

The Care and Feeding of Gifted Parent Groups: A Guide for Gifted Coordinators, Teachers, and Parent Advocates

by Wenda Sheard, J.D., Ph.D.

- 1. Be Honest:** Tell parents if their children's needs cannot be met within the framework of current levels of funding for gifted programs, current school policies, current demands on teacher time, or other reasons. Tell your school administration and school board the truth, too. Back up the truth with facts. Let parents know you can be counted on as an ally.
- 2. Educate:** Teach parents about gifted issues, history, theories, and associations. Feed parents information (newsletters, articles, books, listserves, and websites including <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>)
- 3. Get 'em While They're Young:** Parents of elementary students are younger and often have more energy than parents of high school students. Parents of elementary students typically encounter a greater discrepancy between their child's education level and the level of the material being taught in the classroom than parents of high school children typically encounter. The larger the discrepancy a parent encounters, the more willing the parent is to devote time to a gifted group.
- 4. Channel Their Anger into Action:** Suggest that disappointed or confused parents join with other parents for education and action. Teach parents advocacy techniques. Volunteer to help parents prepare for meetings with teachers, administrators, school board members, legislators, and others.
- 5. Keep Yourself Up-to-Date:** Attend conferences, keep abreast of new research, read new books. Funnel new information back to parents. Encourage parents to keep themselves up-to-date, too.
- 6. Publicity 101:** Give parents information for distribution to other parents. Suggest that parents add school board members to mailing lists. If necessary, teach parents how to do press releases, talk to media representatives, and prepare fact sheets.
- 7. Sociology 101:** Suggest that parents take time to socialize at meetings and other gatherings. Remember that people volunteer in order to make connections with other people, and groups benefit from increased numbers of connections among members.
- 8. Share your Captive Audiences:** Invite gifted advocate and experts to speak and solicit new members at your school meetings, community meetings, business meetings, religious congregation meeting, and other meetings. Help spread the word about the social, emotional, and academic needs of gifted children.
- 9. Realize your Connection Power:** In many cases, teachers, gifted coordinators, and parent advocates are the sole connection between like-minded gifted parents. With proper permission, give parents the names and addresses of other parents interested in gifted issues. Refer new gifted parents to experienced gifted parents. Consider starting SENG Model Parenting Groups www.sengifted.org, or consider sponsoring "meet-ups" like those sponsored by the Oregon gifted association. <http://www.oatag.org/Involvement/Meetup/MeetIntro.html>.
- 10. Make Group Gathering Suggestions:** Maybe hold a Toy and Game festival where families come armed with their favorite toys and games, and play until past bedtime. The parent networking that occurs during these gatherings is astounding - mentorship offers, grade-skipping advice, ideas for future gatherings, etc. Other gifted associations hold Super Saturday events for families, spring symposiums for adults, or robotics events for children. The Connecticut Association for Gifted sponsors popular regional "Minds in Motion" Saturdays. <http://www.ctgifted.org/events.htm>
- 11. Paint a Big Picture:** Remind parents that

action in favor of gifted children is needed not only on a local level, but also on the state and federal levels. Encourage parents to spread the word about the special needs of gifted children. Urge parents to coordinate their advocacy efforts with those of your state gifted organization and other advocacy groups.

12. **Warm Fuzzies:** Gifted advocates, like all human beings, love being recognized for good work. Give advocates congratulations, thank you notes, and awards as appropriate for their efforts on behalf of gifted children.