

High Giftedness

What exactly is being highly gifted?

What are the needs of the highly gifted?



The concept of giftedness in adults is increasingly accepted in society. Our knowledge in this area is slowly expanding.

Within the population of gifted individuals there is a subset of people who are highly gifted. But when is a person 'highly gifted'? What does it mean? Do highly gifted individuals differ in their potential and needs from the population that is considered gifted according to the standard norm?

We know very little about these individuals, partly because the number of people in this subset is so small. Within the normal population it is about 1 in 1000. Within the set of gifted individuals, it is about 1 in 16. There is no good research on highly gifted adults as of yet, even though there is some on highly gifted children.

This leaflet aims to provide information about high giftedness as well as to increase awareness and understanding for these individuals. Our writings about this group, as well as our recommendations, are based on experience (e.g. within Triple Nine Society), practical examples and on literature sources. For information about giftedness in general please refer to the various leaflets found on the website of IHBV.

What exactly is high giftedness?

When looking at IQ scores exclusively, giftedness is defined as having an IQ score within the top 2%, which is the average score of 100 plus 2 standard deviations. (In many intelligence tests the standard deviation is 15.) People who score 3 standard deviations above the mean (i.e. an IQ of 145 or the top 0,1%) are considered 'highly gifted'. Unfortunately there is no worldwide consensus about the use of these terms. Currently we use the term 'exceptionally gifted' for IQ 160 and higher (4 standard deviations above the mean). The English language distinguishes also the term 'profoundly gifted' for IQ 175+. In Dutch there is no translation yet.

Tests in Dutch that are truly able to indicate scores reliably above the 145-150 range are currently not available. They can't accurately determine the 'degree' of giftedness within an IQ number. WAIS tests 3 and 4 have a ceiling of 160. However, we are working on developing tests or on standardizing revised tests, so that measurements over 145 become more reliable.

Characteristics

It is likely that the characteristics of highly gifted adults are in line with those of gifted adults in general, but potentially more intense and extreme. There are many known cases of highly gifted children who can't attend a regular school or who skip several grades in school. Some of them even fall completely outside of the school system. Finding like-minded individuals is often a challenge. And even within the group of gifted people they can still feel 'different'. See also Rise (2016).

Research

Some studies on highly gifted children:

- Hollingworth (1926) drew the conclusion from her research that social problems in children with an exceptionally high IQ are related to two factors: inadequate treatment by adults and a lack of intellectual challenge. These children are often ignored by adults because of the assumption that they will find their way regardless. The results of this study also refute the idea that exceptionally gifted children are clumsy, vulnerable and eccentric. Unfortunately this myth still prevails in society in general and also in education in particular.
- Gross (2004) followed 60 children who scored very high on IQ tests for two decades. Her research shows that the children who were allowed to skip at least three grades did very well, both academically and socially. Most of them pursued PhD's, excelled in their chosen field, formed close relationships and developed warm friendships. The 33 children who were not allowed to skip grades fared less well. They had problems with social relationships and part of them did not complete their studies. Gross suggested that having felt socially isolated for so long, they did not receive enough practice forming social contacts.

Well-being

The findings of Hollingworth and Gross show that a sense of social connection from childhood onward is an important theme for highly gifted people. Finding peers who are developmentally equal is much more difficult for this group than for the average child.

Brackmann (2020) wrote a book in German about highly gifted adults, based on her practical experience as a psychologist, in which she emphasizes the above.

We think that more attention for, and study of, this subgroup of gifted people is desperately needed. It is important for their well-being and possibly for professional help.

Recommendations

- Understand that high giftedness is (also) positive!
- Feelings of loneliness, even in groups of gifted people, can indicate high giftedness in an individual, even if performance does not seem exceptional.
- Few people take IQ tests in order to differentiate within the upper 2%. However, it is not always important to know an exact IQ score. (See also IHBV leaflet 'Am I gifted or not?')
- Finding like-minded people is very important for this group. Opportunities, online and in person, are provided by several organizations and societies focusing on highly gifted people, such as Triple Nine Society, (TNS, www.triplenine.org) or the International Society for Philosophical Enquiry (ISPE, www.thethousand.com) See also the World Intelligence Network (www.iqsociety.org).
- The IHBV website provides a list of caregivers who have experience with giftedness.

References

- Brackmann, A. (2020). Extrem Begabt. Die/der Persönlichkeitsstruktur von Höchstbegabten und Genies. Klett-Cotta.
- Gross, M.U.M. (2004). Exceptionally Gifted Children, Second Edition. Abingdon; Routledge.
- Hollingworth, L.S. (2015). Children above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet: Origin and development. (Reprint from 1975, reprint from book Gifted Children, their nature and nurture, 1926). Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Rise: Documentary about people in the highest IQ subgroup, see: <http://daimoninstitute.com/#RiseDocumentary>.

For more information on gifted adults take a look at all our other products:

