All children who develop atypically need assessment. Assessment is essential to detect learning deficits. Early detection enables early intervention. A well-kept secret is that the same developmental rule applies to children who are unusually advanced. Early detection and intervention are also essential for optimal development of gifted abilities.

If your child is smart and appears happy in school, is there any reason for testing? Isn’t testing just for children who have problems? Actually, no. Testing can prevent problems from occurring down the road.

Here are some typical scenarios of smart children:

“My daughter dumbs down at school. At home she’s reading, but at school, she won’t let on. She doesn’t want to be different from girls who can’t read yet.”

“My son was so eager to go to school, but now he complains that he isn’t learning anything. They keep drilling information he learned way before he started school.”

“The school is recommending that we hold our son back in Pre-Kindergarten for another year so that he can grow socially. He was reading books at age 3, has learned all his addition and subtraction facts, and relates beautifully to older children in the neighborhood. Should we hold him back?”

“Our child has never met a puzzle she couldn’t master. She’s great with mazes, can always find our car in the parking lot, loves doing art, and is crazy about science experiments. But she is having difficulty memorizing her math facts and her reading is not as advanced as the other students. She is starting to say, ‘I’m stupid!’”

“Our house is a battleground every night as our son refuses to do his homework. We’ve tried everything; nothing works.”

These scenarios are recipes for underachievement—children of promise who are not getting their basic needs met. If any of these anecdotes sounds familiar, consider obtaining professional advice about how to change the situation so that your child doesn’t fall through the cracks.

Sometimes gifted children receive less attention than other children in the class. We often assume that they can “make it on their own.” In some classes, gifted children become teachers’ helpers, and assist children who are struggling. In many classrooms, the goal is for all students to meet minimal standards, so the energy is focused on bringing up the bottom. Children who are surpassing these standards may be neglected. In too many classrooms, gifted children spend endless hours waiting for their classmates to catch up. Gifted children have the right to learn something new every day in school.

A surprising number of gifted children have hidden learning disabilities. They may see double or have difficulty blocking out background noise. They may hate handwriting. They may struggle to master reading, spelling or math facts. If there is a history of learning disabilities in your family, it is wise to have your child assessed early to prevent frustration and get needed intervention.

Do you have one child who seems less advanced than your other children? Is she exhausted every day after school? School shouldn’t take up that much of her energy. How can you tell if she is really gifted?
1. Does your child see relationships and make unusual associations?
2. Does your child make you laugh?
3. Does your child ask questions you can’t answer with a Google search?
4. Does your child intuitively understand you and others?
5. Does your child build incredible structures?
6. Does your child have a vivid imagination?
7. Does your child use advanced vocabulary?
8. Is your child compassionate when others are suffering?
9. Are brothers, sisters or other family members gifted?
10. Do you have anecdotes of amazing things your child has said or done?
11. Does your child come up with ideas or expressions that surprise you?
12. Is your child anxious about poor performance in school?

There are endless reasons why gifted children might score lower than their true capabilities, such as:

- Taking a group test
- Being unwilling to guess
- Purposely hiding abilities
- Discomfort with setting
- Having an off day
- Visual processing weaknesses
- Auditory processing weaknesses
- Other hidden learning disabilities
- Test anxiety
- Discomfort with tester
- Feeling rushed by the time constraints
- Tester inexperienced in testing gifted children
- Tester not probing further when probing is allowed
- Taking a version of the IQ test that generates lower scores for the gifted
- Tester assuming the Full Scale IQ score is “valid,” ignoring qualitative indicators of giftedness
- Tester not administering supplemental subtests to derive composite scores that can better estimate giftedness

If you suspect that your child is actually brighter than his or her test scores, get a second opinion. Trust your own judgment about your child. At GDC we have found that parents are usually accurate judges of their children’s abilities.

When gifted children are not given opportunities to work at their own level and pace, they settle for less than their best. They learn to slide by without stretching themselves. Patterns of underachievement are subtle and cumulative; they become harder to overcome with each year. Students who attain A’s on their papers with no effort are not prepared to take more challenging classes in high school and college. When work is too easy, confidence to attempt difficult tasks is steadily eroded.

As a parent, what can you do to prevent underachievement in your gifted child? You need to become informed so that you can ask the school to provide for your child’s needs. The first step in advocating is obtaining information about the level of your child’s abilities. Once you have solid information about your child’s strengths, weaknesses, level of ability, achievement, self-concept, personality and learning style, you have an objective basis for requesting a more challenging curriculum, or advanced reading material, or enrichment, or special class placement, or acceleration.

Your children need you to be their advocate—an informed advocate—who knows what they need and how to help them get their needs met. Smart children need smart parents, who are willing to fight the system, if necessary, to help them develop to their fullest.

_Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.,_ is a licensed psychologist and director of Gifted Development Center (GDC) in Denver, CO. She holds a Ph.D. in learning disabilities from USC. She began studying the gifted in 1963, and has contributed more than 300 publications. Since 1979, 6500 children have been assessed at GDC. [www.giftedddevelopment.com](http://www.giftedddevelopment.com), (303) 837-8378.