

# 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 the characteristics shared by high learning potential 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 children with high learning potential is outlined below.

## Understanding and Acceptance

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

The qualities and characteristics of HLP children need to be discussed between parents, family members, teachers, and club leaders to secure this understanding and acceptance. A deeper understanding will lead to a much more fulfilling experience for the child, where any feelings of isolation will be reduced.

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 may ask a lot of questions in many situations. They often 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

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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 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, internet research, visiting an exhibition at the local museum or art gallery about the theme and discussing their ideas about it with others.

## Thinking Skills

High Learning Potential children need to experience higher-order thinking skills to be equipped to work at a higher level in the long term. These higher order thinking skills are 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 skills, see our advice sheets PA701 Creative Thinking Skills, PA702 Critical Thinking Skills and P703 Higher Order Thinking Skills along with 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 effort expended will lead to feelings of triumph and satisfaction. This will help the child to see the value of higher order thinking and want to repeat the experience.

## Opportunity to Fail

High learning potential children need to experience opportunities to fail. Many HLP children absorb information around them with relative ease and can often answer school questions correctly most of the time without having to actively engage in learning. The need to succeed can place excessive pressure on them, leading to some HLP children becoming intellectually idle and/or failing to develop good learning strategies. Taking risks in a safe environment is essential to their continued development.

Many children with high learning potential are prone to perfectionism; for these children it is even more important that they understand that failure is part of the learning process.

“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.

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For more information see Potential Plus UK advice sheet PA604 Perfectionism and HLP Children.

### Contact with Other HLP Children

Children with high learning potential need to learn with and socialise with other people like them to prevent them feeling isolated and to help them feel as though they can relate to others on a deeper level. This, in turn, will help to raise their self-esteem and enable them to be comfortable about using their abilities.

Contact with other HLP children can 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 gives more information about where the list comes from, its use and why these characteristics are present.
<a href="https://mensa.org.uk/highly-able-children/">https://mensa.org.uk/highly-able-children/</a>	Mensa Website – Highly Able 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.

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