

Diverse Family Structures and Circumstances That Impact Gifted Students

Family circumstances that can affect academic achievement should be brainstormed, discussed, and enumerated. Understanding that diverse types of families have both strengths and weaknesses, teachers need to be aware of what is “normal” for these gifted students. Participants may use this list of factors as a resource in parent conferencing and in identifying resources that can assist families with problems or crises.

These factors include, but are not limited to:

FAMILY PRESSURES

- Divorce
- Death of a parent, sibling, or close relative
- Domestic abuse
- Substance abuse
- Eviction from the residence
- Homelessness
- Illness of parent or close family member
- Parent losing a job or having a substantial reduction in income
- Sibling or parent with serious mental, emotional, or physical problems
- Multiple ethnicities in families with conflicting values

DIVERSE FAMILY STRUCTURES

- High density living units with little privacy or opportunity to complete school studies
- Blended or step-families with remarriages
- Homeschooling
- Diverse cultural or religious customs
- Responsibilities for child care or household chores
- Arrest and incarceration of a parent or close relative
- Excessive competition and demands
- Absent parents
- Non-conformist families with highly-creative children
- Families that travel frequently with absenteeism
- Migrant families
- Single-parent, blended families, divorced families, homosexual families
- Extended families living together
- Military or diplomatic families that move frequently

DIVERSE FAMILY STRUCTURES, *continued*

- Orphaned or foster child shifted among different guardianship arrangements
- Child who experiences limited adult supervision raised by siblings or absent relatives
- Raised in a cult or very diverse setting
- Raised in a foreign country

DEMANDING SCHEDULE

- Participating in state or national competitions, which take time from classes
- Preparing a project for a major competition
- Working long hours after school
- Spending excessive time on the telephone or Internet
- Health problems
- Unexpected and unwanted pregnancy or fatherhood
- Participating in demanding classes or lessons after school
- Demand to take on multiple leadership roles at school
- Demand to be the school diplomat
- Pressure to complete standardized tests that are content-based when the focus is on higher-level thinking

PERSONAL ISSUES

- Adolescent anger and rebellion
- Power struggle with parents
- Unreasonable family pressure to excel
- Experience of grief in relation to giftedness
- Substance abuse or experimentation
- Struggle with ethics of peers vs parents
- College choice and career pressure
- Conflicts with teacher expectations
- Intense Interests not supported at school

COMMUNITY ISSUES

- Advocacy for ethnic rights and non-discrimination
- Advocacy for gender rights
- Demand for community leadership