

Smart Sometimes

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Chapter 29: I'm a Kid, Mom, Not a Robot: What High-Ability Children Want Their Parents to Know About Them

Inconsistencies in how your child applies his or her intelligence may baffle you at times. “How can she be so smart in science but get such low grades in math?” you asked. Or, “For a kid who comes up with brilliant solutions to problems around the house, why isn't he a better reader? We know he's smart.”

The short answer is this: More than innate intelligence is at play in problem solving, reading, understanding math, succeeding in science, and every other type of learning. Different tasks require different types of thinking. For example, reading well requires one type of thinking whereas creating solutions to problems around the house or inventing new ways to use odds and ends accumulating in the basement or garage call for thinking that is quite different. These thought processes aren't interchangeable, but your youngster may well apply both types to separate situations. The human mind is extremely complex, which accounts for the variation of strengths and talents between and among individuals – sometimes, in the same family. A person's use of various types of thinking also helps explain why demonstrating high ability in one area doesn't necessarily carry over to others. This is perfectly normal for high-ability youngsters as well as for other children. Let's listen to what Tiffany wants her parents to know about this particular issue.

“I'd like my parents to accept the fact that I'm smart in some subjects but not in others. That's just the way it is”, asserts Tiffany, 13, who says her parents pressure her to do as well in math as she does in drama. Asked to elaborate a bit, Tiffany notes that she's interested in and, in fact, passionate about drama. From her earliest recollections, she played school, church, and weddings and, when her playmates weren't around, she played every role herself. “The time I was in my first school play, our director told me I was a natural,” she comments with a broad smile. “But I'm no natural in math! I'll really like my parents to understand that even bright kids aren't good at everything. We're not robots!”

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