

## Common Characteristics of Gifted Underachievers

When looking at the characteristics of gifted children, one group—those who are not achieving to their potential—needs careful attention. Children of high potential underachieve or underperform for a variety of reasons, including: social or emotional difficulties, twice exceptionality, and inappropriate educational strategies, among others. Underachievement is oftentimes a complex and long-term problem and best approached with a commitment from home and school to work consistently toward a specific intervention strategy targeting the major cause of the student's underachievement. Students struggling with achievement may exhibit some of the following research-based characteristics.

- ✓ Low Self-Esteem in regards to their academic ability (especially in areas where success is not 'automatic')
- ✓ Negative attitude toward school or schoolwork ("boring", or "dumb")
- ✓ Rebellious toward authority (may only do classwork if they enjoy or like the teacher, content, or assignment)
- ✓ Too Social (may be more engaged in outside interests or relationships than classwork)
- ✓ Problem perfectionism - Fear of failure or success (put off doing assignments because they may not be completely correct or exact)
- ✓ Disorganized (loses papers, assignments etc.)
- ✓ Tendency toward denial (ignores difficult situations hoping they will go away)
- ✓ Doesn't take personal responsibility for success or failure (attributes success and failure to outside influences)
- ✓ Low tolerance for frustration (few or no strategies for working through difficulties in personal life or classroom work)
- ✓ Learning difficulties (may be gifted and have a learning disability or handicap)
- ✓ Low Self-efficacy (won't ask clarifying questions or seek assistance or modifications when needed)
- ✓ From Underserved Populations (those who come from diverse populations which are typically under-identified or served as gifted students)
- ✓ Anxious, impulsive or easily distracted (may exhibit symptoms of ADD or ADHD, or be 'daydreamers')
- ✓ Lacks Self-discipline (may lack the skills or discipline for school achievement)

**Talented & Gifted****Underachieving Gifted Students: Characteristics**

- Low self-concept; negative evaluation of self; feelings of inferiority demonstrated by distrust, indifference, lack of concern, and/or hostility toward others.
- Socially more immature than achievers; lack self-discipline; procrastinate; refuse tasks deemed unpleasant; highly distractible and impulsive.
- Feelings of rejections; believe no one likes them; feel parents are dissatisfied with them.
- Feelings of helplessness; may externalize conflict and problems; avoid challenges.
- Do not see relationship between efforts and subsequent achievement outcomes; negate personal responsibility for failures.
- Irresponsible, rebellious; feelings of being victimized; poor personal adjustment.
- Few hobbies or strong interests.
- Unpopular with peers; hold lower status in class; few friends.
- Hostile toward adult authority figures; distrust adults generally.
- Resistant to influence from teacher or parent.
- Lower aspirations for future; lack future plans or career goals; resist goals that have been set for them.
- May withdraw in classroom situations and be less persistent or assertive.
- Lack study skills and academic curiosity; have weak motivation for academic tasks.
- Dislike school and teachers; choose companions who also have negative attitudes toward school.
- Often leave schoolwork incomplete; frequently nap during study time; often test-phobic.
- Perform at higher levels on tasks requiring synthesizing than on detailed, computational or convergent problem-solving tasks requiring precise and analytic information processing.

Sources: Colangelo & Pfleger, 1979; Davis & Rimm, 1994; Hecht, 1975; Janos & Robinson, 1985; Karnes & Pearce, 1981; Laffoon, Jenkins-Friedman & Tollefson, 1989; O'Shea, 1970; Redding, 1990; Rimm, 1986; Whitmore, 1980.

“Gifted children are especially prone to feelings of not belonging. After all, they’re ‘different,’ and a sense of fitting in and being appreciated can be hard to come by. Self-esteem can also be a problem. Yet if, despite obstacles, the needs at these levels are met, the gifted person may still have great difficulty with self-actualization, the full use of abilities---a paradox, since in the gifted person the potential for self-actualization is so great. These issues have a profound impact on the gifted child’s ability to lead a satisfying life as an adult. The foundations for self-actualization must be laid in childhood.”

