

# **A GUIDE TO IMPROVE SUCCESS FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE GIFTED AND TWICE EXCEPTIONAL (2E)**

This guide has been prepared by Dr. Lisa Zaretsky for parents to help them navigate the complex world of raising Gifted and Twice Exceptional (2e) Children. Twice Exceptional (2e) individuals are those who are Gifted and also have conditions such as ADHD, Learning Challenges, and the like (including those yet to be diagnosed). Dr. Zaretsky is a specialist in this area and is committed to helping Gifted and 2e children and their families to achieve and expand their highest potential and optimal outcomes.

## **Assessment**

A good starting point is understanding what your child's specific talents, gifts, and needs are.

For this, assessment is required as recommended below:

- Work with a professional with expertise in Gifted and 2e who can appropriately assess the situation. This can include, yet is not limited to, family and medical history, educational history, a thorough review of reports, interviews with family, service providers, extracurricular providers, mentors, and teachers, observation, and engagement with the child. Keep in mind that each child, family, and situation is unique. This is a guideline, and while there is best practice, there is also the need for personalization based on the needs of each child and family.
- Make sure to include all of your child's strengths, gifts, and talents along with their challenges and disabilities when providing information about your child.

## **Developing Personalized Plans**

It's essential to create a personalized educational, social-emotional, and mental health plan with a multidisciplinary team. This team can include educators, mentors, mental health providers, coaches, tutors, and service providers. When creating a personalized plan it is important to also consider educational placement that will cater to your child's needs, extracurricular activities that support your child's interests, talent development, mentorship, internships, support groups, assistive technology, and family support.

- When considering an educational placement, keep in mind that a strengths-based, interest-based, and talent-focused learning program in a structured yet flexible/adaptable psychologically safe environment is essential for 2e learners.
- Experiential learning is one of the best educators, talent developers, and niche builders, particularly for 2e children. It provides skill and talent development in conjunction with real-world experiences.
- Fostering collaborative relationships with teachers and staff can make a positive difference. Sharing information with them about the full impact of Gifted and 2e on learning, skill development, behavior, educational outcomes, social-emotional and mental health, and family dynamics can be beneficial.

## Parent Support

In achieving successful outcomes in navigating the complexity of the world of neurodiversity, it is essential that parents are supported with appropriate guidance along their journey whilst also attending to their own needs. Learning how to “put out fires” in challenging situations and retain some semblance of calm in stormy waters will go a long way towards maintaining their own sanity whilst best assisting their neurodiverse children. Learning to manage stress and maintain your own well-being as a parent is a key goal of this guide.

- It is essential to become educated about Gifted and 2e and how this information relates to your child. Working with a professional who has expertise in this area, reading books by leading authors and researchers in the field of 2e, and seeking resources from organizations that cater to 2e parents and families are some ways to accomplish this.
- Find educational opportunities such as webinars and conferences, to learn about the social emotional, and mental health impacts of 2e on learning, creativity, inspiration, motivation, behavior, beliefs about self and potential, relationships, and the family system.
- Keep in mind and continue to reassure yourself that support for the parents is essential while raising a 2e child. Therapy, coaching, and support groups are some of the ways parents can access support.
- Areas of support that could be beneficial include:

Assistance with parenting skills that are geared toward 2e children, nurturing your relationship with your child, finding strategies and coping methods that promote the well-being of your family's dynamics. Find a community where you can connect with other parents of Gifted and 2e children for shared experiences, camaraderie, and exchanging tips and tools.

## Supporting Social-Emotional Learning and Health

Keep in mind that your 2e child's strengths, gifts, and talents can be in all areas of life. They must all be valued as pathways to success that require building upon them. Utilizing their strengths and interests with ongoing skills and talent development is essential in this process.

Attaining and sustaining psychological safety is critical in all environments (school, home, and community) by providing structure, support, strategies, and flexibility that sustains the whole child. This means finding ways to support their gifts, talents, strengths, interests, challenges, and disabilities simultaneously.

Your child needs to feel safe, supported, and secure in who they are. Once that foundation is built and stabilized they are more likely to allow themselves to be vulnerable, take risks, expand themselves to grow, learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable, and develop self-awareness with resilience and grit. They also need a safe space to talk about their feelings, where they feel validated, seen, and heard.

Other specific things that you as parents can implement to support, encourage and assist your 2e child include:

- Implementing daily consistent mindfulness practices and movement is helpful for fostering awareness, being present and engaged, self-regulation, and emotional regulation.

- Provide frequent opportunities for your child to experience nature (such as the forest, mountains, beaches, country walks, city parks, etc) and outdoor activities such as walking, hiking, bicycling, swimming, running, kayaking, playing ball, etc. Nature is calming to the whole system and provides an opportunity for expansive curiosity, learning, movement, and mindfulness practices.
- Promote the goal of progress, not perfection, and emphasize the distinction between the two. Encourage and support perseverance and tenacity, yet clearly differentiate that from perfectionism.
- Accept and fully embrace each child for where they are right now. Allow them to unfold and bloom at their own pace, including independence and, later on in life, adulthood. Honor and respect their own growth journey and needs even if it is unfamiliar to you. Learn to grow together.
- Keep lines of communication open and guide your child without judgment or shaming.
- Let love lead the way. That includes your own self-love and care. It is equally important for parents of 2e Children to have a self-care daily routine, external support, and community.
- Encourage the 3 C's which are creativity, courage, and compassion. These are critical for healthy self-expression, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-acceptance, and self-advocacy.
- Redefine failure and rejection in your vocabulary and in your family system. When things don't work out as hoped or planned, normalize that as part of life, teach the learning value these opportunities provide, and emphasize that it does not reflect on them personally.
- Embody all of the above practices so that they are modeled for your 2e child(ren) to learn how to regulate emotions, manage challenging situations, support others, and develop to their full potential and expand beyond that in a loving, supportive environment.

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