

# Asynchronous Development

Gifted children vary in their abilities and often their patterns of growth differ from their age peers.

When the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and creative aspects of a person develop on a trajectory that is outside of norms, and at an uneven rate, it is described as *asynchronous development*.

Research shows that some gifted and talented children develop asynchronously. In fact, for one group of psychologists, educators, and parents (Columbus Group), asynchronous development is central to their definition of giftedness. They believe that giftedness is based on the inner experiences of the individual combined with advanced cognitive development.

Asynchrony can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. For example:

- A 6-year-old child with a 9-year-old mind wants to draw and write like a 9-year-old, but his motor coordination is age appropriate.
- A 5-year-old girl may be reading at an 8th grade level, but she is at grade level in math.
- A young gifted child may cognitively understand difficult concepts such as death and social justice, but may not have the life experience to handle these concepts.

Asynchrony implies greater complexity. And, these qualitatively different experiences may occur in all cultures, ethnic groups, and segments of society.

## KEY CONCEPTS

**Increased Asynchrony.** As levels of giftedness increase, asynchrony may be more pronounced and social relationships may become more problematic.

**Progressive Development.** The discrepancy between mental age and chronological age is progressive. A 6-year-old with a 9-year-old mind will become a 12-year-old with an 18-year-old mind.

**Anxiety.** When a child realizes he is out of sync from his age mates, he may experience fear, anxiety, or depression.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» How is social development of gifted youngsters both similar and different depending on gender?

Read: [www.sengifted.org/archives/articles/developmental-phases-of-social-development](http://www.sengifted.org/archives/articles/developmental-phases-of-social-development)

» In what ways does asynchronous development affect all the members in a family?

Read: [www.hoagiesgifted.org/asynchronous.htm](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/asynchronous.htm)

» Is a child who demonstrates asynchrony a candidate for acceleration?

Read: [www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation\\_deceived](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation_deceived)



[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

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**Peers.** It's essential that gifted children spend time with like-minded age peers as well as like-minded "idea peers." Varied groups of friends are essential to meet children's needs at different levels of growth.

**Perfectionism.** Children may experience intense frustration when their hands and feet cannot keep up with the visions of their more advanced minds.

**Acceleration.** Research supports that acceleration is one way to challenge bright students. Age, size, and perceived maturity should not be a barrier to screen for possible acceleration; immature behaviors used as a coping strategy to "fit in" often disappear when the child is placed in the right environment with cognitive peers.

**Twice-Exceptionalities.** The most asynchronous gifted learners are often those with learning disabilities, commonly referred to as twice-exceptional or 2E learners. This combination requires additional support at home and at school.

**Age-Appropriate Expectations.** Adults must continually remind themselves that gifted children are still children. It's important to have age-appropriate expectations.

## SOME BEGINNING STRATEGIES

- Focus on your child's strengths.
- Help your child and others to: understand the meaning of being gifted, know the challenges that accompany asynchronous development, and set realistic expectations.
- Explore and teach strategies to address the misunderstandings and stress that come from being out of sync with others—such as mindfulness, self-advocacy, and mind-body tools (yoga or martial arts).
- Find multiple peer groups for your child. One group may include those close in cognitive ability and another may include those with similar interests. A mental age match is sometimes more essential than a chronological age match.
- Bibliotherapy: Have your child read books with main characters who also have unique abilities and uneven development.
- Connect with other parents who are experiencing similar challenges for camaraderie and support. Join a parent support group or start your own.
- Help educators understand what you notice at home regarding the asynchronous development of your child. Keep educators informed when you see your child soar or if you feel your child is lagging behind.

## FOR MORE INFO

Delisle, J., & Galbraith, J. (2015). *When gifted kids don't have all the answers: How to meet their social and emotional needs* (Rev. ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Foley-Nicpon, M., Assouline, S. G., & Colangelo, N. (2013). Twice-exceptional learners: Who needs to know what? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 57(3), 169–180.

Neihart, M., Pfeiffer, S. I., & Cross, T. L. (2015). *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (2nd ed.) Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Olszewski-Kubilius, P., Lee, S. Y., & Thomson, D. (2014). Family environment and social development in gifted students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 58(3), 199–221.

Silverman, L. K. (2013). Asynchronous development: Theoretical bases and current applications. In C. S. Neville, M. M. Piechowski, & S. S. Tolan (Eds.), *Off the charts: Asynchrony and the gifted child* (pp. 18–47). Unionville, NY: Royal Fireworks Press.

Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG), [www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)



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