

Characteristics of Twice Exceptional (2e) Children



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As with any comprehensive list of characteristics, these characteristics are not shared by all 2e children. It is difficult to place characteristics in “ability” and “disability” or “strengths” and “weaknesses” categories, because oftentimes, what could be considered a weakness in one setting, might be considered a strength in another. For example, debating with an adult about the morality of personal choices could be admired in a social setting and punished in a school setting. Or the ability to hyper focus on intellectual pursuits could be a strength at school, but a weakness at home when parents need chores done. While it is difficult to codify individual characteristics, this list could be useful in providing a framework for identifying 2e individuals.

Intellectual

- highly curious, divergent thinker
- intellectually advanced
- creative problem solvers
- insatiable need for information/learning
- learns “systems” to a high degree of competency
- can see obscure connections not easily seen by others
- advanced creativity
- strong metacognitive (thinking about their thinking) skills
- unique insight into complex issues
- has different, often unusual perspectives
- likes to explore wide ranging, often esoteric, subjects
- can rapidly accelerate learning to high levels of expertise

- advanced, wicked, often bizarre sense of humor
- extraordinary perceptions and/or abilities in one or more areas
- autodidactic (ability to successfully teach one's self)
- responds well to academic flexibility and self-directed learning
- may seem introverted, spends a lot of time daydreaming/thinking
- long attention span when working in areas of high interest
- passionate about areas of interest, fully focused and invested
- persistent
- demonstrated superior spatial skills
- enjoys codes, puzzles, games of strategy
- good at developing compensatory strategies
- may have difficulty with auditory instructions/learning
- advanced reader, can read and understand highly complex material
- superior vocabulary
- unusual imagination
- very motivated to achieve mastery, may abandon subject due to perfectionism/unrealistic expectations
- hyper-focus, often to the exclusion of all else
- likes to see big picture first and then fill in details, dismissive of details in quest for big picture
- asynchronous intellectual development
- often have learning dis/abilities
- dislikes linear learning or rote practice
- overreaction to timed tests
- slower processing speed than displayed by typical children
- tendency to over think questions; may take a long time to answer a question

Physical

- issues with food, multiple food aversions, need for eating rituals
- problems with digestion, gut health, food allergies
- sensory processing issues
- likes to handle items, may have oral fixation
- can be hypersensitive to touch, often do not like to be touched; conversely, they may be hyposensitive to touch, and seek rough physical interaction
- extremely sensitive to stimuli
- unusual sleep cycles, difficulty sleeping, less need for sleep
- trouble controlling body movements, awkward, clumsy
- poor fine motor skills
- trouble with modulating voice levels
- difficulty sitting still, standing in line, walking with group
- difficulty with personal hygiene and managing personal care
- may not be aware of physical sensations or needs (forget to eat, drink, sleep, go to bathroom)
- even if appearing chaotic or messy, needs underlying system of order and routine
- may have weak muscle tone, poor gross motor skills, or asynchronous physical development

Emotional

- empathetic
- deeply connect to those they love
- often mature beyond their years
- intense feelings, may be confused by their emotions
- asynchronous emotional development
- overwhelmed by other's emotions and emotional intensity
- very sensitive, easily wounded emotionally
- may have existential sorrow/depression

- perfectionist
- compulsive, obsessive
- impulsive
- have issues with anxiety, phobias
- unrealistic expectations of themselves
- low self-esteem, feel like an imposter
- emotional response out of sync with what is typical
- rigid about rules and fairness, struggle with gray areas, inflexibility
- may need time to prepare for changes to routine, surprises may be difficult for them to manage
- arrogant, or may appear arrogant
- bored, frustrated, feel held back by traditional pacing and learning practices
- less interested in typical external motivators and reward systems
- falls apart under pressure
- has trouble understanding facial expressions and body language

Social

- often feel lonely, out of sync with others
- asynchronous social development
- concern for social justice
- has a mature understanding of world problems and social injustice
- cares deeply about the future of the world
- questions status quo, comes up with creative alternatives
- often outwits adults
- sensitive to patronizing or hypocritical behavior, may confront adults in authority on their own behavior
- may not follow rules for rules sake; may challenge underlying logic/illogic of rules, even if punished for doing so
- may have trouble with authority; can be oppositional and argumentative

- may want to be the center of attention in some instances; conversely, may have high social anxiety in other instances
- comments and actions are out of sync with what others are doing
- may have extremes with imaginative play: difficulty understanding imaginative play, or obsessively engage in imaginative play throughout childhood
- may struggle to express themselves verbally
- gullible, socially awkward, often bullied
- gets along with adults, as well as with much younger/much older children
- behavioral issues often resolve when intellectually or creatively satisfied
- love to challenge themselves and/or others
- often misunderstood, ostracized
- confused by social protocol

This list contains traits that closely match descriptions of the overexcitabilities discussed in Dabrowski and Piechowski's (1977) theories:

- Psychomotor Overexcitability, may manifest as hyperactivity, sleeplessness, rapid speech, intense athletic activities, restlessness, and acting out on impulse.
- Sensual Overexcitability, may manifest as increased need for touching and handling things, need for physical contact with others, oral fixation, or the need to be the center of attention.
- Imaginational Overexcitability, may manifest through vivid imagination, detailed description of images and impressions, high anxiety, phobias, inventiveness, animated visualization, intense dreams and nightmares, mixing of truth and fiction, and fears of the unknown.
- Intellectual Overexcitability, may manifest in an insatiable need for information; delight in analysis of difficult problems, persistence in asking probing questions, inordinate desire for increasing levels of knowledge, reverence for logic, and preoccupation with theoretical problems.
- Emotional Overexcitability, may manifest in phobias, fears, obsessions, inhibition (timidity or shyness), concern with death, anxieties, depression, feelings of loneliness, and concern for others.

Twice exceptional persons, like all people, are individuals who have, and are defined by, a unique combination of characteristics and behaviors.

Dabrowski, K., & Piechowski, M.M. (1977). Theory of levels of emotional development:

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