

# FRIENDSHIPS AND HIGH LEARNING POTENTIAL CHILDREN

## Summary

Children with high learning potential often feel different to other children in their peer group and can have a very small circle of friends. Frequently, high learning potential children are more comfortable relating to older children and adults and sometimes they get on very well with younger children as well. This advice sheet explores friendships in the context of high learning potential.

## Introduction

Friendships can be difficult for everyone for a wide range of reasons. There are many types of friendship, best friends, acquaintances, family, colleagues, to name but a few. Some of these people will stay in our lives for a very long time, some a short while and some will come and go several times. And, of course, no matter what age we are or where we are in the world we can all be hurt by any one of our friends or acquaintances.

We are not born with coping mechanisms or skills and strategies for dealing with all the situations that arise out of friendships. Therefore, we need guidance and support to help us with fitting in and integrating as successfully as possible with the many people we come into contact.

## Friendships and High Learning Potential Children

Not all children with high learning potential have difficulties with friendships, but many of them do. There are many who spend much of their lives isolated and lonely, unable to make that vital connection. These children will tend to avoid events like school trips, discos and meetings in town, as they feel out of place.

Even when intellectually they may be high flyers, possibly achieving high grades and accolades in most areas of the school curriculum, socially and emotionally they often struggle to have positive and fulfilling relationships with their peers. Some are more comfortable with much older or younger people, others prefer adults. To some extent, the reason for this is their asynchronous development. While they can discuss and debate difficult and complex issues or play complex, imaginative games that isolate them from their peer group; in other areas they can be immature or awkward and thus not fit in to certain social situations.

Sometimes young people with high learning potential can come across as arrogant and domineering and some don't have any interest in playing the "typical" playground games, which does them no favours when establishing friendships. Bullying or being picked on for looking or behaving differently can be a problem. Being referred to as a "geek", "boff" or "nerd" or being told you cannot play with what you see as your friends when you are only 5 or 6 years old is hard to hear and deal with alone. It is important that bullying is taken seriously by the adults close to the situation and that a positive ethos where everyone is valued and accepted is encouraged.

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Many of the issues these children and young people face can cause frustrations and anger and this can lead to arguments and bad feelings between friends and within families. As a result, some young people with high learning potential will also need guidance about anger and behaviour management.

From a very early age (possibly much younger than many of us are aware of) children with high learning potential need parents, carers and professionals to teach, role model and nurture their social and emotional development in order to pre-empt some of the future difficulties that we know many of them encounter and suffer from.

### How Parents Can Help

Manners, positive communication, listening skills, kindness, respect, empathy and compassion are all essential ingredients for a well-rounded human being. These skills have to be learnt because we are not born with them.

Today, parents and carers are busy people and may find it difficult to set time aside to fully engage and support the social and emotional development of their high learning potential child. However, by teaching these invaluable life skills to our children we are endeavouring to ensure that many of the young high learning potential children of tomorrow have the skills and coping mechanisms to find a place in society and hopefully live happy and fulfilled lives.

### Friends out of School and Use of Media

Encourage your child or young person to join activities or clubs where they may meet like-minded friends. Tap into their interest and area(s) of high learning potential to encourage them to take part in activities associated with these. You can even suggest they create a club themselves.

Young people today prefer to communicate via Twitter, Chat software, Facebook, Tumblr, etc. and many older high learning potential children may find this preferable due to their difficulties/awkwardness with social situations and encounters. This is fine, but make sure you teach safety guidelines and monitor very young children's use of the internet carefully. Teach them not to give out real names, phone numbers or addresses and never to meet anyone without letting an adult know about it. Pen Pal type communication over the internet or by good old fashioned letter is an alternative option for children and young people who struggle with other types of social integration.

### Further Information

PA601 Social and Emotional Development of High Learning Potential Children	Raising happy, successful children is the goal of every parent. As social and emotional problems appear often among high learning potential children, this advice sheet looks at the cause of these and offers some advice on dealing with them.
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Potential Plus UK Explorers Clubs	Challenging activities for children and young people; some of them have parent discussion groups. Contact our Head Office on 01908 646433 for further details.
Gift Courses <a href="https://giftcourses.co.uk">https://giftcourses.co.uk</a> 01245 830321	Opportunities to make friends with other high learning potential children through Gift Courses.
<i>Friends Forever: How Parents Can Help Their Kids Make and Keep Friends</i> by Fred Frankel	The author offers clear-cut friendship-making guidelines for parents and their children. He includes methods for dealing with bullying and inappropriate friendships, shows how to teach kids the social and emotional intelligence skills they need to form friendships and includes advice on the use of social media.
<i>The Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Kids</i> by Tracy L. Cross	The book contains practical suggestions and ideas for guiding and supporting the development of gifted children.
<i>The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children</i> by Maureen Neihart	This book summarises research about children with high learning potential and the issues they encounter, as a way expose and advise on their unique needs in these areas.
<i>Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers</i> by Webb, Tolan and Meckstroth	This award-winning book contains chapters on motivation, discipline, peer relationships, sibling relationships, stress management, depression, and many other issues that parents and teachers encounter daily with these children due to their unique social and emotional concerns.
<a href="http://www.incentiveplus.co.uk">www.incentiveplus.co.uk</a>	Incentive Plus – resources to promote social, emotional and behavioural skills in children and young people.
<a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a>	Young Minds is a charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of Children and Young People and empowering their parents and carers.

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