

## Exceptional and Profound Giftedness



Nowadays giftedness in adults is more broadly accepted than ever. Exceptionally or profoundly gifted people have even more potential than the gifted, but they also have needs that differ from the “average” gifted. Little is known about this group however, partly because the number of people in this subgroup is rather small. With this leaflet we provide information on exceptional and profound giftedness and we hope to increase awareness and understanding of this specific group. Our descriptions and recommendations for the group of exceptionally / profoundly gifted people are based (apart from the available literature) on experience and case studies. For information and advice on giftedness in general, we refer to the different leaflets of the IHBV which can be found on our website.

### What is exceptional or profound giftedness?

When giftedness is defined only in terms of an IQ score, we speak of giftedness when the IQ score is in the upper 2%. This corresponds to the average score (100) plus 2 standard deviations. People with an IQ score from 3 standard deviations above the average (which corresponds to about 145) are also called extremely, highly, exceptionally or profoundly gifted (there is no consensus about the terminology). There are special tests that allow scores higher than 145 but most tests cannot properly determine the “degree” of giftedness when using IQ scores.

### Characteristics

It is likely that the characteristics of exceptionally and profoundly gifted adults are in essence similar to the features already known for the gifted group, but these are further amplified and more intense. Although this should be seen as positive, the corresponding difficulties they face may equally scale up. There are many examples of children who are allowed to skip several grades, or do not attend a regular school. Some of them even completely fall outside the existing school system. Finding like-minded peers is often a challenge. Even within a group of other gifted people, they may still feel “different”. See also Rise (2016).

### Research

Some researchers have studied exceptionally gifted children:

- Hollingworth (1975) concluded that social problems in children with exceptionally high IQ scores coincide with two factors: inadequate treatment by adults and lack of intellectual challenge. These children were often ignored by adults because it was thought that “they can make it on their own”. The accompanying ideas that exceptionally gifted children would be eccentric, vulnerable and socially awkward, were proven to be unfounded. Unfortunately, these misconceptions are still very common, even among educational professionals.
- Gross (2003) followed 60 children with very high IQ scores for two decades. Her study showed that those who were allowed to skip at least 3 grades did very well academically and socially; all of them graduated, excelled in their field, formed close relationships and developed warm and deep friendships. The 33 children who were not allowed to accelerate in their educational setting did not fare so well, they had trouble with social relationships and some of them

did not finish their studies. Gross suggested that, since they have felt socially isolated for so long, they have had too little opportunity to practice their social skills.

### Adding to well-being

The findings of Hollingworth and Gross showed that social connection is an important theme for these children and finding developmental equals is often a major problem for them. As far as we know from experience and case studies, this also applies to exceptionally gifted adults. The Internet and social media can provide more opportunities to connect. We think that more attention and research for this group of people is needed. It is important for their well-being and for the education of professionals in all fields.

### Recommendations

- Understand that exceptional giftedness is a positive characteristic!
- Feelings of being “different” or lonely, even in groups of gifted people, may indicate exceptional or profound giftedness, even if real life performance is not deemed exceptional.
- Administering IQ tests to differentiate within the upper 2% is done by only a few specialized professionals. Having exact IQ scores is not always of importance however. (See also the IHBV leaflet - Am I gifted or not?)
- Finding like-minded people to connect with either digitally or in real life can be done via various societies, such as the Triple Nine Society ([www.triplenine.org](http://www.triplenine.org)), who focus on exceptionally and/or profoundly gifted people. Please see also the World Intelligence Network ([www.iqsociety.org](http://www.iqsociety.org)).
- The IHBV website contains a list of health-care professionals who have experience with giftedness.

### References

- Gross, M.U.M. (2003). *Exceptionally Gifted Children*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hollingworth, L. S. (1975). *Children above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet: Origin and Development*. New York: Arno Press
- Rise: Documentary about people in the highest IQ group, see: <http://daimoninstitute.com/#RiseDocumentary>