

### Summary

This advice sheet is aimed at parents who would like to consider whether their young child has high learning potential. Below is a guide to some characteristics and abilities that are common amongst children with high learning potential aged between 12 months and 4 years. However, not all of them will apply to every individual child. Whilst the ages given are a rough guide as each child is unique and progresses in different areas at different rates, they provide a useful resource to help you determine whether your young child has high learning potential (HLP).

### Introduction

Many parents of children with high learning potential begin to suspect that there is something different about their child compared with their peers when their child is quite young. This is a guide for parents to consider their child's abilities in the context of high learning potential.

### Characteristics of Young Children with High Learning Potential

- Unusual alertness as a baby
- Interest in books
- Interest in technology and how things work
- Unusually active and high levels of directed energy (but not hyperactive)
- May require less sleep (yet not sleepy or irritable due to lack of sleep)
- Early and extensive language development and vocabulary, forms grammatically correct sentences in comparison to similar-aged peers
- Has a vivid imagination (includes having imaginary friends)
- Extraordinary feats of memory
- Attention to detail in their environment
- Extreme curiosity and may ask many questions
- Ability to memorise and recall facts easily
- Early development of a sense of humour
- May see solutions that don't occur to others
- Interest in abstract terms (e.g., time, space, or metaphysics)
- Advanced sense of justice and fairness (and may not understand responses of peers)
- Strongly motivated to do things that are of interest, unwilling to do other activities

### Abilities of Young Children with High Learning Potential

- Ability to focus on and enjoy a media programme at 12 months
- Has favourite shows/activities on various media at 12 months
- Ability to form two-word phrases by 14 months
- Ability to understand instructions by 14 months
- Ability to say and understand many words before 18 months
- Recognition of letters/alphabets by age 2

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- Recognition and rote counting of numbers 1-10 or higher by age 2
- Recognition of colours by age 2
- Recognition and reading of first word by age 2
- Interest in puzzles by age 2
- Has long attention span in interest areas by age 2
- Ability to form at least three-word phrase by age 2
- Ability to solve a 20-piece puzzle by age 3
- Recognition of simple signs or logos and own written name by age 3
- Interest in mark-making before age 3
- Ability to write letters, numbers, words, and their names between 3 and 4 years
- Ability and stamina to read easy-reader books by age 4
- Specific talent (if any), such as artistic ability or an unusual facility for numbers – becomes more apparent by age 4
- Ability to do simple addition and subtraction by age 3
- High degree of mathematical understanding by age 4

### Early Readers, Deep Readers

Many young children with high learning potential teach themselves to read at a very early age. By the time they enter early childhood education they may already be sounding out and blending letters, reading signs, or reading accurately both aloud and silently. Some children are such good readers that their silent reading speeds may cause it to seem as if they are skimming through picture books. They may also be concentrating so deeply on their reading that they are unaware of people speaking to them, or teachers attempting to engage their attention. As many adults assume children must be taught to read, even parents can be surprised by the reading abilities of their child and would struggle to pinpoint exactly when they were able to do this!

### Hypersensitive

Many children with high learning potential are hypersensitive; emotionally, sensually and / or physically.

- Emotional hypersensitivity (or overexcitability) can be demonstrated through extreme emotion, anxiety, concern for others, difficulty adjusting to change. Such children may ask many questions about pain, death, anger, love.
- Sensual hypersensitivity (or overexcitability) is a heightened sense of the five senses and can be demonstrated through tactile sensitivity (such as a dislike of tags in clothes), sensitivity to loud noises, changes in temperature, an appreciation of beauty in music or art or an attachment to treasured toys for example.
- Physical (or psychomotor) hypersensitivity (or overexcitability) is primarily indicated by a surplus of energy and can also be demonstrated through compulsive talking, nervous habits, physical expression of emotions and sleeplessness.

### Dual or Multiple Exceptional

A child can have both high learning potential and special educational needs (when this is the case the child is often called dual or multiple exceptional, or twice exceptional). Common conditions that are seen alongside high learning potential are:

- Dyspraxia
- ADHD
- Autism
- Dyslexia

For more information see Potential Plus UK Fact Sheet F01 – Dual and Multiple Exceptionality.

If you feel your child may have high learning potential, please contact Potential Plus UK, and make an appointment for a telephone consultation with one of our Advisers. We also have an Early Years Assessment of Potential service available.

### Further Information

PA501 Young High Learning Potential Children at Preschool or Nursery	Parents are often concerned about their young high learning potential child at preschool or nursery. This advice sheet guides you through these issues and possible ways of resolving them.
PA502 Young High Learning Potential Children at Home	The home is the place where much of your child's formative years are spent and you, as their parent, are their first teacher. This advice sheet provides guidance for giving your young child with high learning potential the best start at home.
PA503 Behaviour of Young High Learning Potential Children	Many parents and carers struggle with the behaviour of young high learning potential children, from difficulties relating to their peer group to complex behaviours related to anxiety. This advice sheet explores the kinds of behaviour seen in young high learning potential children and the possible reasons for them and gives some indication about how best to approach them.
PA504 Inspiring Young High Learning Potential Children	Young children with high learning potential may have strong passions that naturally lead them into areas of learning, or to enjoy doing many different things. This advice sheet will help you to nurture your child's interests and inspire them to learn something different.
<i>How to Raise a Bright Child</i> by Dr Joan Freeman	This book offers advice on stimulating young children, how young minds develop and learn, ways to make learning fun for pre-school age children and how to encourage motivation at school, as well as providing specific help on subjects such as dyslexia, learning to read and children who more advanced than their age group.
<i>Gifted Young Children</i> by Louise Porter	It is a practical guide to identifying and supporting young children with High Learning Potential. It explains how teachers and parents can promote the children's emotional and social adjustment, including ways to enhance self-esteem, encourage friendships and support their autonomy. It also shows how parents can discuss high ability with their children and respond to their needs.

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<a href="https://www.verywellfamily.com/signs-of-giftedness-in-infants-1449376">https://www.verywellfamily.com/signs-of-giftedness-in-infants-1449376</a>	Short article, updated in 2022, based on research on giftedness in babies.
<a href="https://www.davidsongifted.org/gifted-blog/small-poppies-highly-gifted-children-in-the-early-years/">https://www.davidsongifted.org/gifted-blog/small-poppies-highly-gifted-children-in-the-early-years/</a>	“The very early development of speech, movement and reading in many highly gifted young children serves as a powerful predictor of unusually high intellectual ability. Parents of the highly gifted become aware of their children’s developmental differences at an early age.”

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