



Twice-Exceptional Children

Author: Ermelinda Maulucci, Mensa Italy

A child presenting with 'twice exceptionality' should be identified early in order to fully understand every aspect of their character, and so that adequate support can be provided both in school and out of school.

Who Is A Twice-Exceptional Child?

When a child presents not only as gifted but also with one (or more) learning differences, physical disabilities, or disturbances (neurodevelopmental or other), the term used is "twice-exceptional", or "2E". This type of child has cognitive abilities that are far higher than normal, but also has challenges related to learning, behavior, or emotions that require support.

Twice Exceptionality

The abilities connected to giftedness and the issues related to this diagnosis give rise to a unique set of characteristics. Twice-exceptional children present with aspects of diverse talents that interact with each other and are unique to each individual.

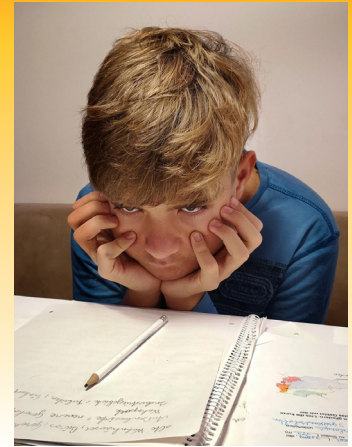
The most common types of twice exceptionality include specific learning disorders (SLD) such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dysorthography, attention deficit and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD), obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and depression.

Twice-exceptional children may present with low self-esteem, and

they may feel more vulnerable or be highly self-critical. They may also display more asynchrony than children who are simply gifted. They may excel in certain skill areas but show difficulty with others, even though their high intelligence may compensate.

Identifying twice-exceptional children is very complex. Their high cognitive abilities may mask their deficiencies, making it harder to diagnose them as gifted or as 2E. If their weaknesses are present to a significant extent, their giftedness may not be recognized, as the child may perform worse than expected in cognitive profiling tests. In other cases, the two sets of characteristics can mask each other, and the child may seem not to have any exceptionality at all. Identifying a twice-exceptional child is very important to ensure that they receive all the support they need, both with their abilities and with the difficulties linked to the diagnosis.

The characteristics of twice-exceptional children depend on the diagnosis associated with giftedness. These children therefore present with the typical traits of gifted children and with other characteristics linked to their specific associated disorder: their particular characteristics will differ, for example,



Key Points

Gifted children may also experience one or more associated issues: physical deficits, neurodevelopmental disorders or other neurodiversities.

In this case, the child is defined as twice-exceptional (2E).

It is important to promptly recognize the presence of twice exceptionality, so that the necessary support can be provided.

The diagnosis may be complex, as the child's high intelligence may compensate for the deficit, and because every 2E child has unique characteristics.

depending on whether the disorder is ADHD, autism spectrum, dyslexia, oppositional-defiant disorder, or other. Additionally, even children with the same type of exceptionality may demonstrate different characteristics. This happens because every 2E child is an individual with particular traits.

Key Questions

What can I do if I think my child might be twice exceptional?

If you suspect that your child might be twice-exceptional, you should contact an experienced giftedness specialist, who has also undertaken research and training in the field of twice exceptionality. To verify whether they are gifted, your child should undergo a set of tests to assess their cognitive skills, using specific diagnostic tools to investigate any associated disorder they may have.

What happens at school?

Twice-exceptional children may be inconsistent in their performance, present homework that is incomplete, be disorganized, or underperform. This means that they may be seen as lazy, unmotivated, or defiant as a result. These children may achieve average grades in their areas of difficulty, and as a result, may not draw attention from the teachers for gifted identification. Even those children who do not underperform academically may feel confused and frustrated, because they are aware that their true potential is much greater. These students need support at school. They need a strengths-based approach with help for their weaker areas, but also encouragement and support for their areas of giftedness.

Is a gifted child more likely to have an associated disorder than other children?

It is difficult to determine with accuracy the exact percentage of people with twice exceptionality, due to the possible missed diagnosis of the disorder or the potential difficulties in recognizing giftedness, but also due to the inadequate diagnoses that gifted people may be given. However, international research and literature on the presence of disorders and neurodiversity have yielded data that broadly overlap when comparing gifted people to the rest of the population.

Is it possible for a gifted child to be misdiagnosed with a disorder or with twice exceptionality?

Certain characteristics of gifted children may be confused with aspects of other disorders. For example, some experts claim that gifted individuals can be characterized by “overexcitabilities” or other heightened sensitivities (see work by Kazimierz Dabrowski). These include intensity, high levels of physical energy, talkativeness, asynchrony, emotionality, sensitivity to sensory stimuli, the presence of all-consuming interests, impatience, distraction, and problems in interacting with their peers or classmates. These characteristics are more intense the higher the IQ. If these characteristics are not correctly interpreted as signs of giftedness, there is a risk that they may be connected to neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g., ADHD, ODD, Autism, etc.). In such cases, gifted children may be misdiagnosed and given inappropriate treatment.

References and Resources

- Embracing Intensity Interview with Dr. Chris Wells
<https://embracingintensity.com/244-giftedness-neurodivergence-overexcitability/>
- The Neurodiversity Podcast with Emily Kircher Morris
<https://neurodiversitypodcast.com/>
- Dare, L., & Nowicki E. A. (2015). Twice exceptionality: Parent’s perspectives on identification, *Roeper Review*, 27(4), 208-218.
- Gilman, B. J. (2020). *Gifted minds empowered: Advocacy to develop gifted children’s strength*. Empower One Publishing.
- Guilbault, K. M., & Kane, M. (2016). Asynchronous development. NAGC Parenting for High Potential TIP Sheet. https://cdn.ymaws.com/nagc.org/resource/collection/1A7A020E-2678-4FE3-9DDD-1452520DA6C5/NAGC-TIP_Sheet-Asynchronous_Development.pdf
- Maulucci, E. (2021). *Alto potenziale cognitivo e doppie eccezionalità, (Giftedness and twice exceptionality)* (IT), Kimerik.
- Piechowski, M. M., & Wells, C. (2021). Reexamining overexcitability: A framework for understanding intense experience. In T. L. Cross & J. R. Cross (Eds.) *Handbook for counselors serving students with gifts & talents* (pp. 63-83). Routledge
- Silverman, L., Gilman, B., Lovecky, D., & Maxwell, E. (2019). *The checklist for recognizing twice exceptional children*. www.gifteddevelopment.com www.static1.squarespace.com
- Webb, J., Amend, E. R., Beljan, P., Webb, N., Kuzujanakis, M., Olenchak, F. R., & Goerss, J., *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults* (2nd ed.). Great Potential Press Inc.