

# Finding a Mental Health Professional

It's often confusing for parents to know when and how to seek out professional advice from a psychologist, counselor, or therapist for their gifted child.

Parenting gifted children can be a challenge, as they may develop at a different pace than their age mates. Beyond demonstrating advanced abilities, they may exhibit intense emotions, have difficulty connecting with peers, and sometimes say and do unusual things.

In addition to personal support, psychologists and neuropsychologists are the go-to professionals for administering IQ tests and neuropsychological evaluations, which can help parents and educators better understand a gifted child's unique needs.

However, not all psychologists and counselors have experience in working with gifted children and their families. Therefore, it's important that parents ask potential providers the right questions and determine the right fit for them and their gifted child.

## QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

*When should I seek the support of a professional psychologist, therapist, or counselor?*

If your student is exhibiting academic or behavioral needs that are beyond developmental expectations, it may be time to seek support from a professional. Your student (or you) may be beyond frustration with academics or behaviors.

**Psychologists** and **neuropsychologists** can assess abilities, achievement levels, and behaviors; they also provide recommendations to support the student's success. **Therapists** and **counselors** can provide ongoing support and tools that can be used at home and in the classroom to support students' behavioral and affective needs.

*Are there specific psychologists or counselors trained to work with gifted children?*

Yes, but they are few in number, as very few psychologists and counselors have received training in working with gifted students. It's important to try and find a professional who understands giftedness. Depending on your needs, you may need to travel to find the right match for your family.

*How do I find professionals in my area?*

Many state gifted associations and the Hoagies' Gifted Education Page have providers listed on their websites. Ask other parents of gifted children or school psychologists, social workers, and/or gifted coordinators in your school or district if they have lists of outside providers who understand gifted children.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Not every professional is the right fit for your child. It's OK to shop around.

» Signs of a good working relationship include taking time to build rapport, listening to concerns, tailoring assessments and recommendations to your child's needs, and following up.

» Through technology, it's possible to work with experts long distance via Skype, Google Hangout, and conference calls. Ask about these options if in-person meetings aren't feasible.

» It's appropriate to ask if the psychologist or counselor regularly works with gifted students. You want the best-equipped professional to work with your child!

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## QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

### *Do you have any tips as I embark on the process?*

Before engaging with a professional, be sure to interview them by phone to understand their philosophy, methodology, and attitudes toward gifted children. Be sure to check with your school or district to ensure they will accept the recommendations from a particular provider if you plan to use the results to advocate for your child at school.

### *When seeking IQ testing, what should I look for in a psychologist?*

Ask about the types of students that are typically assessed through their practice and the types of tests that are offered. A psychologist who supports gifted students will use a variety of measurement tools. (See "Assessments" TIP Sheet for info on testing.) If a provider only offers one test for all students, this is a red flag: There is no one test to demonstrate giftedness. Ask about recommendations and post-test follow-up. You will want time with the psychologist to review the recommendations and ask questions.

### *I've heard about neuropsychological evaluations for gifted children beyond the standard IQ test. How do I know if my child needs one, and how do I find someone to administer it?*

Sometimes, parents and professionals need more information than just a confirmation of intellectual giftedness. For example, they may want to investigate specific neurological concerns, such as how the child processes information or whether learning disabilities exist. Typically, parents have their child complete a traditional IQ test first, but if certain issues persist or surface, they may wish to dig deeper with a neuropsychological assessment. A psychologist can refer parents to neuropsychologists who provide this level of assessment.

### *What do I tell my child when we are preparing to go to a testing appointment?*

The most important thing is to make your child feel at ease. Some parents tell their children that they are going to play learning games to show how their brain works and how they learn best. Be sure to let them know it's not a test like at school, and there is no right or wrong answer. This is an exercise that tells us more about them and what they do best.

### *Are there suggested questions I should ask when interviewing professionals?*

Beyond asking "Have you ever worked with gifted children?", try questions like these:

- Which gifted local resources do you think are most helpful for families?
- What have you found to be the most challenging behaviors with gifted kids?
- How does one's level of intelligence affect his or her ability to cope with anxiety or depression?
- What are your thoughts about motivation, underachievement, and the gifted?
- Are you gifted?

### *How do I know when it's a good fit?*

Before the appointment, be sure to talk with your provider to answer any questions and to put you at ease. During the appointment, the provider should take time to listen to both you and your child. Building a rapport is essential, so the provider should not just "jump in" and start testing. The best sign of a good fit is when a child does not want to leave!



## FOR MORE INFO

### Read:

*A place to start: Is my child gifted?*  
[davidsongifted.org](http://davidsongifted.org)

*Assessments TIP Sheet*, [nagc.org](http://nagc.org)

*Tests & Assessments*, [nagc.org](http://nagc.org)

*Tips for Selecting the Right Counselor or Therapist for Your Gifted Child*,  
[sengifted.org/tips-for-selecting-the-right-counselor-or-therapist-for-your-gifted-child/](http://sengifted.org/tips-for-selecting-the-right-counselor-or-therapist-for-your-gifted-child/)

### Browse:

*Mental Health Professionals (List)*,  
[sengifted.org/resources/recognize-d-professionals](http://sengifted.org/resources/recognize-d-professionals)

*Psychologists Familiar with Testing the Gifted and Exceptionally Gifted*,  
[hoagiesgifted.org/psychologists](http://hoagiesgifted.org/psychologists)

### Dig Deeper:

Webb, J., Amend, E., Webb, N., Goerss, J., Beljan, P., & Olenchak, R. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.



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