

EMOTIONAL INTENSITY IN GIFTED CHILDREN

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IDENTIFYING GIFTEDNESS

- When it happens and how it happens is not always the same because gifted kids don't always look the same

WHAT GIFTED KIDS ARE NOT (ALWAYS)

- Nerds
- High achieving
- Worker bees
- Compliant
- “A pleasure to have in class”
- Evenly skilled across all areas of development

THE NUMBER

- It's not just *one* number
 - Discrepancies and uneven development
 - Can lead to misunderstandings and frustrations
- Kids are not just *the* number
 - Giftedness is an important aspect of an individual and it's the framework for how that individual interacts with the world, but please don't forget about the person
 - Twice Exceptional

DABROWSKI'S OVEREXCITABILITIES

- Psychomotor: love of movement (talkers and walkers)
- Sensual: heightened experience of senses; tend to have early appreciation for music, arts
- Intellectual: need to know, figure out, discover; high degree of concentration; strong memory
- Imaginational: prone to invention, fantasy, vivid dreams, detailed visualization

DABROWSKI'S OVEREXCITABILITIES

- Emotional
 - Intense feelings
 - Extremes of emotion
 - Sensitive/empathic
 - Strong emotional attachments

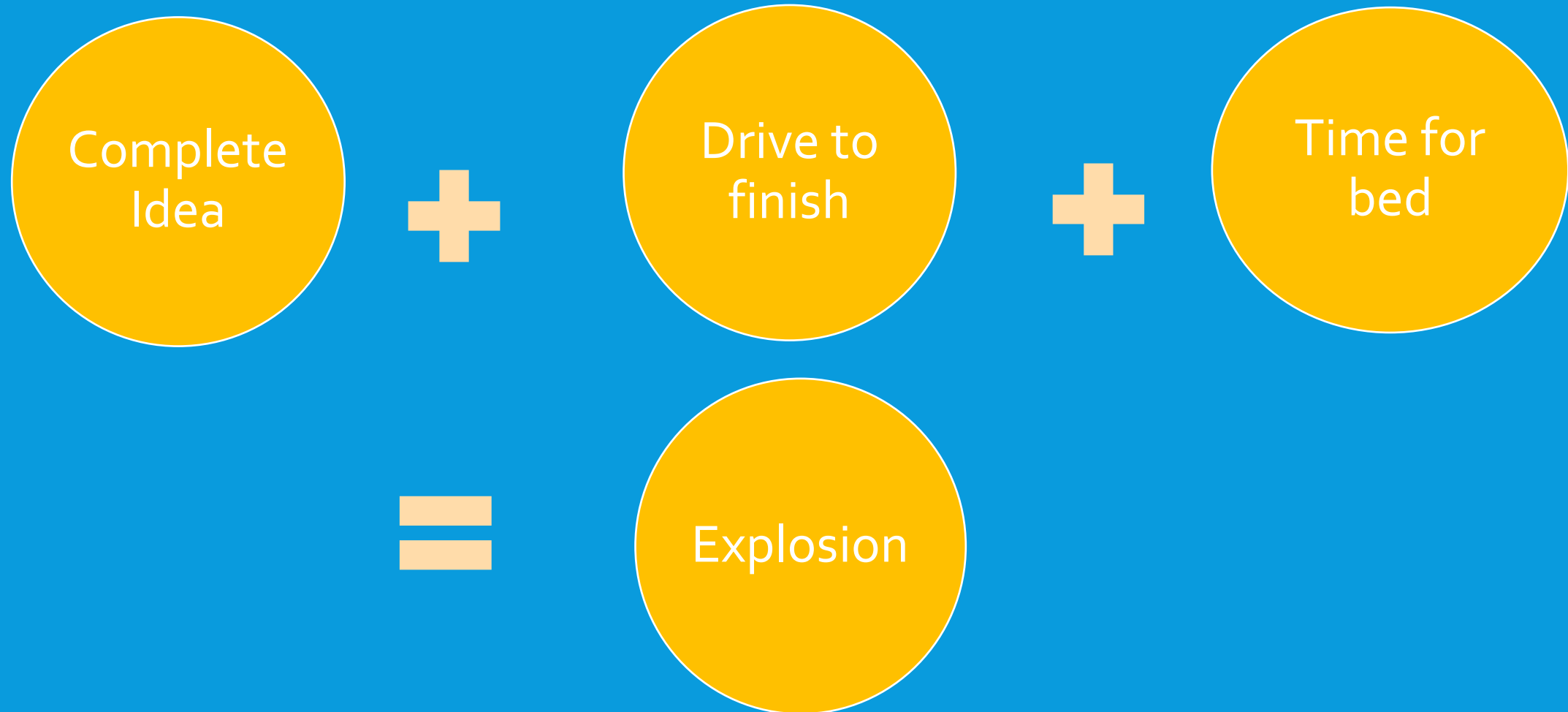
WHAT ELSE DO WE KNOW?

- Tend to be frustrated by the mundane
- They “just know stuff”
- Vivid memories (and visceral responses)
- Not intrinsically motivated by grades
- Tend to want to finish a preferred task
- Can hyperfocus on areas/tasks of interest
- Tend to have a complete idea (and a picture of it)
- Often notice lots of details

AT ITS BEST



WHY YOU'RE PROBABLY HERE



KEY COMPONENTS IN WORKING WITH GIFTED KIDS' INTENSITIES

- Understanding frustrations
 - Due to mismatch (between skills, environment)
 - Due to interference
 - Due to challenges (academic, physical, or social)
 - Due to an accumulation of irritations
- Showing respect
 - *Mutual*
 - For the task (also mutual!)
 - For the feelings, thoughts, ideas...intensity
 - For boundaries

An intense kid changes the room...we laugh when they laugh, we get upset when they get upset. We feel what they feel. It's contagious.

BACK UP

- Their feelings are actually *not* your feelings
- Detach
- Detach
- Did I mention you should detach?

WHY?

- Ability to draw people in/contagious emotions
- Sensitivity to your emotions
- Strong verbal abilities
 - Can debate with the best of them
 - Can be very good at identifying your weaknesses and telling you about them
 - Can use powerful and scary language
- Ability to finish/hyperfocus
 - Not easily distracted from frustrations

THE ANXIETY LAYER

- Vivid and visceral memories
- Ability to think through potential consequences
- Visual
- Powerful ability to imagine situations and feelings
- Fight or Flight or Freeze

HOW TO DETACH

- Label it in your head: “Wow. He’s having a powerful reaction.”
- Brace yourself: remember your plan to detach and stay calm
- Take a breath, take a minute
- Back up and allow space and time to work
- Congratulate yourself on not getting sucked in

OH, AND IN THE MOMENT

- Don't try to reason
- Don't try to give consequences
- Don't try to remind about strategies
- Actually, just don't talk
- Don't panic

BACK UP

- Their interests and passions are not yours to take over, either
 - Their enthusiasm is contagious, too
 - Fight the urge to take over and turn an interest or hobby into a competition/career path/area of expertise
 - Offer opportunities, respond with interest, but let your child determine the intensity here

REMEMBER

- Gifted kids are not always motivated by grades
- Gifted kids are not always motivated by their capabilities (i.e., just because they're good at doing something, doesn't mean they want to do it)
- Gifted kids are motivated by their desire and need to know, explore, question
- Unless...

THEY CARE ABOUT GRADES, PERFECTION

- Challenges lead to growth
 - Many gifted kids don't have much practice with challenges
 - Many gifted kids don't want to jeopardize their standing
 - Uneven skills and abilities can lead to the wrong conclusions

GROWTH MINDSET

- *Mindset* by Carol Dweck
- *The Power of Yet* TED Talk by Carol Dweck
- Focus on the process, not the outcome
- Use language carefully
 - Labels like “smart” and “gifted”
 - “you’re the kind of kid who”
 - “your brain works...”
 - Point out the positive, point out the potential trouble, point towards the work

ENGAGING GIFTED KIDS

- Creative problem solvers
- Highly verbal
- Good reasoning abilities
- Motivated by what matters to them/what they deem as important or valuable...not doing something just because they're told to

COLLABORATION

- Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (Ross Greene)
- Capitalize on your child's strengths
- CPS builds executive function, switching from feeling to thinking rationally
- Mutual respect and partnership
- Meaningful

DEPOSITS AND SUPPORT

- Think about making deposits and withdrawals...focus on deposits by:
 - Enrichment without strings attached
 - Demand-free periods
 - Allow appropriate independence
- Support
 - For the child – communicate a healthy appreciation for giftedness; skill building (relaxation, regulation, changing thoughts, social skills, outlets)
 - From schools
 - For family
 - From “your tribe”

RESOURCES

- National Association for Gifted Children
- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted
- Parenting Gifted Kids: Tips for Raising Happy and Successful Children by James Delisle
- Emotional Intensity in Gifted Students by Christine Fonseca
- Living with Intensity: Understanding the Sensitivity, Excitability, and the Emotional Development of Gifted Children, Adolescents, and Adults by Susan Daniels and Michael Piechowski

RESOURCES

- Destination Imagination
- Connecting for Kids
- Meghan Barlow and Associates
 - Individual and family therapy
 - For younger kids – social skills/play groups
 - For teens – Emotion Regulation groups
 - For parents – CPS workshop on 3/10
 - Newsletter, Facebook, website