

Chapter 2

“I really dig being gifted. I mean, the work is more interesting in school, my friends and I all seem to get along, and things are just . . . good. But, I still have to remind myself to relax. That part will probably always be hard.” —Nira, age 12

Now you know that being gifted isn't just about being smart. It's how you're hardwired. Your giftedness influences how you view and interact with the world. The success secrets in this chapter will highlight specific characteristics about giftedness and help you learn more about the way these attributes may impact you—in good ways and in not-so-good ways.

**THE GOOD, THE BAD,
AND THE STRESSFUL**

17

**SUCCESS
SECRET
#9**

**Learn everything
you can about
your giftedness.**

Most of the things that make you unique involve the way you think about the world. The ability to solve problems quickly and creatively, being a fast learner, and understanding difficult concepts are all things you do every day. Some of the other characteristics of how you think include being highly curious (which is why some gifted kids like to take things apart and figure out how they work), having a vivid imagination, and demonstrating an intense need to learn (even if you think school is boring).

“Being gifted doesn’t really change who you are. It just changes what you know about who you are.” —Becca, age 14

Giftedness doesn’t end with how you think. It involves how you act and behave as well. Gifted kids

thrive when things are logical and hate it when everything seems chaotic. They often understand the complex problems that exist in the world and hate it when adults underestimate them. And, gifted kids think that perfection is required—so much so that they often decide not to try something for fear of failing (Webb et al., 2007).

**SUCCESS
SECRET
#10**

**Your brain can
lie to you.**

Guess what? All of those feelings about being perfect—sometimes they are wrong. Sometimes your brain can lie to you and make you believe something that just isn't true. It happens because gifted kids think quickly, linking together ideas fast—too fast. Sometimes two wrong ideas get linked and gifted kids begin to believe things that may not be true. For example, a gifted kid may link together the idea that gifted kids are good at everything they try and the idea that not being good at something means you are not gifted. When these are linked, the gifted student may feel too much pressure to be perfect, believing that anything less means the gifted label was a lie.

So, what's a gifted kid to do? Slow the process down and learn to discern what is correct and accurate versus what is not. Learning to tell the difference between when your brain is lying to you and when it is not is critically important to managing the natural intensities your giftedness can bring.

An easy strategy to use when discerning whether or not your brain is correct in its assumption is something I call PROOF. With this method, you are literally looking for proof that what you believe is true. For example, let's say your brain is saying, "I am horrible at math. I will never learn it. So I must NOT be smart." To use the PROOF method, you are going to look for proof that you are, in fact, horrible at math. You will also need to prove that being horrible at math means you are not smart. So, look at your grades over time, look at test scores, and talk with your teachers and parents. Odds are really good you are not horrible at math at all. It's more likely that you are just struggling with a particular concept. Even if you do discover that math is not your best subject, it doesn't mean you are not smart. If your other grades are good, or if you have a lot of talent in other areas, then that's your proof that being bad at math does *not* mean you are dumb. It just means you will have to work harder in math than in your other subjects.

TIPS FOR USING THE PROOF TECHNIQUE

1. What message is your brain telling you? Be specific.
2. How do you *know* it's the correct message? What proof can you find that it is true?
3. If you find that the message is true, what can you do about it?
4. If you find that the message is untrue, what is the correct message?
5. How can you train your brain to stop giving you false messages?

**SUCCESS
SECRET
#11**

**Gifted and
intense go
hand in hand.**

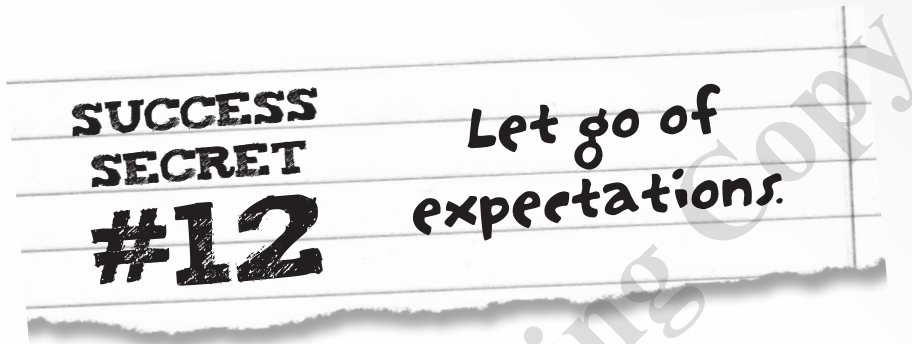
As we said before, giftedness involves your thoughts, actions, and feelings. It also involves the way in which these things interact with the world. For gifted kids, everything is more intense. This means that you think more deeply than other kids, you behave in a way that is more focused or intense, and you feel things at a deeper level. When you are happy, you are super happy. But, when you are sad,

"All that emotional drama you start going through in fourth and fifth grade—don't freak out about it. It's normal. And the sooner you learn to manage it, the easier everything gets." —Fiona, age 12

The Good, the Bad, and the Stressful

you are very sad. There is no middle ground—no halfway point with you (Sword, 2006a).

This is not a bad thing, although sometimes it may feel like you are on an emotional rollercoaster that never seems to end.



The intensity you feel in all aspects of your life can seep into everything—school, your friends, and your home life—and it can leave you feeling things in extremes. This includes how you feel about the expectations you have for yourself.

“The only problem with the label of gifted is dealing with everyone’s expectations—my teachers, my parents, other kids. And yes, even my own.”—Mary, age 11

Many times gifted kids have expectations for themselves that are high. They believe they need to constantly do well. This unrealistically high expectation makes things harder than they need to be.

Let’s take school. For some gifted kids, school is a great place to be. They thrive on learning. School has become synonymous with achieving—something that comes naturally to many gifted kids.

This is not true for everyone. Driven by the need for intellectual stimulation, some of you may find the routine nature of school boring. In your boredom, you may make careless errors—something the perfectionist in you abhors. You may find yourself pulling away from school and learning. You may even find yourself developing physical symptoms like headaches and stomachaches every time you try to go to school. All of this is related to

everything it means to be gifted and the expectations gifted kids sometimes have for themselves.

We'll explore more of this in detail in the next section, as well as some strategies to help change the negative things about school and learning. The bottom line for now is to learn to let go of those unrealistic expectations.



**SUCCESS
SECRET
#13**

*The only thing
you can really
control is you.*

Intensity can impact how you interact with your friends and family. Many of you may find it hard to find friends. Perhaps you can't relate to the more typical things kids your age enjoy. For some of you, the problem is really about not knowing how to connect with kids in general. Friendships are often a large source of frustration.

Most of you often don't understand why your friends get annoyed with you, or why the kids at school think you're bossy or mean. It can be really hard and make you feel very sad, but guess what?

You have no control over how the other kids act toward you. In fact, you really have no control over anyone else. The only thing you do have control over is you, your behavior, and your reactions. Although that may not seem like enough some days, it really is a very powerful thing. Remembering that you are the only thing you have control over can be hard. That's where my hula hoop trick comes in.

TIPS FOR THE HULA HOOP TRICK

1. Imagine there is a hula hoop on the ground.
2. Step into the middle of it.
3. Everything *outside* of the hula hoop you have no control over—this includes friends, family, school . . . everything except *you*.
4. Everything *inside* the hula hoop you have 100% control over—this includes you, your thoughts, and your feelings.
5. The next time something bothers you, remember this hula hoop and decide if the problem is something you have control over. If it is (like your feelings), remember that you—and only you—can change it.

Use this technique every time you find yourself trying to change how other people behave. It will help you remember that the only one you can really change is you.

**SUCCESS
SECRET
#14**

**It's OK to
feel anxious
sometimes.**

Emotions are a big deal for many of you. As I've said before, being intense is a normal part of being gifted. That means that feeling overwhelming emotions—both the happy and the sad kind—

"It's fine to feel stressed out at times—everyone does. Just remember that learning to relax makes things a lot easier."—Aidan, age 13

is normal. The problem isn't that you experience these intense emotions. The problem is in *understanding* them. Fortunately, one thing you are really good at is figuring things out. You just need to know what to look for.

We'll explore more about understanding emotions later in the book. For now, just know that the intense stress and anxiety you sometimes feel is normal and not something to freak out over.

SUCCESS SECRET #15

Remember to
take care of
yourself.

Being a gifted kid is both great and difficult. But, regardless of whether you're having an easy time with your giftedness or a hard time, there are a few things you can do to manage your life better. The biggest thing is taking good care of yourself. No one copes well when he is tired, hungry, or stressed. Remembering to make *you* a priority in your life is essential to being successful now and later on.

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

1. **Get plenty of rest.** Most kids your age require at least 8 hours every night. Developing a bedtime routine can help if you have a hard time getting to sleep at night.
2. **Eat healthy foods.** Junk food may taste good, but it can really work against your brain functioning and overall health. Learn about good food choices and commit to eating healthy every day.

3. **Stay active.** Exercise is an essential part of taking care of yourself. Most schools don't have daily P.E., so it is really important to spend a part of every day being active. Dance, jumping rope, playing ball—all of these forms of exercise will improve your brain functioning, keep you healthy, and make it easier to get to sleep at night. Not only that, but exercise is one of the best ways to combat stress.
4. **Relax.** We live in a very busy world. Learning to relax a little every day can help rejuvenate our minds and our bodies. Try deep breathing, yoga, prayer, or just sitting in silence for a few minutes every day.
5. **Play.** Life isn't just about work, especially when you're a kid. It is easy to get too busy with school and your extra activities to remember to play. But, playing is just as important as everything else. So find a way to carve out a few minutes of playtime. You can play with a friend, a pet, or your parents. Just a few minutes a day is all you need to stay in balance.

**SUCCESS
SECRET
#16**

**Believe in
yourself.**

All in all, being gifted is a really cool thing. However, the traits that make you gifted are the very things that can become a problem for you. The intensity of your thinking can enable you to figure out the really hard stuff—and make school feel boring at times. The strong opinions you hold can make you a leader in class—and cause you to appear bossy and like a know-it-all to your friends. The strong emotions you feel every day can give you a sense

“Sometimes it is hard to believe I am smart, especially if I get something wrong on a test. That’s when I have to try to remember that everyone gets things wrong sometimes.”
—Mia, age 9

of passion and empathy about your world—and turn you into the occasional emotional mess. The trick is learning to balance out the way you’re hardwired, using the good aspects of giftedness to smooth out the areas in which you struggle.

We’ll learn more about this in the rest of the book. For now, it’s just important that you believe in yourself and all of the wonderful things about being gifted—the good, the bad, and the stressful.

Parents Sound Off

Parents have a lot to say about the good and bad aspects of giftedness. Many of them know all too well how hard their children have to work at developing friendships, dealing with emotions, and fighting boredom in school. Take a look at what these parents say about giftedness, and then talk with your parents and see how they feel.

- » “I love that my kid thinks of herself as smart. But, she never gives herself any room for failure. Everything has to be perfect. My daughter places unrealistic expectations on herself.”—Lynn
- » “It was so hard watching our children not live up to their potential because they were bored and took their education for granted. I think a lot of gifted kids do that.”—Rajas
- » “I love that no matter what she does, I know she’ll give it her all. (But) I worry that she doesn’t give herself permission to fail.”—Carol
- » “Man, parenting our children is great—and miserable at the same time. It is so hard to know how to help our children control their emotions or give themselves a break periodically.”—Andie

Overall, parents see the ways you struggle to manage your stress. They also see all of the great tasks you can accomplish with your incredible mind.

In the end, all of the attributes of giftedness—the way you think, feel, and behave—are the things that make you amazing. Those same attributes are also the things that make life hard at times. Your job is to figure out how to keep it all in balance.

What Do You Think?

It's time for you to take a moment and reflect on the ideas in this chapter and your own thoughts. Figure out what your best attributes are and which ones cause you the most grief. This is the first step toward understanding how to maintain a good balance.

Advanced Reading Copy

**WHAT ARE THE WAYS IN WHICH
YOU DEMONSTRATE YOUR
GIFTEDNESS? HOW DO YOU THINK,
ACT, AND FEEL ABOUT THINGS?**

**WHAT ASPECTS OF YOUR
GIFTEDNESS GIVE YOU
THE MOST TROUBLE?**

HOW CAN YOU STAY IN BALANCE?