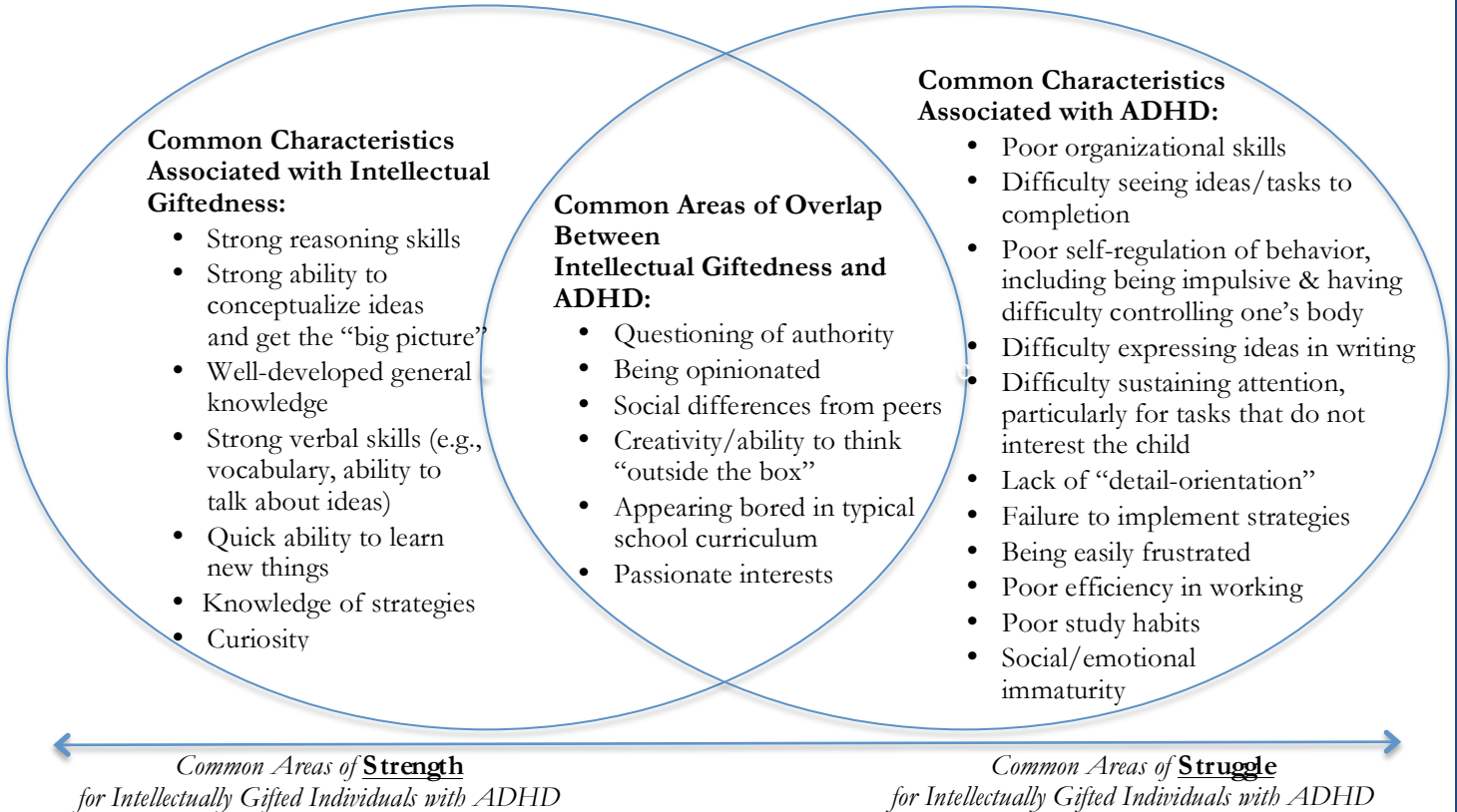


ADHD in Children & Adolescents with Intellectual Gifts

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common and chronic neurobiological disorder. It occurs in 9.5% of children ages 4-17, and occurs across a range of intellectual abilities, from those with intellectual impairment to those with intellectual giftedness. ADHD is related to an impairment in the brain's executive functioning system, which is responsible for skills like self-monitoring and self-regulation. As a result, children with ADHD experience difficulty with regulating their attention, body movement, impulses, emotions, organizational skills, and task completion. These types of difficulties often seem inconsistent with the intelligence and personality strengths of individuals with ADHD. Such inconsistencies are even more pronounced in intellectually gifted individuals who also have ADHD. Though these individuals possess well-developed thinking and reasoning skills, their weak executive functioning can result in gaps between the child's apparent "potential" as measured on structured cognitive and achievement testing versus their actual school performance, their ability to complete daily activities, and their social and emotional functioning. As a result, the intellectually gifted individual is often highly variable in his/her behaviors and performance, as he/she is likely to show a range of characteristics such as those described below.

RANGE OF CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH INTELLECTUAL GIFTEDNESS AND ADHD



IDENTIFICATION OF ADHD IN INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED INDIVIDUALS

Overlap in Behaviors:

- Intellectually gifted individuals in general may show some behaviors similar to ADHD (e.g., seeming "bored" or distracted in the classroom).
- However, the individual with ADHD will show such behaviors in a greater variety of situations, rather than primarily when he/she is not being challenged enough.

The "Masking" Effect:

- ADHD is often not detected as early in intelligent children who may, in the early grades, be able to keep up with age-appropriate academic expectations.
- With time, as the demands for independence mount, the child with ADHD has to put forth substantial effort to keep up; despite having intelligence beyond his/her age, he/she may fall behind same-age peers.
- Just as giftedness can mask ADHD, ADHD can potentially mask a child's intellectual strengths, which can result in failure to recognize and develop the child's giftedness. In both instances, children may experience significant frustration.

PROACTIVE SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS**In General**

- Get help early to prevent problems and to support your child's success by talking to other parents, the pediatrician, your child's teachers, as well as by reading evidence-based information and trying strategies at home (see this handout and general *ADHD handout*).
- Seek comprehensive evaluation by a well-trained psychologist. Because intellectually gifted individuals with ADHD present with complex characteristics and unique needs, it is vital to understand *all* aspects of their development (*including intellectual ability, academic skills, behavior, attention, as well as social and emotional functioning*) in order to support their success.
- By ignoring or improperly treating their needs, gaps between the child's strengths and weaknesses increase, creating a confusing and frustrating situation, which can include:
 - False assumptions that the child is being "lazy"
 - Tension between the child and school
 - Tension between the child and his/her family
 - Not providing proper intervention, resulting in the child failing to develop his/her strengths, struggling to live up to potential, or possibly developing learning disabilities
 - Child's decline in self-esteem and possible feelings of depression from not meeting expectations and being misunderstood
 - Frustration and anxiety due to the child's efforts not matching his/her performance
 - Child's loss of interest in and motivation for school
 - Child experiencing social stress with peers
- Work with a psychologist/counselor/coach to teach the child how to use self-control, to self-monitor behavior, to improve social skills, and how to prevent/reduce stress as well as to work with family on parenting strategies, other behavior management interventions, and school supports to help child with ADHD.
- Consider the need for medication treatment to improve the child's ability to focus, sustain concentration, manage impulsivity, and better modulate emotions and behaviors.

Home Supports

- Parents should be communicating on a regular basis with the school and others involved with the child.
- Use consistent behavior management strategies such as positive reinforcement (praise, privileges, rewards) for good behavior and consequences for negative behaviors.
- Use tools such as visual cues, lists, timers, calendars, etc. to increase task completion and organization.
- See general *ADHD Handout* for additional strategies.

School Supports

- School interventions should be individualized and give equal focus to developing strengths, challenging intellect, and attending to the ADHD.
- Use the child's strengths and interests:
 - Consider opportunities for independent study (*e.g., special projects or classes*)
 - Creatively use his/her interests to motivate the child to engage in less preferred activities.
- Maintain an intellectually stimulating environment.
- Give structure (*e.g., breaking large assignments into pieces*), but do not over-simplify concepts, which can lead to the child losing interest.
- Consider the gifted program at the child's school, but ensure that a plan is developed to support the child's success in such a program.
- Identify any learning gaps and provide instruction.
- Support the development of compensatory strategies (*e.g., use of visual cues or self-talk to stay on-task, use of assistive technology such as computer programs to increase efficiency with writing and study time*).
- Arrange for accommodations in the classroom setting as needed (*e.g., movement breaks, extended time on assignments, providing extra structure*).
- Request a formal school plan (*e.g., 504 Plan*) if needed.
- See general *ADHD Handout* for more information on school plans and strategies.

Emotional and Social Supports:

- Consider possible need for counseling due to social and emotional vulnerability and stress and need for coping skills in dealing with mixed abilities.
- For the older child, build his/her ability to advocate for his/her own needs.
- Provide structured opportunities for socialization, and practice/model appropriate interactions.
- Make sure child learns and practices compassion and to appreciate everyone's gifts.

REFERENCES AND MORE INFORMATION

- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders (CHADD) at www.chadd.org
- Fonseca, C. (2010). *Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students*. Prufrock Press, Inc.
- Sousa, D. (2009). *How the Gifted Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted at www.sengifted.org