

# Siblings, Giftedness, and Disparities – oh my!

by Molly Isaacs-McLeod

If you have more than one child sharing your home, you know that no two are alike. If you have biological siblings residing under your roof you know, despite incredibly similar genetics, what works with one does not work with all – in any realm. No, the universe is simply not that kind to the beleaguered parents of the gifted!



In all seriousness, what is a parent to do when one child is gifted and the other isn't, when both children are gifted but in different areas, when one child is 2E and the other isn't, when one is "pleasantly" gifted and the other is, well, not so pleasantly gifted? The permutations are endless, compounded only by the number of children you have.

As adults we have (hopefully) reached a point where we are comfortable in our own skin — most of the time. We have enough life experience to know that we all have areas in which we excel, and areas where that is not the case. Most of us have had the experience of a sibling, co-worker, or teammate who is able to do something with ease that would be difficult, if not impossible, for us to do. We can use those life experiences to help our households navigate the sometimes bumpy road of "differently gifted" family members.

**Each person has strengths and weaknesses.** It is important to play to the strengths and support the weaknesses. Have your children talk with you and with one another about their strengths and weaknesses. Depending on your family dynamics and habits, you might consider having each family member bring up one strength and one weakness of their own at the dinner table. Parents must participate too!

**Focus on effort and challenge rather than level and outcome.** Everyone should be working at a challenge level, wherever that might be at any given time. This harkens back to the idea that a fair classroom is one in which each person is working equally hard. If everyone is having to invest time and energy, no one is excelling at everything all of the time.

**Model and encourage mutual admiration and support.** Help siblings to understand and appreciate the effort each takes in working toward a goal, assignment, or personal challenge. In 2E situations, it can be very helpful for all family members to have a working knowledge of the issues at play and the impact that the LD (or other second "e") may have on learning, playing, and living. Greater understanding can often lead to greater appreciation.

**Accept and embrace who and where your children are.** The attitude of unconditional love and acceptance is contagious. When you demonstrate understanding, acceptance, and respect for who and where your child is, others in your household will often follow suit. As our children mature, they generally leave only a certain amount of their "quirkiness" behind; much of it is carried forward adding dimension to the unique adult individuals they become.

**Zero tolerance for denigration and ridicule.** Children can be unkind, and they can be especially unkind to those closest to them. If your household has only one rule, it needs to be one that prohibits detrimental teasing. Gifted children can be very sensitive (shocking, I know) and even "good-natured ribbing" can be very destructive when it is directed at areas that are already fraught with guilt, shame, insecurity, etc.

**In closing, here are a couple of things to be mindful of:**

**Children who excel need to enjoy their success.** Sometimes out of consideration to the child who struggles, parents downplay successes of the other child(ren).

**Children who struggle need attention as whole beings, and not just for their LD or other challenges.**

Addressing issues can be so time consuming that it can be easy to forget the “rest” of the child.

**Children (and their adults) need a place to be themselves *and* be accepted, at the same time!** The greater world is not always kind, especially to outliers. Home needs to be that place where we are loved and accepted and where we can be more “ourselves” than anywhere else, secure in the knowledge that we are both accepted and acceptable.

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