

Gifted Parenting: What I Wish I Knew

By Connie Olson

"You have to go to school because it's the law," I explained to my son. That statement, I now realize, was a good sign I was in the midst of parenting a gifted child, a sign I completely missed. At the time, it seemed like a perfectly normal thing to tell my kindergartener who was sprawled on the floor snow-angel style refusing to go to school in the third week. That statement is the only thing that got him up and out the door most mornings. Looking back, I am not so sure that most kindergartners would be motivated by "the law" – I wish I knew that at the time! There are so many things I wish I knew. If you are just beginning your gifted parenting journey, I hope the following "I wish I knew" items make the path a bit clearer for you.

I admit, I am a rookie at parenting and even more so at parenting a gifted child. You see, I didn't know my child is gifted. The classic signs were all there, he turned the pages of books at 4 months, learned to read several words around age 3 or 4, and had mastered the alphabet long before kindergarten. I assumed all children his age were equally capable of those same skills and that our consistent work with him was the sole reason for his quick grasp of concepts. I wish I knew the classic signs and tendencies of giftedness from day one because I may have been a more patient parent and a better advocate for my son.

My son is now in the third grade. When I think back over the previous school years, I believe it was the constant struggle to deal with his behaviors that clouded my ability to see his giftedness. How many times can you sit through another parent-teacher conference hearing... "your son is doing well academically, *but* he doesn't finish his work/sit still/keep his supplies organized/etc.?" Every conference left me feeling defeated. I wish I knew that gifted children exhibit traits that are different from their peers, and it is normal, not necessarily a parenting error.

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I had hoped the lack of desire to go to school would end after kindergarten, but it didn't. Over the years I have had many conversations with my son about why he doesn't want to go to school. No matter how I ask the question, his standard response is always, "school is boring." As a slightly wiser parent than those kindergarten parenting years, I have come to realize that home is a place where he has

free reign to learn what *he* wants to learn. Who doesn't want that? But also, occasionally he drops hints about wanting more challenge at school. For example, this year he asked my husband and I to teach him what the parenthesis in algebra mean so he could solve harder problems. I wish I knew long ago that a lack of challenge can cause less than desirable behaviors in gifted children.

This year his gifted and talented teacher sent home an assignment that was challenging. After days of ignoring or refusing to do his homework, I finally framed the thought of working on this assignment as though it were an escape room. Escape rooms are a popular activity where you and a group of people are “locked” in a room and must use all available clues to figure out how to unlock the room to get out within a one-hour timeframe. He had one hour to finish it, literally and figuratively. He finished the assignment easily and happily. I wish I knew earlier that a continued lack of challenge erodes a gifted student’s confidence when faced with work that is hard for them.

Motivating Your Gifted Child:

- *DO show you value education and teachers*
- *DO counsel your child to reflect on difficult situations and discuss ways to change the environment to fit his needs*
- *DO help your child see how he can apply his interests to school projects*

Are you further along in the gifted parenting journey than I am? If so, I want to hear what *you* wished you knew. You can email me at cjadry@gmail.com. If you are new to this journey, feel free to reach out to NDAGC for more guidance and resources. And, if you are a gifted and talented teacher, I would encourage you to offer the parents of your gifted students’ information about NDAGC’s resources. I wish I knew about the resources this organization offers earlier in my journey!

Connie Olson has honed her writing skills in the marketing and public relations field over the past 17 years. She has two beautifully energetic young children, is married to her husband who “*coincidentally*” has the same name first name as Superman, and they all live in what may or may not be the smallest home in Fargo, North Dakota. Olson participated in NDAGC’s parenting book study, “*Success Strategies for Parenting Gifted Kids,*” in Fall 2021.

