

# Not everyone is average!

Recognition of giftedness in seniors is beneficial  
(for the caregivers)

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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 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 certainly 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.

Knowing the characteristics of giftedness helps these seniors to know themselves better. Then they and those around them can seek out more suitable activities and companions with which they 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. For example, conflicts arise because they want to keep everything under control and cling to their ways and habits down to the last detail, after all, they 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 the gifted senior has the feeling of not being understood at all and is found to be especially difficult. Conflicts with doctors can also arise because the gifted person had hoped to be able to talk to them at a more advanced level. For that reason, the IHBV has also published other leaflets about giftedness in general for medical doctors and other caregivers to explain what being gifted means.

## 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, such an individual is still gifted as a person. He or she has lived their life as a gifted person. This manifests itself, for instance, through their interests and in the way he or she feels and reacts. In the book 'Gifted Seniors' this is achieved based on detailed, concrete descriptions.

## How do you recognize giftedness?

By employing the questions and characteristics in the box below, a social worker can obtain an indication of giftedness. And even if the individual does not identify with all of them, it may be clear that the client needs more challenging and in-depth activities, and that is the ultimate goal.

## Questions asked by gifted seniors (but not always expressed)

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