

# Not everyone is average!

Recognition of giftedness in seniors is beneficial  
(for the (potentially) gifted)

instituut  
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*Giftedness is still being primarily associated with children. Fortunately, it is increasingly recognized that some gifted children need extra attention and sometimes a specialized education. Gifted adults already receive a little more attention than twenty years ago, but you seldom read anything about gifted seniors, even though there must be many thousands of them. It is also of great importance for seniors to know about their giftedness because being aware of one's characteristics and challenges can lead to increased happiness and less loneliness. Scientific research of giftedness in seniors is in actuality nonexistent, therefore we have to primarily employ personal testimonials.*

## Giftedness

Many gifted people are not aware of their giftedness. Some only find out late in life and some never discover that they are gifted which is unfortunate because recognizing this cause of 'being different' and 'feeling different' can help them function better and to find a connection with others. Gifted people often find it difficult to connect with others who think at a slower pace than they do and frequently have completely different interests. When they are not challenged enough they also easily become bored.

In their final phase of life, gifted seniors often tend to become disengaged because they do not find enough people in their environment with whom they can relate to on an equal level. The average offering of activities for their age group is oftentimes a disappointment as well. The result is that they are much lonelier than they would like to be.

## Recognizing your giftedness helps!

The recognition of one's giftedness can be a real eye-opener for many people.

That does not indicate that the path towards recognition will always be easy. For some, it even feels like a mourning process. Fortunately, experience indicates that people are usually very happy that they have embarked on this journey in hindsight.

Individuals experience a sense of being more understood by being in contact with other gifted people. Conversations are often so engaging that they forget the time. Nevertheless, not every gifted person is automatically a friend, as the differences between individuals are vast. Even in larger residential communities, such as elder care facilities, finding a true connection to others with giftedness is infrequent. Activities involving a substantive theme give the greatest chance of meeting like-minded people. For example, lectures (followed by discussion), musical performances, or brain games such as scrabble, bridge, chess, and mahjong.

Having knowledge of your giftedness will help you to get to know yourself better. This will enable you to seek out more suitable activities and companions with whom you have something in common.

## Autonomy and receiving care can certainly cause conflicts

We often see that gifted seniors have a lot of difficulties with needing to be cared for. Although it is challenging for anyone to accept that they cannot do everything themselves anymore, this seems to be even more true for the highly gifted. Conflicts arise because you want to keep everything under control and you want to cling onto your ways and habits down to the last detail because you have thought these through carefully. But that does not seem to work for the person providing the help. It can also be difficult when the communication with a caregiver does not go smoothly and you have the feeling that you are not being understood at all. This applies to contacts with all kinds of care workers, including doctors, when you had hoped that you could communicate with them at a more advanced level. For that reason the IHBV has also published leaflets about being gifted, to explain to care providers what being gifted means. Perhaps you can use these leaflets to improve communication.

## Giftedness and dementia

The combination of giftedness and dementia is complex. Our knowledge is based exclusively upon testimonials. The gifted person's intelligence can mask symptoms of dementia for a very long time. And even if the symptoms are obvious and the diagnosis is made, you are still gifted as a person. You have lived a life as a gifted person. This manifests itself, for instance, in your interests and in the way you feel and react, which is important to explain to caregivers in geriatric nursing. In the book 'Gifted Seniors' this is achieved based on detailed, concrete descriptions.

## How do you recognize giftedness in yourself?

If you recognize yourself in many of the questions and characteristics in the box below, that is a strong indication of giftedness. Even if you don't identify with all of them, you may require more challenging and in-depth activities, and that is the ultimate goal.

## Questions asked by gifted seniors

1. I have felt different than others my whole life. What is wrong with me?
2. Why can I not seem to have a meaningful conversation with the other people here?
3. Why am I so uninterested in the activities offered here?
5. Why do they treat me like a child?
6. Why do they frequently not understand my questions?

## Characteristics that may indicate giftedness

1. You have broad interests and one or more unique hobbies. (Note: not all gifted people have achieved a higher education.)
2. You are very curious and enjoy learning new things.
3. You are creative and have good associative thinking skills.
4. You are very fond of your autonomy.
5. One or more of your children and/or grandchildren is gifted.
6. You often do not feel comfortable in groups nor do you enjoy going to birthdays and parties. You prefer to read a book or spend time alone outdoors.
7. You have had an unusual educational experience. For example, you wanted to study, but could not or were not allowed to. Or you did not succeed at school but completed education later in life.
8. You have had many different jobs and at times have experienced conflicts both at work and in your private life.

More information (Dutch):

- IHBV Kennisdossier Hoogbegaafde senioren: <https://ihbv.nl/hb-senioren/>
- Nauta, N. & Schouwstra, I. (2020). <https://ihbv.nl/hoogbegaafde-senioren-boek/>
- International part of the website: <https://ihbv.nl/international/>

Articles:

- <https://ihbv.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Gifted.elders-A.forgotten.-group.pdf>
- <https://ihbv.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Artikel-Elders-with-dementia-Mensa-World-Journal-2019-12.pdf>