

NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH HIGH LEARNING POTENTIAL

Summary

Children with High Learning Potential (HLP) often need more support than others at home and in the classroom, but this does not necessarily mean that they need more structured activities. Sometimes it means they need more freedom and a little more guidance instead. Sometimes the need is for social and emotional support. This advice sheet, exploring the general needs of HLP children, is aimed at parents of high learning potential children.

Introduction

Children with high learning potential have certain characteristics that are associated with their ability to learn quickly. For more information about these characteristics shared by HLP children, please see Potential Plus UK advice sheet PA102 Characteristics of High Learning Potential Children. These characteristics sometimes result in unexpected behaviour if an appropriate environment or support is not provided. The kind of environment and support needed for HLP children is outlined below.

Understanding and Acceptance

High Learning Potential (HLP) children are each uniquely individual, though they share certain characteristics with other HLP children. People around them notice that they learn differently, act differently and react differently to other children in their peer group. Very often, HLP children are misunderstood and people may look for reasons as to why they don't fit and try to make them conform. It is very important that the people around a child with high learning potential understands them and accepts them as they are.

The qualities and characteristics of HLP children need to be discussed between parents, family members, teachers and club leaders; so that there is an acceptance of what is normal for them. This understanding will lead to a much more fulfilling experience for the child, where their feelings of isolation will be lessened.

One of the most important things to understand about HLP children is that their social and emotional development can often be at odds with their intellectual development. This is sometimes termed 'asynchronous development'. For more information on this issue, see Potential Plus UK advice sheets PA601 Social and Emotional Development of HLP Children and PA514 Asynchronous Development.

Enrichment

HLP children often ask a lot of questions in many situations. They have a great thirst for knowledge and their questions should never be brushed aside. If they cannot be answered when they are asked, questions can be saved for later or another resource can be consulted. For example, if a child is asking whether acid can turn into a gas and the answer isn't obvious, they can ask someone who might know, look it up in a book or search on the internet to find out. If they

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want to know a lot about a particular subject, it is important that they learn where they can find more information about it, thereby building up a bank of resources to use in the future.

To satisfy their thirst for knowledge and preserve their enthusiasm for learning, HLP children will benefit from experiencing subjects they are learning about in a deeper way. This can be gained from reading different books about a subject, researching the topic on the internet, visiting an exhibition at the local museum or art gallery about the theme and discussing their ideas about it with others.

Thinking Skills

To be equipped to work at a higher level in the long term, HLP children need to experience higher-order thinking skills; analysis, synthesis (working with several sources of information to create something new) and evaluation. Other thinking skills that are important are creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving.

In everyday life, these skills can be acquired in a variety of ways. For more information on encouraging these see our advice sheets PA701 Creative Thinking Skills, PA702 Critical Thinking Skills and P703 Higher Order Thinking Skills and the links below.

It is important to encourage thinking skills as often as possible and to value the more complex thought processes involved. Reflecting after the event on the skills used and the feelings of triumph and satisfaction gained will help the child to see their value and want to repeat the experience.

Opportunity to Fail

HLP children need to meet failure because, when they get everything right most of the time, the need to succeed can place excessive pressure on them; they may become intellectually idle and could fail to develop good learning strategies. Taking risks in a safe environment is essential to their continued development.

Many HLP children are prone to perfectionism; for them it is even more important that they are able to understand that not all failure is bad. For more information see Potential Plus UK advice sheet PA604 Perfectionism and HLP Children.

“Failure as a result of adventurous thinking is one of the ingredients of success at the highest level. The only people who never fail are those who do nothing or those who only do easy things, which does not ultimately help them or anybody else.” Teare 2004.

Contact with Others like Them

HLP children need to be with other people like them to prevent them feeling isolated and to help them feel normal. This, in turn, will help to raise their self-esteem and enable them to be

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comfortable about using their gifts.

Contact with other HLP children will also offer intellectual challenge through discussion, play and activities. These are some of the reasons why the Potential Plus UK works hard to build communities of families online and in local areas.

Further Information

PA102 Characteristics of Children with High Learning Potential	There are some characteristics that are common amongst children with high learning potential, though not every child with high learning potential will have all of them. This advice sheet is aimed at parents of high learning potential children and also gives more information about where the list comes from, its use and why these characteristics are present.
http://mensa.org.uk/gifted-talented/children	Mensa Website – Gifted Children Section
<i>Parents’ and Carers’ Guide for Able and Talented Children</i> by Barry Teare	Book providing advice on home – school partnership and extension activities in different subjects. Also gives advice about suitable fiction choices for advanced readers.
<i>The Survival Guide for Parents of Gifted Kids</i> by Sally Yahnke Walker	An easy to read text dealing with many different issues of HLP children.
<i>A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children</i> by Webb, Gore, Amend and DeVries	Written by four authors with decades of experience with HLP children and their families, this book covers issues such as peer relations, sibling issues, motivation and underachievement and discipline.

Potential Plus UK Date of Issue: February 2017

Potential Plus UK Planned Review Date: February 2020

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