



# Looking Back

FINAL WORDS OF PARENTS WHO HAVE MADE THE JOURNEY

## Words for the journey

Parents often say that they have learned the most, and felt the most understood, when they talk with other parents. In this last section of the handbook, we offer words and wishes from parents who have been on the journey; these parents know the joys, challenges and adventures of raising children who are gifted. We invited a number of parents to tell us what advice and insights they would like to pass on to other parents. This is what they told us.

### Discover, play and take care

Your child does not need to be, and in fact should not be, sheltered from all of life's painful moments. Help her to discover her own solutions to life's challenges. Sometimes a diary or journal can help her sort things out for herself. If she is too young to write, you can act as an impartial scribe in helping her to find her voice.

Play together! Find an activity that is fun for both of you and do it regularly. Those fun memories and a loving relationship will be especially important when your child becomes a teenager.

In the same way that you must put on your oxygen mask first on an airplane, you absolutely must take care of yourself too—as impossible as it may seem at times, make it a priority to eat properly, exercise, get enough sleep and regularly have some time alone to nourish your own spirit.  
– *Mother of 14-year old gifted daughter*

## Let them learn how to learn

Children who learn quickly may not really get a chance to learn *how* to learn. They may not get to practise the full learning process: fail, try again, improve, succeed. For our child, team sports provided a safe and satisfying place to discover this with friends. He learned that even when he isn't as good at something as he would like, he can improve and create his own success. Now he carries that belief with him wherever he goes. He is a learner for life.

– *Mother of a happily-accelerated junior high student*

## Keep motivation alive

Welcome your high-schooler's determination to secure a part-time job. Academics may be 'job 1' for your gifted child, but the minimum-wage work world of teenagers provides a reality check along with camaraderie, adult responsibilities, real earnings, practice in money management and the opportunity to develop a good work ethic. Even more importantly, gifted teens who have cruised through the school system learn the time management skills needed to survive that difficult first year of university.

Do not panic if the child who you know is capable of much more, settles for 'good enough' marks. Do make sure they understand which marks are important and when they need to pay attention to

them. Sometimes marks are just marks: do fifty multiple-choice questions really reflect what has been learned over the year? Focus on the ‘gatekeeper’ marks that allow for later choices to be made in individual courses, programs of study, or choice of schools. Keeping interest and motivation alive is more important than obsessing about marks. Your child will astonish you with their rate of learning when their heart is in it, and for gifted students that may not happen until post-secondary education.

Be clear when negotiating educational solutions whether your efforts are on behalf of your gifted child or for all gifted children. Be realistic and choose what is best for your child and your family, even if it means switching teachers, schools or districts—your child only moves through the system once. Work with other parents for structural change in the education system for gifted students: but understand it will be for your children’s children, your grandchildren.

– *Parent of two gifted children, in high school and university*

## Enjoy and support

As a mother of three gifted daughters, I believe it is extremely important to raise them to be proud of their abilities and to help them understand their giftedness. Gifted girls often either dumb down or become manipulative and cynical if not recognized. Having them identified and placed in a gifted program was crucial to their development. They met a group of students who liked being smart and ambitious. They grew to respect other minds while being respected for their own and as they discovered that their minds worked differently became more tolerant, less threatened by others’ opinions.

The challenge for mothers of gifted girls is to enjoy and support their confidence. They will attempt things some of us never dreamed of trying, and why shouldn’t they? Watch, listen and carefully counsel when asked; then let them fly.

Life is intense with gifted girls. They react to an arch of an eyebrow so it is important to be open and honest every time they question us. Often their observations exasperate me especially when I am busy but somehow they hone in on the very question I need to ask myself if I expect to achieve my own dreams. If I listen to them, they listen to me!

– *Parent of three gifted daughters*

## Be a cheerleader

I think one of the most important things a parent can do for his or her gifted child is to value their uniqueness. They need support and love to reinforce their special spark. Throughout their school years they will suffer because they are different, and if you can help them survive and come out the other end with their self-esteem intact, they will be well on their way to a fulfilling and happy adulthood. Be their advocate and cheering section.

– *Parent of two gifted, and unique, sons*

## Remember they are children

It has been difficult at times to remember the chronological age of my gifted child.

Intellectually, he understood math way beyond grade level, tinkered with genetics for relaxation and debated with adults for sheer entertainment. Then how could I explain the tantrum, anger or tears when things did not work out? He may have understood the world intellectually, but he reacted with a child’s emotion. By listening and encouraging him as he processed these intense emotional difficulties, I supported his transformation into a fine young man. Above all, I would urge all parents to respect their gifted child’s passion but always remember they are children first!

– *Mother of a 15-year-old joyful burden*