***How many friends should my gifted child have?***

 That depends on the child: is the child an extrovert or an introvert?

 Extroverts love to be around people and have fewer problems with social contact. They are more at risk, however, for hiding abilities or unusual interests in order to fit into peer groups.

 Introverts desire time alone in addition to some social contact. A few good friends may be all this child needs. Gifted children tend to be introverts.

***My child has friends who are not the same age. Is that normal?***

 Absolutely. A true peer is one who can understand your child’s vocabulary, interests, and humor. Chances are that peer will be someone older and not an age peer. Gifted children look for people who understand them. It will also depend on common interests: the chess friends may be older but the soccer friends may be the same age.

 Yet, a balance between same age and older peers should be maintained. Certain topics that interest older peers may be developmentally inappropriate for your younger child.

 ***When do peer problems begin?***

 Gifted children can feel different from age peers as early as preschool. They may seek time alone or with older children who do read or think at their level. They may appear bossy to age peers.

 As they get older, their social choices can become stark: they conform to lower expectations in order to fit into the group socially by building up an acceptable façade or they stay true to themselves which causes them to stand out and lose potential friendships.

***How important are social skills?***

 ‘Business friendly’ skills are always needed. These social skills allow people to interact in a friendly manner without requiring a person to adopt another’s beliefs and behaviors.

 Be careful to differentiate between social skills and popularity. Most prominent gifted people were not part of the ‘in crowd’ and many did not develop strong friendships until college or graduate school.

***My child seems to want to be alone. Should I worry?***

 Does your child sincerely enjoy alone time? Or is your child isolated, afraid of rejection, or lacking in social skills? Introverts rarely initiate social contact but do enjoy it when others initiate it. If your child is uncomfortable with all social contact, then you may need to seek counseling.

***Does peer pressure lead to academic underachievement?***

 In middle school, students feel the tug of ‘fitting in’ as their loyalties switch from families to peers. For gifted girls, ‘smart’ can be an unacceptable feminine trait that hinders relationships and community cooperation. They may spend so much time ‘acting average’ that they may even lose IQ points.

 Gifted boys also experience underachievement in efforts to fit in. Gifted boys who participate in socially acceptable sports will be ‘forgiven’ their giftedness. Gifted boys who are more creative and who do not like sports have a more difficult time. Behaviors that spotlight bravery or dominance are respected; academic excellence is not.

**Practical Suggestions**

**Provide structure** during play dates.

**Avoid overscheduling** so that children have time to develop friendships.

**Change bossiness into leadership** by helping the gifted child understand the feelings of others as well as learning persuasion.

**Consider special schools or programs** that will increase interactions with other gifted children.

**Avoid too many comparisons.** It’s difficult to make friends with people who are tired of hearing what a model student you are.

**Put peer pressure into perspective** by explaining that no one cares who was most popular after high school.

**Use bibliotherapy** (reading books with social-emotional themes) as a way of addressing friendship difficulties.

**Friendship Strategies**

Parents can help a gifted child by discussing the following strategies.

* Make time for friends.
* Take initiative to open doors for possible friendships.
* Learn to be a good host.
* Practice friendship skills in low stress situations.
* Be a good listener to show interest and caring for others.
* Compliment others to bring attention to their good qualities.
* Participate in group activities in order to create friendship opportunities.
* Be accepting of others who think and act differently than you do.
* Learn to be a good sport in winning and losing.
* Learn to deal with teasing, bullies, and rumors.

Online resources for parents:

[www.hoagiesgifted.org](http://www.hoagiesgifted.org)

Overall resource for any gifted topic

[www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org)

Source for national standards and information on gifted education

[www.sengifted.org](http://www.sengifted.org)

Source for social and emotional issues with gifted humans.

Resource used:

Webb, James T, Gore, Janet, Amend, Edward, and DeVries, Arlene, (2007). A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children. Scottsdale: Great Potential Press.

**Friends:**

**Gifted Kids and Social Relationships**



A Parents Guide

By Suzanne Fedorka