

Does my child start working late on homework each night?

Does my child watch two or more hours of TV (or play two or more hours of video games) on school nights?

Total Points for Section 1:

4-5: My child has characteristics that indicate a very serious underachievement problem.

2-3: My child has characteristics that indicate a fairly serious underachievement problem.

1: My child has characteristics that indicate only minor underachievement problems.

0: My child has no characteristics of underachievement.

Read Chapter 1 of Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades to understand the characteristics of underachievers.

Section 2:

Was my child the center of an unusual amount of attention for the first three years of his/her life?

Were my child's parents divorced before he/she was a teenager?

Does my child have a same gender sibling who is less than three years younger or older than he/she?

Does my child want a lot of one-to-one attention?

Total Points for Section 2:

4-5: My child encountered very serious risks for underachievement.

2-3: My child encountered fairly serious risks for underachievement.

1: My child encountered only minor risks for underachievement.

0: Indicates no obvious risk factors that would lead to underachievement.

Read Chapter 2 of Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades to learn about risk factors that may initiate underachievement.

Section 3:

Is the mother or father in this child's family perfectionistic?

Does my child tend to ignore his/her mother, father, or teacher when they make requests?

Did the mother or father in this child's family not like school?

Is the mother or father in this child's family unhappy in his/her career?

Is the mother or father in this child's family disorganized?

Do the mother and father in this child's family have very different approaches to child rearing?

Is one parent in this child's family a more rigid disciplinarian than the other?

Do my child's grandparents live nearby and overindulge him/her?

Total Points for Section 3:

- 5-8: My child has very serious problems related to imitation of family patterns.
- 3-4: My child has fairly serious problems related to imitation of family patterns.
- 1-2: My child has minor problems related to imitation of family patterns.
- 0: My child has no apparent problems related to imitation of family patterns.

Read Chapter 3 of *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades to understand how your child or student may be unconsciously imitating problem parental attitudes or behaviors.*

Section 4:

Dependent Underachiever:

Do other children seem to pick on my child?

Is the mother or father in this child's family overprotective?

Does my child need lots of parent help with homework?

Does my child often play the class clown?

Does my child cry, whine, or complain a lot?

Dominant Underachiever:

Does my child brag a lot when he/she does something well?

Does my child often disobey his/her mother, father or teacher?

Does my child blame others or find excuses?

Does my child often convince a parent or teacher to change his/her mind?

Does my child get one parent (or teacher) to say yes after the other parent (or teacher) says no?

Total Points for Dependency:

- 4-5: My child has very serious dependency problems.
- 2-3: My child has fairly serious dependency problems.
- 1: My child has only minor dependency problems.
- 0: My child has no dependency problems.

Total Points for Dominance:

- 4-5: My child has very serious dominance problems.
- 2-3: My child has fairly serious dominance problems.
- 1: My child has only minor dominance problems.
- 0: My child has no dominance problems.

Read Chapter 4 of *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades if your child is a dependent or dominant underachiever.*

Section 5:

Is my child bored with school?

Does my child seem to ask for more teacher help than most children?

Does my child tend not to finish class assignments?

Does my child disrupt the class by talking too much?

Does my child complain that schoolwork is too easy?

Is socializing the most important part of school for my child?

Does my child's class emphasize competition in almost everything?

Does my child's class attempt to eliminate all competition?

Total Points for Section 5:

- 5-8: My child has characteristics that indicate a very serious underachievement problem.
- 3-4: My child has characteristics that indicate a fairly serious underachievement problem.
- 1-2: My child has characteristics that indicate only minor underachievement problems.
- 0: My child has no characteristics of underachievement.

Read Chapter 5 of Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades to discover what classroom risks can cause underachievement.

****Quiz questions taken from Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades by S. B. Rimm, Great Potential Press., Scottsdale, AZ, 2008.***

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