

## Supporting the Gifted Mind – Counselling Perspectives

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- To accept gifted young people as they are and acknowledge their feelings.
- To build a sustained therapeutic relationship that is nurturing through trust, respect and hope.
- To understand individual needs and individual differences – no two gifted minds are the same.
- To keep responsive and clear communication and boundaries.
- To guide young gifted people and encourage them to be responsible for their life, as they are the expert on themselves.
- To recognise different factors that contribute to mental and emotional health needs.



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## Counselling Young Gifted People: What We Should Know and How We Can Help Them

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### Counselling for Gifted Young People

A common perception among counsellors working with clients who are gifted is that they can use the same counselling process for these people as they do for their clients who have not been identified as gifted. The counselling profession in Aotearoa New Zealand needs to explicitly address giftedness. The dearth of research and commentary on this matter, both in this country and from overseas, indicates that academics and health professionals are still paying little heed to giftedness among young people (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2013; Prober, 2016; Webb et al., 2016).

The behaviours exhibited by gifted young people need to be understood in the counselling process. Giftedness is often accompanied by sensitivity and intensity, and these characteristics can amplify depressive and extreme behaviours among gifted people. Consequently, unless giftedness is appropriately recognised and the needs of gifted people met when they are young, adults presenting with trauma or painful buried issues may need greater comfort and encouragement in order to address their issues and develop ongoing resilience.

## Understanding the Sensitivity and Intensity of Giftedness

Much of the data in my research reflected that gifted young people:

- typically process ideas differently from other people. They think quickly, they think a lot and can be in an odd fancy world.
- can reason about something that may be uncomfortable for others but is very important to them. Their behaviours can be disturbing and challenging within society's standards.
- have a sensitivity and intensity that can manifest in caring and a strong concern for somebody or something (e.g. the environment), a heightened sense of moral responsibility and outright passion.
- are often misunderstood. This is an ongoing and pervasive problem for gifted individuals, especially when others assume that all gifted young people of the same age have the same mental and emotional needs.
- are often not having their mental and emotional needs sufficiently addressed. These youngsters risk becoming misinterpreted and marginalised.
- can internalise other people's negative responses emanating from different constructions of giftedness. As youngsters begin to define themselves according to how they are understood, they may develop low self-esteem, become reluctant to take up challenges, lose interest in learning and even face other difficulties, such as being bullied.

Wong (2018)

## Parents of Gifted Young People

When parents first discover their child is gifted, many feel overwhelmed by the concern of raising a child who is different from others and whose learning, mental health and emotional needs are not the same as most of their peers'. While many parents of gifted young people respond to that realisation by searching out support resources and acting as advocates for their child, other parents may choose to ignore the fact that their child is gifted. Whatever reaction parents have, parents matter because how they engage with and nurture their gifted child may have a significant impact on that child's mental welfare and emotional development.

The structure and dynamics of families of gifted people have to be understood by counsellors. Difficulties within a family may in some way render the young person with little or even no control over what happens to them, which will further impinge on their wellbeing.

Parents of gifted young people need respect and their feelings acknowledged. These parents can also exhibit sensitive and intensive behaviours and characteristics. It is important to recognise and acknowledge the complex feelings that parents of gifted young people often have.

