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# GET **GIFTED** STUDENTS TALKING

Jean Sunde Peterson, Ph.D.

**76** Ready-to-Use Group  
Discussions About  
Identity, Stress, Relationships,  
and More **Grades 6–12**



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free spirit  
PUBLISHING®



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# DEDICATION

to Reuben



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Immediate and extended family, new and longtime friends, colleagues, and many, many students and clients have taught me about development—and about giftedness. I cannot recall a time when I was not around bright people who were growing and changing. That process continues to fascinate me. I have appreciated and been influenced by these stimulating, highly idiosyncratic individuals.

I am especially indebted to my husband, Reuben, who is highly committed to his own work as an educator, for his unwavering support of my teaching, writing, and other interests. We have grown and changed together. I also want to thank my children, Sonia and Nathan, for being patient with me when they were young, sharing me with my teaching career and waiting for summer, when our lives would change dramatically for three months.

Since the first *Talk with Teens* books appeared in the 1990s, counselors, counselors-in-training, and classroom and gifted education teachers have given me feedback and ideas for future revisions. Their adaptations, struggles with unclear directions, and excitement over successes have all informed me. I have especially appreciated the feedback and suggestions of Terry Bradley, in Boulder, Colorado, over several years and have included three of her many creative ideas in this book—the paired activity in “Self in Perspective,” the stress-ball activity in “Sorting Out Stress,” and the books activity in “Angry!”

I am relieved that the field of gifted education has embraced the idea that paying attention to the social and emotional development of gifted kids is important. I am grateful to pioneers in this area for thinking, exploring, studying, writing, presenting, consulting, organizing, counseling, leading, and publishing helpful resources, among them Nick Colangelo, Barbara Kerr, James Webb, George Betts, Michael Piechowski, Linda Silverman, Joanne Whitmore, Tom Hébert, Sal Mendaglio, Tracy Cross, Lawrence Coleman, Jane Piiro, Donna Ford, Sylvia Rimm, Ed Amend, Andrew Mahoney, Susan Jackson, Helen Nevitt, Tom Greenspon, and Judy Galbraith. Through personal contact and through their writing, I recognized them as kindred spirits during my initial years in the National Association for Gifted Children.

I want to acknowledge Penny Oldfather for supporting the discussion groups I organized when I coordinated a program for gifted students in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for five years. Group work was a fairly new idea in the field at that time, and her approval, as director of the Unique Learning Experiences program, was crucial to the viability of the group component. Principal Fred Stephens, a former school counselor, supported this strand in the program, and I want to acknowledge him as well. My friend Norma Haan, a former college roommate of mine and a longtime therapist, was a ready consultant.

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# PREFACE

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*Get Gifted Students Talking* is a book that has come full circle in many ways. It was my work with gifted students that inspired an approach to group work that was outlined in two books published several years ago: *Talk with Teens About Self and Stress* and *Talk with Teens About Feelings, Family, Relationships, and the Future*. The original books were written for the general population, since the preventive, development-oriented discussion group format is potentially beneficial for all teens. Since that time, however, social and emotional development has received increasing attention in the field of gifted education. Though we understand that gifted teens face the same basic developmental tasks as the rest of the school population, *how* they experience development is probably unique. Their own and others' expectations about their development are also likely to differ from what other teens experience. Therefore, this book reflects my assumption that highly capable teens can benefit from opportunities to talk about developmental hurdles in a group comprised of only gifted teens.

When it was time to revise the books, my publisher and I agreed that two volumes were still needed but with distinct foci: one for the general population—called *The Essential Guide to Talking with Teens*—and one for gifted teens—*The Essential Guide for Talking with Gifted Teens*. This book is a retitled update of the latter. The former book has also been updated, with the title *How (and Why) to Get Students Talking*.

*Get Gifted Students Talking* incorporates the best elements of the earlier editions—in the sessions selected and in the detailed guidelines for group work, including the emphasis on skills related to discussing social and emotional concerns. I believe these skills are important to future relationships and often are not given adequate attention in schools. Most significant, however, are new topics, such as the realities of living online today and the importance of resilience, that reflect issues especially important to gifted teens. Information about the social and emotional development of gifted kids, based on current clinical perspectives, research, and literature, is included throughout the book. The background information for many sessions has been updated. Suggestions and sample questions have been improved and extended.

I encourage you to let me know about your group work with gifted teens, how specific session topics and suggestions work for you, and what new activities or ideas you have used to adapt the sessions to your context.

You can email me at [help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com) or send me a letter in care of:

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**Jean Sunde Peterson**

# INTRODUCTION

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## About This Book

### Description and Benefits

Gifted education teachers often focus mostly on the academic needs of bright students, developing an advanced curriculum in a special program or ensuring that curriculum and instruction are differentiated for gifted students in mainstream classrooms. Traditionally, much less attention has been given to gifted students' social and emotional development. *Get Gifted Students Talking* provides an opportunity for gifted teens to “just talk”—to share feelings and concerns with supportive peers, make connections, and develop expressive language—in a discussion group facilitated by a caring, nonjudgmental adult. Regardless of whether normal developmental tasks, life events, or personal circumstances affect students' attendance, classroom performance, or behavior, the sensitivity and intensity of gifted teens probably adds an extra layer to their internal response to challenges related to growing up. Yet, because they are perceived as highly capable and may appear to be doing well, adults may assume that gifted children and teens are handling social and emotional concerns adequately. Furthermore, gifted teens are often reluctant to ask for help, believing, like the adults, that they should be able to deal effectively with personal problems, difficult circumstances, low morale, or low motivation on their own. Even when family life is discouraging, deeply ingrained achievement habits may allow high-achieving gifted students to continue to demonstrate excellent classroom and talent performance, protecting their public image of success and again contributing to parents', peers', teachers', and coaches' assumption that support isn't needed. Fundamentally, little is known about the inner life of gifted teens. Adults rarely ask how these students are experiencing various aspects of life, including developmental changes and the day-to-day challenges of social, extracurricular, and academic life at school.

My experience with approximately 1,400 group sessions with gifted teens has taught me that, collectively, they have a wide range of concerns that often are not apparent to others. For many, adolescence is not an easy time. Even remarkable performers, who delight the adults around them, are growing and developing—with self-doubts and uncertainties about present and future. Gifted underachievers may not feel as self-assured as some of them seem. Gifted rebels may feel in control only when others stay at a distance, avoiding their speeding, looping tetherball.

The ready-to-use semi-structured sessions provided here can serve as a curriculum that nurtures the social and emotional development of these and other gifted teens. The sessions have been used in programs for gifted students in public and private middle schools and high schools, in summer university programs and camps for high-ability teens, and in yearlong residential schools. The suggestions, activities, and written exercises in this book, along with the focused but flexible format, have been thoroughly tested, are supported by three research studies, and epitomize the Peterson Proactive Developmental Attention model (2018), which advocates for proactive attention to social and emotional development.

I have witnessed the benefits of these guided discussion groups for gifted students of many ages. The groups can accomplish the following:

- allow gifted teens to focus on how and where they are, in the present, not on how or where invested adults think they ought to be
- generate self-reflection in both well-adjusted gifted students and those with significant risk factors
- help gifted students normalize “weird” thoughts, sort out personal conflict, put their own and others' expectations into perspective, and lower stress levels
- be an opportunity to explore the notion that sensitivities and intensities are associated with giftedness
- give students who are cynical and negative about school an experience that makes it more comfortable and satisfying
- help group members learn to anticipate problems and find support for problem-solving
- serve a preventive function by improving self-esteem and social ease, neither of which should automatically be assumed in gifted teens
- give educators and counselors an opportunity to interact with several gifted students at one time with a focus on social and emotional development, maximizing time and impact

Researchers exploring the concept of giftedness have often focused on assets rather than burdens associated with high ability, but a growing trend is to look at the latter as well. Researchers in the field of gifted education are often educational psychologists, and many have



used a *quantitative* approach to explore areas such as motivation, self-regulation, cognition, problem-solving ability, higher-order thinking, the process of learning, and differentiated curriculum. Others have studied gifted students' subjective experience of social development *qualitatively* (such as through interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and student papers), discovering and pursuing new research directions as a result. The session topics in this book were chosen on the basis of research, clinical literature, and clinical experience.

For the sake of brevity and reading ease, *gifted teens* will be the phrase used to identify the target population here. A more current and more appropriate phrase would be *teens who are gifted*. The term *gifted* will be used throughout the book as a descriptor (not as a noun), rather than the phrase *gifted and talented*, in line with the national organization's name (National Association for Gifted Children) and most pertinent scholarly literature. In this book, *giftedness* will refer to exceptional ability that represents top percentages on a bell curve of one or several domains.

## Genesis

For twenty-five years, I was a teacher in public schools. For nineteen of those years, I taught mostly English literature, language, and writing to students in junior high school (ages twelve to fourteen) and senior high school (ages fifteen to eighteen). My years in the classroom tuned me in to the social and emotional world of teens, and I observed and interacted with many who were gifted. When they wrote essays, interacted with me during yearbook meetings, worked with me in foreign-language club activities, or lingered after class, they taught me about adolescent development—and about sensitivities and intensities. Of those who were intellectually gifted (demonstrated largely through writing insights and skills), some were high achievers and some were underachievers.

In general, students across a range of ability levels readily accepted my invitation to respond in writing to the literature we were reading. In fact, we did not discuss literature much orally; instead, they wrote in their journals about what they were reading, and I responded in the margins. There was no “correct” interpretation. They were encouraged to immerse themselves, think about the characters, apply perspectives related to other subjects and to their own world, gain insights, and learn through the process. We used class time for providing background material to help them understand book contexts. We sometimes discussed what they were reading, but students seemed to appreciate their autonomy for drawing conclusions themselves. In their journals, they asked questions about what they did not understand. I like to think that all those students benefited from this approach, but the

gifted ones seemed particularly to thrive. The process was open-ended, with no limits on insight, creativity, or depth. Because the students were thoughtfully responding to literature, my initial concerns about appearing to be invasive or voyeuristic in reading their journal entries soon dissipated.

Some of the many reasons for using this teaching approach relate to the discussion groups I later developed. Namely, students need information, and they need to develop skills. In the English classroom, I wanted students to learn to express themselves on paper and to become self-reflective, independent thinkers. I also wanted to hear from everyone, not just from highly verbal and assertive students. I employed an interactive, constructivist approach to immerse them in learning, with hands-on classroom activities, media and community resources, vocabulary-in-context exercises, classroom dialogue, and reading. We learned together, and the students became more and more comfortable with complexity and ambiguity. The open-endedness, “soft” direction, independent learning, and communication with the teacher did not reflect top-down learning. All students in the writing and literature classes I taught at that school seemed to take the journals seriously. They learned not to just summarize the plot. I learned that adolescents will invest, be discreet, ask important questions of each other, behave well, and gain wisdom when they feel respected and when the teacher is an appropriately unobtrusive guide. I applied this perspective to the development-oriented discussion groups described in this book.

I believe that gifted teens, like other teens, are hungry for acknowledgment and nonjudgmental listening. I soon saw that the gifted students in the classroom wanted to *be known*—to be recognized for individual worth and uniqueness, not just for intellect or talent. Some stayed after class to talk about difficult personal matters. I learned that there were many important things they did not discuss with peers, and some of these teens did not have a comfortable enough relationship with a parent to ask tough questions or express concerns.

I was certainly reminded that gifted students are not exempt from troubling life events, difficult family situations, and challenges related to social and emotional development. The parents of some were divorced, unemployed, addicted, ill, absent, neglectful, preoccupied, or abusive. In contrast, some had parents who hovered protectively. Most important, all of these bright students were experiencing universal developmental challenges, although perhaps qualitatively differently from others their age. They fought with siblings, had “crushes” and breakups, and were anxious about the future. Some struggled with the hypocrisy of the adults around them and the sad state of the world as they saw it, and they responded to these

and other issues with sadness, frustration, irritability, lack of motivation for schoolwork, and sometimes problematic behavior and depression. They had difficulty managing their complex, fragmented lives. Sometimes they felt like exploding from tension. They needed someone to talk with. They needed affirmation for their humanness. They needed to have feelings and experiences validated.

Eventually, in another school, I made small-group discussion a component of a multi-option program I created for gifted students, an approach that had not been tried previously at that school. I had seen the need for support and attentive listening in the gifted teens in my former classes. This group experience would be focused on social and emotional development—“growing up.”

The groups did not catch on immediately, but by second semester, after a carefully crafted invitation focused on stress and high expectations, there were three groups, with eight to ten students each. The next year there were six groups, and then ten, with two hour-long groups per day, coordinated with the two-hour lunch schedule. In addition, for one day, usually annually, I invited an administrator, a counselor, or a student teacher to join a group—with no group experiencing a guest more than once, and always with only one guest—so that those adults could learn about proactive small-group work (in this case, with gifted teens) and perhaps develop a more holistic view of gifted students. Group members were eager to demonstrate their group. I was careful to choose a topic for those sessions that would not require a great level of trust (for example, “What do you wish teachers understood about teens like you?”). The guests invariably said later that they had never thought that gifted students might feel misunderstood and narrowly viewed.

The students faithfully attended group meetings even though attendance was voluntary. Some came to school when they were not feeling well because they “didn’t want to miss group.” Most attended the weekly group meetings for three years, with different development-related topics to talk about each week. We hardly ever discussed academics, *per se*, but we did address the stress related to the classroom and competitive activities. Group members became close through steady, undramatic weekly contact, and when a personal or institutional crisis arose, the groups were a readily available support system. The students taught me, they taught each other, and they learned about themselves. The topics were not particularly heavy, but they resonated. The students relaxed and “just talked.” Some students indicated, in written feedback at the end of each year, that their group had helped them survive a difficult year. Almost all mentioned that it was important to hear that other gifted teens had concerns. The most shy members said they had gained from

hearing others talk about growing up. Even normally gregarious group members wrote that they realized they were not alone in dealing with personal challenges. The first *Talk with Teens* books grew out of the manuals I eventually created for the groups.

In other locations, I continued to form middle and high school groups with various populations. Concurrently, I finished doctoral studies in counselor education, began university teaching and research, and became a licensed mental health counselor, working for several years in schools, churches, alternative teen facilities, and substance abuse treatment programs. I often worked with highly able children, teens, and families, continuing to learn about the social and emotional development of gifted individuals. Until I retired, I made sure the future school counselors in the university program I directed were prepared to counsel gifted children and teens. Previous editions of this book became the ongoing social and emotional curriculum for summer programs for gifted students at the university. From the highly capable graduate students in the selective school counseling program, I learned how giftedness is experienced after high school. I continue to write, speak, facilitate small-group discussion, and counsel gifted teens.

## Purpose

The purpose of these guided discussions is to support the social and emotional development of gifted teens. Whether through small- or large-group discussion, they become increasingly self-aware, and that in turn helps them make better decisions, resolve problems, and experience healthier relationships. They learn to embrace their complexity and make sense of their emotions and behavior. They feel more in control of their lives.

Support comes naturally in an environment where group members can express themselves. All teens need practice putting concerns and feelings into words. As verbal and social as many gifted teens are, they may not be skilled at communicating feelings and concerns clearly, genuinely, and effectively. Learning to talk about what is important to them and to listen attentively to others will probably enhance their present and future relationships. Adolescence is a good time to learn these skills. Small groups, in particular, offer two opportunities that may be lacking elsewhere:

- a noncompetitive environment where no grades are given and everyone is relatively equal
- a safe place to talk about the journey of adolescence with others on the same road

Gifted teens gain social skills through interacting with each other in the presence of a nonjudgmental

adult. Social hierarchies, and even arrogance, tend to disappear when the focus is on social and emotional development. Everyone has complex feelings, frustrations, and anxieties. In this setting, teens discover what they and others have in common; gain experience in initiating, listening, and responding during conversations; and become aware of how they are seen by others. All these gains can enhance social ease and self-esteem, both of which can help make school a more pleasant, more comfortable place. In the current era of school accountability, small-group work may also be viewed as a strategy for improving attitudes and test performance of gifted underachievers.

The format of *Get Gifted Students Talking* is not designed specifically to teach group skills or to acquaint teens with the vocabulary of group work. However, many such skills and some aspects of group dynamics will likely become familiar. The extensive introductory material here actually offers a solid overview of techniques related to group facilitation. With guided group discussion, process is more important than product, and one goal is to enhance the skill of articulating social and emotional concerns. The focus, objectives, and suggestions for content and closure contained in each session provide a framework for solid, substantive, invigorating group experiences.

It is important to understand that the purpose of these group discussions is not to “fix” group members. Even though the questions are designed to provoke reflection and introspection, the emphasis is always on articulating feelings and thoughts in the presence of others who listen and care. These groups are not meant to be therapy groups. Yes, group work in any form has potential therapeutic value, and some noticeable changes in attitude and behavior often occur in the kind of groups promoted here. However, even when it appears that these changes have occurred because of the response and support of a group, other factors, such as changes at home, the healing effect of time, or developmental leaps, may also have contributed. Nevertheless, being involved in a group might help, and even be crucial, in times of personal crisis, regardless of whether others in the group are aware of the distress. It is important to note here that mental health professionals can use many of these sessions with individuals or in group and family counseling to foster communication skills and personal growth. Though few in number, providers who specialize in working with gifted clients do exist, and some do group work.

As is the case whenever adults stand firmly and supportively beside teens, establish trust, and participate in their complex lives, you will serve your group best by listening actively, with the focus fully on them, and offering your nonjudgmental presence as they find their own direction.

## Meeting ASCA Standards

The national standards for school counseling programs, developed by the American School Counselor Association, focus on academic, career, and personal/social development of students. The focused discussions outlined in this book address standards in each of these areas, with giftedness in mind.

In regard to academic development, various sessions can help gifted students develop positive attitudes toward school, toward teachers and administrators, and toward learning. Group members become more aware of their learning preferences. Topics related to post-secondary options and transitions help students anticipate the future.

Related to career development, almost all discussion topics are intended to enhance self-awareness of personal strengths and interests. Such awareness is important for finding career direction, particularly when gifted teens struggle with *multipotentiality* (many strong interests and talents and potential career paths). A basic premise of this book is that bringing gifted teens together in small groups helps them make comfortable interpersonal connections—through listening and responding, supporting and being supported, and appropriately expressing feelings and opinions. They break down cultural and socioeconomic stereotypes and learn about the perspectives of others. Interpersonal skills and sensitivity to others will help in future employment. Group members reflect on the work attitudes of significant adults in their lives and imagine themselves in future work contexts. They also learn about post-secondary educational settings and are able to ask questions and receive important information about post-secondary social, emotional, and academic transitions. Group facilitators are provided suggestions for organizing career-oriented experiences outside of school as well.

Most important, this book focuses on personal development—on simply growing up. Session topics encourage self-reflection about identity, feelings, and peer, family, and community relationships, not only in terms of universal developmental tasks, but also acknowledging that giftedness has potential impact on these areas. Members develop skills in a group, a social microcosm, potentially enhancing their lives in the present and after the school years. In addition, group members learn about emotional and physical vulnerabilities related to technology, high-risk social situations, relationships, and stress, and they consider ways to be social without putting themselves at risk.

## Assumptions

The format and content of *Get Gifted Students Talking* reflect the following assumptions, which you may want to keep in mind as you lead your group.

1. Gifted teens have a desire to be heard, listened to, taken seriously, and respected. They want to be seen complexly—more than simply performers or nonperformers.
2. Because of their place on a bell curve of ability, they have a sense of differentness.
3. Some who are quiet, shy, intimidated, or untrusting do not spontaneously offer comments, but they, too, want to be recognized and understood as unique, complex individuals.
4. All gifted teens need and appreciate support, no matter how strong and successful they seem to others. All have doubts about themselves at times. All feel socially inept and uncomfortable at times.
5. All feel stressed at times. Some feel stressed most of the time. Many feel stressed because of overcommitment, overscheduling, or overinvolvement. All are concerned about the future.
6. Whether or not it is demonstrated outwardly, all have a high level of sensitivity to themselves and their contexts.
7. All are sensitive to family tension. Some are trying hard to keep families afloat or intact, and they may be given heavy responsibilities because of their abilities.
8. All probably have some sort of image to protect.
9. All feel angry at times.
10. All gifted teens, no matter how smooth and self-confident they appear, need practice talking honestly about feelings.

## The Nuts and Bolts of Group Work

### Group Settings

The session structure is appropriate for both small-group and large-group discussion, although most topics work better with small groups because trust is established more quickly in them. Sessions are arranged in a purposeful progression for a long-term series but may certainly be selected and rearranged to create a short-term program or focus. Materials should be selected to fit context, purpose, and need. Here are some settings in which the sessions might be used:

- school-counseling and advisory groups for students of high ability
- summer enrichment programs for gifted teens
- residential schools for gifted teens
- leadership retreats, programs (those attending are likely to have demonstrated, or have the potential for, capable leadership)
- music, athletics, academic clubs, or other organizational retreats for group-building
- at-home family discussions

### Length of Meetings

Ideal meeting length varies, depending on the age of participants. Thirty or forty minutes is usually adequate for students in grades six and seven—a bit longer, if hands-on activities are included. Eighth graders and high school students usually appreciate a fifty-minute session (or other class-period length)—after they settle in and gain trust. I recommend that groups meeting over lunch be allowed to leave a few minutes early from their preceding classes so that they can get their food before all classes are dismissed to maximize the time available for discussion.

These sessions are also useful for extended sessions with gifted teens. I have used them for twice-weekly ninety-minute sessions with groups of fifteen high school juniors at a summer Governor’s School, as well as for four-session-total, ninety-minute series with profoundly gifted pre-teens outside of school. In general, alternating sessions that include activities with sessions focused mostly on discussion is helpful. Maintaining stable group membership is important for trust.

### Large Groups

*Get Gifted Students Talking* can be useful in a self-contained classroom for gifted students or classrooms at residential or other schools for gifted students. Ongoing weekly discussions, or a week of daily sessions on coping with stress, for example, can be part of the classroom curriculum. Homeroom, administration periods, or “community time” can use an activity or discussion catalysts effectively if the time allowed is adequate (at least twenty minutes). In a general-population school, sometimes gifted students are placed in the same homeroom so that large-group discussion geared to social and emotional development is possible.

### Small Groups

#### GROUP SIZE

For small-group work, ideal group size varies according to age level. For younger gifted teens, a group of five to seven seems to work best. Regardless of age, however, I do not recommend more than eight because each group member needs time to talk, and trust and a sense

of connection may be difficult to achieve in a larger group. These are general guidelines. I have facilitated successful small-group discussion with as few as three students, who bonded well and continued to develop trust after other members moved away.

Group dynamics differ depending on the size of a class or group, but the focus and most of the strategies here work with both small and large groups. Since a discussion of an activity sheet can easily take an hour with a group of eight verbal students, adjustments must be made when those sheets are used with larger groups. For example, full-size classes can be divided into small groups (three to five members) for sharing, with guidelines for discussion.

### MEETING LOCATION

For small-group work, I recommend a small room. Such a space is more likely than a classroom to be private and uninterrupted, to have fewer visual distractions, and to be conducive to a sense of intimacy. I also prefer to sit around a table—not only for comfort, but also because sessions may involve activities such as brief writing, manipulating clay or other media, or drawing. Moving student desks into a circle also usually works well. Lying or sitting on the floor for an entire session is actually less comfortable than sitting in a chair for some.

## Forming a Group and Selecting Topics

Most of the guided discussion sessions in *Get Gifted Students Talking* are appropriate for gifted adolescents at any age, as well as young adults. However, with so many session topics to choose from, I encourage you to choose carefully those most appropriate for the youngest of your students, keeping in mind that their social and emotional development probably does not match their level of cognitive precocity (referred to as *asynchronous development* in the field). Gifted children may indeed experience depression and thoughts of suicide, disordered eating, sexual and other relational aggression, and self-harming behaviors, but those topics can wait. Be aware that the language in this book intentionally accommodates older teens, who might be particularly sensitive to “being talked down to.” The suggested questions for each session are generally appropriate across several ages, but they can certainly be adjusted for the ages you work with.

Ideally, groups are “closed,” with membership not changing. Each time someone is added or someone leaves, it is again a “new” group, with group dynamics changed and a need to reestablish trust. However, short-term absence usually has only a short-term effect. Regardless of group membership, attendance is usually not a problem after trust has been established.

I have found that the best groups are often those whose members do not know each other well outside of

the group. They seem to feel free to share, and they do not have to preface all comments with “Well, someone in here has heard me say this before, but . . .” It should not be assumed that gifted students are well acquainted with each other. Gifted teens who are involved in some activities may not be acquainted with gifted teens in other activities, even when both activities are under the athletic or music umbrella, for instance. And gifted teens with heavy home responsibilities or after-school jobs may not be involved in activities at all. I hasten to note, however, that I have had well-functioning groups in which most members knew each other well. The groups helped them know each other better. Even best friends may not typically discuss topics like those in this volume.

However, depending on the size of the student population you draw from, you may not have a choice. If some members of your group know each other, it is important to move the group beyond the natural division of friends and nonfriends. Having a focus, with specific activities and written exercises, helps ensure that students who are friends do not dominate or irritate the others with “inside humor.” Encouraging students to change seating each time can also be helpful, although it is important to make that a group norm at the outset, since groups—especially middle school groups—may be resistant to doing that later.

I like to promote the idea of using the groups to break down social barriers. In general, I prefer a membership balance between achievers and underachievers, high-risk and low-risk individuals, students highly involved in school activities and not so involved, and representatives of various ethnic and socioeconomic groups. The mix helps members break down stereotypes and discover common ground through talking about development.

If several groups are being formed at one time, distribution can be accomplished by initially compiling a list of all students who accept the invitation to participate and then sorting the list. Of course, recruitment must target those least likely to feel welcome. In some cases, the highest-functioning students may be the most reluctant to join, fearing that the groups are geared only to “problems” and “counseling” and that participation will somehow stigmatize them. These students might also feel anxious about the focus on nonacademic areas. Underachieving students and those with other risk factors may think that they will be the only ones in the group with stress, vulnerabilities, fears, and problematic performance or attitudes. The latter can benefit from realizing that everyone has developmental concerns. That reality should be included in any recruitment material. For example, stress from high expectations can be mentioned as a common denominator among most gifted teens.

All social, cultural, and socioeconomic groups have a great deal to learn from each other, and a group setting can be an ideal learning environment. Gifted teens may not feel comfortable talking about developmental concerns in intellectually diverse groups, but they are apt to be open when a group is composed entirely of gifted teens, including those with various levels of *achievement*. In fact, such group composition can foster highly productive discussions. Often, underachievers are amazed that achievers have social and emotional problems; some achievers are equally amazed that underachievers can be highly intelligent and extremely articulate. Discovering common ground is a worthy goal. Gifted students with behavior problems, difficulty with authority, or poor social skills are usually well served when group membership is mixed, with at least half of the group's members having good interpersonal skills, behavior, and achievement.

If mixing is not possible in your setting, or if your group has been brought together because members share a common concern or have a specific purpose and agenda, you can still use these guided discussions with confidence, since they deal with common developmental issues. In fact, I often recommended to school counseling graduate students that talking about developmental challenges can help even the most angry or disruptive students. In other words, the topic does not have to be anger or behavior, *per se*, even though it might be helpful to brainstorm strategies for improving behavior at some point. Simply having a chance to connect with others, express concerns, and feel more comfortable in school can help reduce problematic behaviors. Feeling heard may help students view school as an accommodating, comfortable place.

When forming a group, consider mixing gender identities. With gifted teens in high school, I prefer mixed groups regarding gender. It is important for teens at that age to learn about each other in a safe and nonjudgmental place, outside of the regular classroom and apart from usual social settings. It is also important for all students to learn how to communicate with, and in the presence of, people with gender identities different from their own. Especially for gifted teens who are shy or who lack social contact, a discussion group may be a chance to have contact with people who do not share the same gender identity. Even for the highly social, a group can raise awareness of gender and gender-identity issues and enhance ability to function effectively in relationships now and in the future, including in marriage and other partnerships, in employment, in positions of leadership, and in parenting.

On the other hand, same-gender grouping also has advantages and is particularly appropriate when the issues are gender-specific, especially troublesome and gender-related, or perceived by students to be unsafe for discussion with more than one gender identity

represented in the group. Same-gender groups can sometimes empower members in ways that mixed groups cannot. Gender homogeneity may be desirable in an addiction-recovery or sexual-trauma-recovery group in a treatment center, for example. Obviously, decisions about grouping depend on the goal and purpose of the group, as well as the age of students. In middle schools, sometimes groups comprised of students who gender-identify similarly work best, with members appreciating the safety of talking about certain topics with others assumed to be experiencing the same physiological and emotional changes. That homogeneity is usually less a concern in high school. I once studied the implementation of a small-group social and emotional curriculum at a middle school for gifted students and found that students appreciated that the weekly meetings were not mixed once a month, when special topics were being covered. The other three meetings per month were successful as mixed.

When students understand the purpose of the groups, and after they move beyond initial discomfort with the nonacademic emphasis, they can relax, invest, and appreciate the opportunity to talk with others at their intellectual level about growing up. For many gifted teens, one key ingredient in trust and feeling understood seems to be a similar ability level.

Similarity of age is another key ingredient. Because the sessions are geared to social and emotional development, not to cognitive and academic concerns, it is best to form age-based groups—especially when gifted students have skipped grades and are in a grade with older students. A twelve-year-old in eighth grade is developmentally different and has differing concerns from eighth graders who are fourteen, for instance, and even thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds can have difficulty connecting with each other about social and emotional concerns. Gifted seniors are likely looking ahead in ways that even juniors are not, so seniors of any age might have common career-development and college concerns. However, *socially and emotionally*, a thirteen-year-old senior probably would connect better with gifted age peers. Relationship issues differ along the age continuum, and it is best when students can communicate with others in their own age group about these concerns. Intellectually, and in regard to interests, even very young gifted children might feel most comfortable talking with gifted teens or adults. But socially and emotionally their developmental needs and challenges are likely to be similar to those of age-mates.

## Inviting Students to Join a Group

In a school, the best way to encourage students to join your group, if membership is voluntary, is to invite them personally. In any event, I recommend that you not call it a *counseling* group when describing it to

prospective group members, even if you are a counselor, but certainly if you are not, because of liability concerns. Some students are automatically turned off and turned away by the *counseling* label. Later, if someone asks if it is a counseling group, explain that counseling is basically talking and listening with someone trained in that process, and the group is similar in that aspect. If you are a trained counselor, your group could be called a counseling group, but the caveat about perception still applies. *Support group* is appropriate when there is a common, specific agenda, or a shared problem area. However, if the group is largely preventive, with self-awareness and personal growth as goals, then *support* probably is too problem-oriented for many students. *Discussion group is always my preference in school settings.*

In schools, I have contacted students individually to explain a proposed group, and I have also brought prospective full-size discussion groups together to hear the plan. In either case, I recommend assuring students that joining the group is not a high-risk thing to do. That message is important for gifted teens, especially those who are not used to venturing into the unknown. They may not be confident that they can adapt to whatever transpires. The advantage of calling in a whole group is that the students can see who else will be attending. On the other hand, some might decide against joining for that very reason, hanging on to stereotypes without giving unfamiliar or unknown gifted peers a chance. When meeting with students individually, you might give them the names of a few prospective members—but *only if they ask*, and only if it is possible to share names in advance. If a student wants to ensure that friends will be in a group, I prefer to say, simply, “I encourage you to come and be surprised. It’s good to get to know new people, and sometimes it’s good *not* to know anyone else well at the outset. If you decide later that you are not comfortable with the group, you have the option of not continuing.” *If you decide to meet with all prospective members together, be prepared to do at least a typical, brief activity to demonstrate what the group will be like.*

Be sure to emphasize both the social and the emotional purposes of the group. Gifted kids may be surprised and intrigued by that information, especially if academics and talent are emphasized elsewhere in their lives. Tell them it is a rare opportunity to connect with gifted peers about nonacademic life—even those they interact with regularly otherwise. I routinely mention stress and stereotypes as sample topics for discussion, and these seem to resonate. Explain that, beyond pursuing general goals, the group will determine its own unique atmosphere. That much of an explanation usually suffices. If students want to know more, show them the contents of this book. The session titles are varied, and students usually find them interesting—and unexpected.

If you use this book with gifted high school students, it helps to tell them, in addition to other potential benefits, that when you know them better through the group experience, you will be able to write more complete job, college, or scholarship recommendations for them. Explain that you will also be a better and more informed advocate for them if they ever need assistance.

## Students Who Have Significant Risk Factors

If, as a professional counselor, you want to form groups for gifted teens around a major concern, a variety of developmental topics in this volume are appropriate for generating discussion. Any of the following can be a common concern related specifically to giftedness:

- lack of family acceptance of, comfort with, or affirmation of high ability
- anxiety
- perfectionism
- preoccupation with being in control
- preoccupation with performance
- profound giftedness
- twice-exceptionality (one or more learning disabilities and giftedness)
- being someone who bullies or being the target of bullying—or being both

Other life events and circumstances are also possible concerns:

- major change or disruption in the family
- misuse of substances by a parent, a guardian, another family member, peers, or self
- physical or sexual abuse
- family tragedy
- lack of family support for school attendance or achievement
- seriously considering dropping out of school
- terminal illness in a family member
- frequent family relocation
- poverty
- death of someone close
- feelings of loss when something has changed
- parental military deployment
- a school crisis

- pregnancy
- being new in school

For several of the previous concerns, faithfully applying the guidelines of this book and focusing on development can provide support and generate helpful interaction. However, unless you have counselor training, facilitating school groups focused on other issues (for example, abuse, tragedy, and bereavement), or forming groups composed solely of individuals who struggle with depression, hyperactivity, drug use, or behavioral or emotional disability is unwise, unethical, and potentially unproductive or even harmful. There are also significant privacy issues related to grouping kids together with a stated concern. Even for trained professionals, such grouping often is not recommended. One common guideline is not to have the same pathology in all group members. In this regard, however, underachievement should not be seen as pathology; grouping gifted underachievers together for discussion of developmental topics can indeed be productive.

Some students may not be eager to join a group. If attendance is voluntary, perhaps meet first with these students individually. Explain that you will be leading a discussion group for gifted students, and you are inviting them to participate. If the student has difficulty with authority, is an underachieving student, or is known as a joker or a rebel, for example, state that you are looking for interesting, complex students who can help make a “good group.” Say that you are looking specifically for students who express their abilities in unusual ways because you do not want a group that is afraid to challenge each other and think, and you do not want only students who do what is expected. Reframing characteristics usually considered troublesome in this positive way often takes students by surprise and encourages them to participate.

However, regardless of a student’s behavior, always present the group’s purpose genuinely: to give gifted students a chance to talk about issues that are important to teens with high ability. Be sincere, accepting, and supportive in your invitation. With students in distress, as with all prospective group members, take care not to frighten them away by sounding invasive or therapy oriented. Give them time to warm up to the idea of interacting with others about growing up.

## Primary and Secondary Prevention

*Get Gifted Students Talking* is appropriate for primary prevention in the form of focused, development-oriented discussion meant to prevent problems and proactively nurture development. It is also appropriate for secondary prevention—that is, as early intervention to restore balance quickly after a personal crisis has occurred. For these purposes, the sessions can benefit

groups composed of diverse gifted students, including those who struggle—whether silently or dramatically. All can benefit from attention to social and emotional development. Giftedness might even put them at unique risk for poor emotional and/or educational outcomes. Circumstances can also put them at risk.

**Teens experiencing family transitions** can benefit from the sessions in the Stress section. They might also feel affirmed and be able to express uncomfortable feelings in some of the sessions in the Identity section. Some of the family-oriented sessions in the Relationships section might also be helpful during transitions, as well as some sessions in the Feelings and Family sections.

**Gifted teens at risk for poor personal or educational outcomes** might benefit from these:

- “Façade, Image, and Stereotype”
- “More Than Test Scores and Grades?”
- “Learning Preferences”
- “Intensity, Compulsivity, and Control”
- “Influencers”
- “Authority”
- “Getting What We Need”

**Group members who are feeling sad or depressed** often find some of the sessions on stress to be helpful. In addition, the following can be valuable:

- “Self in Perspective”
- “Intensity, Compulsivity, and Control”
- “Playing”
- “Lonely at the Top”
- “Feeling Stuck”
- “Resilience”
- “Getting What We Need”

Gifted students returning from, or currently in, treatment for substance abuse or disordered eating might also find these sessions helpful, including when they are quietly integrated or reintegrated into a “regular group” (that is, without a common concern). The prevention- and development-oriented sessions specifically focused on drug use or disordered eating are not necessarily appropriate for these students. But *basic developmental topics are appropriate regardless of situation*. Gifted teens who use substances and/or are involved with potentially life-threatening behaviors do not fit the positive stereotype of “gifted kids,” but they do certainly exist, regardless of whether they have been identified for special programs.



# Leading the Sessions

## Facilitators

These sessions are designed to be used with gifted teens in a variety of settings by group facilitators who may have one or more of the following roles:

- school counselors
- counselors and advisors at residential or other programs/schools for gifted teens
- teachers in school programs for gifted students
- counselors and social workers in community agencies, treatment centers, or private practice
- wellness advocates and group builders at retreats for gifted youth
- parents or primary caregivers (in informal one-on-one or family interaction)

## Are You Ready to Lead a Discussion Group?

Especially if you are not used to dealing with large or small groups in informal discussion, you may find the following suggestions and observations helpful:

- Discussion related to social and emotional areas involves more personal risk and is much less “controllable” than discussion in the intellectual arena. Such loss of control can feel frightening for facilitators or group members accustomed to using cognitive and verbal strengths to control situations.
- It is important to recognize that some group members may be more intellectually nimble than you are (a common admonition when preparing teachers to work with gifted kids). A group member may, literally, be 1 in 100,000 or 1 in 1,000,000 in terms of intellectual ability. Do your best to make this a nonissue, regardless of how you perceive your own ability. Acknowledging it overtly calls attention to something that can, at times, keep gifted teens at a distance, feeling that no one can connect to them and being afraid to show vulnerability in discussions. Instead, *keep the attention on emotional, not cognitive, development*. Group members all are developing socially and emotionally, probably not easily. If you use the questions provided, their attention will not be on you, but instead on what those questions generate. Then you can mostly observe as they interact with each other.
- If you are careful to keep the focus on social and emotional issues, there will be little opportunity for group members to play competitive, “one-up” games with you or with each other.

- Significant adults in gifted teens’ lives might have focused more on behavior than on feelings, more on academic performance than on social and emotional needs, or more on performance than on personal development. Some teens will be eager and immediately grateful for the emphasis on social and emotional development, but some might be uncomfortable or even frightened by it initially, especially those whose families guard privacy at extreme levels and view emotional expression as problematic. Regardless, your concentrated attention to expressive language and social and emotional concerns will probably be a new experience for them. Their discomfort may even elicit problematic behavior at first. Social and emotional concerns are not likely to be debatable, but, because of anxiety, some “debaters” might want to deflect attention onto political or other issues initially—until they begin to trust the process or until you rein them in. Be patient. Rely on the suggestions for the session. Ask the questions and wait, looking open, inviting, and optimistic.

You might also want to consider your motives for establishing groups for gifted teens, as well as your sense of security around them. When I train counselors and teachers to work with gifted individuals, I advise them to ask themselves these questions:

- Can I avoid feeling competitive with gifted teens, or needing to assert control over them?
- Can I be confident around them, not threatened by their abilities?
- Can I stay composed and focused on the social and emotional, no matter what comes up?
- Can I deal with gifted students simply as human beings with frailties, insecurities, sensitivities, and vulnerabilities, regardless of their school performance and/or behavior?
- Can I avoid needing to “put them in their place”?
- Can I accept their defenses, including arrogance and bravado, and give them time to let themselves be socially and emotionally vulnerable?
- Can I recognize that they may not be accomplished risk-takers socially, academically, and/or emotionally, and that they might need to be encouraged to take appropriate risks?
- Can I look critically at common stereotypes of gifted kids and my own negative feelings about gifted kids that might affect my work with them, and can I put these aside during the group experience?
- Can I let group members teach me about themselves without judging them?

- Can I avoid voyeurism (being titillated by ferreting out details about families and kids' personal lives)? *That is not what these groups are about.*
- Can I resist the urge to psychoanalyze and interpret? Again, *that is not what these groups are about.* More important, if you are not a trained counselor or psychotherapist, but are presenting yourself as one, or behaving like one, liability is a concern.
- As a teacher, can I move from an evaluative to a supportive posture?
- Can I leave an adult-expert position and accept that teens know themselves and their world better than I do—and that I need to learn from them?
- Can I enter their world respectfully?
- Can I keep in mind that gifted teens may have no other place to talk that is noncompetitive, nonjudgmental, nonevaluative, nonperformance-oriented, and nonacademic—so that I don't slip into an inappropriate mode?

If you answered yes to all or most of these questions, you're likely ready to take on a small group or roomful of gifted teens. If your answers were mostly negative or unsure, perhaps you should consider other ways to work with gifted teens or should (if you are not a counselor) consider co-facilitating a group with a counselor at least initially. Such co-facilitation may help you develop listening and responding skills and move toward an objective, nonjudgmental posture.

## General Guidelines

The following general guidelines can help you lead successful, meaningful discussions with gifted teens. You may want to review these guidelines from time to time.

1. The function of the group leader is to facilitate discussion. The best posture is "learner," not "teacher," with the group members doing the teaching—about themselves. Adolescents talk when adults step back and apply active-listening skills.
2. Be prepared to learn how to lead a group by doing it. Let the group know that this is your attitude. If you are a trained counselor, you may need to become comfortable with *focused* discussion. In addition, even if you lead groups regularly, reviewing basic tenets of group process might be beneficial. If you are not a trained counselor and are not able to co-facilitate a group with a counselor, as mentioned above, ask a counselor for information on group process and listening and responding, but recognize that this kind of group is different from therapy groups, which are usually the type graduate students experience during training. Their reading this introductory material might help them consider a new way to "do groups," applicable to all counseling settings.
3. Don't think you have to be an expert on every session topic. Tell the group at the outset that you want to learn with them and from them, and you want them to learn from each other as well. It is better to be "one-down" (unknowing) than "one-up" (expert) in your relationship with gifted teens. That is an appropriate place to start, and they will respond. *For most sessions, having information is not the key to success.* Trust your adult wisdom, which is something you have that your group members do not. But, again, recognize that *your job is largely to facilitate discussion, not to teach.*
4. Monitor group interaction and work toward contribution from everyone without making that an issue. Remember that shy students can gain a great deal just by listening and observing. You can encourage everyone to participate, yet not insist on that.
5. Keep the session focus in mind, but be flexible about direction. Your group may lead you in new directions that are as worthwhile as the stated focus and suggestions. However, *if they veer too far off track, with only one or two students dominating, use the focus as an excuse to rein in the group.*
6. It is probably best to go into each session with two related session ideas in mind, since the one you have planned might not generate as much response as expected. You can always unobtrusively guide the group into a new direction. Try several approaches to a topic before dropping it, however. It might simply require some "baking time." *If you are afraid they won't talk, they may not. Believing in the topics and the questions is important. Choose them accordingly.*
7. Be willing to model how to do an activity, even though it is usually not necessary. The activity sheets are fairly self-explanatory, but, on occasion, you may need to demonstrate a response. If you are not willing to share your thoughts and feelings, your group may wonder why they should be expected to do so. However, even a small disclosure early in the life of a group might indicate that you will always be a "peer participant," an inappropriate role. Modeling should be rare and done only to facilitate student responses. Too much can actually inhibit responses because the open-ended questions are meant to elicit diverse perspectives, you are modeling only one kind, and the group will likely follow your lead. *In addition, attention should be focused on group members, not on you. You want them to learn about each other.*

8. After the group has established a rhythm (perhaps after five or six meetings), ask how group members are feeling about the group. Is there anything they would like to change? Are they comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings? What has been helpful? Are there problems that need addressing, such as discussions being dominated by a few, a personality conflict within the group, or too much leader direction? (When posing this last question, do not include the specific examples of problems. If students have concerns about the group, let them bring them up, without suggestions from you.) Processing group dynamics (*process* is an important verb in the counseling profession) is an opportunity for members to practice tact in addressing group issues (see also #11), if there are any.
9. Incorporate student suggestions (from #10, below) that fit the overall purpose of the group. If you do not yet feel comfortable as a facilitator, and if students are being negatively critical, tell them that you are still learning about groups, as are they. Be aware that some may press for “no focus” for a long time. *You should review the rationale for focus outlined on page 16 prior to your first request for feedback. Depending on group composition, you may choose to delay questions about format until the benefits have become clear.* Or simply be prepared to explain the purpose of the semi-structured-but-flexible format. Support the group and give guidance as they make progress in overcoming group challenges. Explain that this kind of group discussion takes practice, but the rewards can be great. Above all, try to be secure about using a focus. If you seem unsure and ask too frequently about the format, you may experience “mutiny,” especially if there has not been sufficient time for the group to bond and appreciate the benefits of some structure. I often ask for feedback midway and also late in the life of a group, otherwise relying on members’ level of cooperation to tell me how the group is functioning. If lack of cooperation is a problem, I process that (see #11).
10. If group energy consistently or increasingly lags, discuss that in the group. Let members help you figure out how to energize discussions or deal with group inhibitions. However, *do not readily reject the idea of maintaining a focus for each session.* Perhaps you could, instead, alter your questioning style (see page 19), or more deftly follow some strands that come up spontaneously. Or perhaps you might want to be more selective when choosing topics. The written exercises and activity sheets often help to encourage sharing. Thoughtfully creating your own activities related to the focus, or incorporating various media into the meetings, can also energize a group.
11. Anything can be processed in the group—crying, interrupting, disclosing something unexpected, being rude, being sad, belching, challenging the facilitator, group negativity. That is, group members can discuss what just happened—in the present. A facilitator can say, “What was it like for you to challenge me just now?” or “How did the rest of you feel when she challenged me?” or “How are you feeling right now, after she disclosed that?” or “That comment was a surprise. How is it affecting us?” Processing what happens in a group gives members a chance to reflect on their own feelings and on the group’s interaction and to learn skills in articulating emotions. It also keeps the focus on them, not on you.

### Choosing and Adapting Session Topics

Group facilitators are often reluctant to adapt the format and topics with group uniqueness in mind. At the very least, time constraints may mean that you need to shorten some written exercises. Depending on the age level or language ability of your group, you might choose to alter some vocabulary. In addition, some session suggestions might not fit your setting. In that case, ignore them or devise your own unique approach to the focus. Examine the sessions to determine which ones might be most helpful, enjoyable, and appropriate for your group. Finally, when selecting topics, be aware that intellectually precocious teens may be only average, or even *below* average, in social and emotional development. Too often, adults forget that gifted kids are “just kids.” However, beware of underestimating group members’ awareness of the world or need for information just because they are chronologically young.

Two cautions are in order. First, be aware of, and respect, community sensitivities. For example, parents and other members of the community might object to discussions related to sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexuality and sexual behavior, gender identity, gender roles, and family roles. Even discussions about depression might not be deemed appropriate. If you’re considering addressing a certain topic that might raise alarm, consider first asking parents or guardians (or other caregivers) for permission through a written explanation of the subject matter. Second, select topics, from the many available, according to age level. If a parent/guardian asks to “sit in on” a session, you should say that privacy (of all group members) is the main reason having a guest is not advisable. In addition, the purpose of the group is to help members interact in a safe and respectful way with each other about the challenges of growing up. An observing adult would likely limit members’ willingness to practice expressive language as they do that. You might keep a list of typical topics available and explain the focused-but-flexible format to anyone with questions about the discussion groups.

## Ethical Behavior: Confidentiality

Counseling codes of ethics provide behavioral guidelines for counselors in order to protect those who are counseled. Your behaving ethically as a group leader is crucial to the success of your group work. For instance, sharing group comments in the teachers' workroom or lunch area at school, with parents, or in the community may ultimately destroy the possibility of small-group activity in your school. When trust is lost, it may be impossible to reestablish.

If you plan to conduct groups in a school setting but are not a counselor and are unfamiliar with ethical guidelines for counselors (including those specifically related to group work), get a copy of them from a school counselor and read them carefully. *Be especially aware of your responsibilities regarding confidentiality.* These include familiarizing yourself with situations in which confidentiality must be breached, such as when abuse is suspected, when someone is in danger or may be a danger to others, or when someone is planning to disrupt or damage school mission, personnel, or structure (the last item is in the school counseling code). The "informed consent" aspect of group work can be addressed by discussing format, content, confidentiality, limits of confidentiality, and purpose at the first meeting.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a group. Explain what actions you will take to protect confidentiality, but emphasize that *you can guarantee the behavior of only yourself, not of group members.* However, since trust is so essential for comfortable group discussion, strongly encourage group members not to share what is said in the group outside the group. Tell them that not keeping comments "inside the group" can destroy the group and even prevent *any* groups from existing in the school or organization in the future because of lack of trust. However, facilitators should not use the word *secrets*, because these groups are not about secrets, the word may raise unwarranted concerns, and it may be frightening to students whose families direct them not to share personal information. Discussion about confidentiality should be quietly matter of fact, not threatening or overblown.

You may wish to address these issues in a letter to parents asking their permission for their children to attend the group. For a sample letter, see page 22. Please note that this letter is appropriate for groups not designed to address specific problem areas. Feel free to adapt it.

## Group Members Who Betray Trust

If you or a group member learns that confidentiality has been breached, processing the experience will be crucial. Barring the betrayer(s) of trust from continuing in the group is not the only appropriate response and may not be appropriate at all. Since these groups are focused on development, the situation is an opportunity to discuss trust ("What are your thoughts about the trust

level of the group?"), feelings in the group ("What are you feeling right now?"), prospects for regaining trust ("What would we need to do to regain trust?" "How long do you think it might take?"), what the breacher(s) can/will do in the future ("What would \_\_\_\_\_ need to do to regain your trust?"). Maintaining poise and objectivity as you conduct the discussion actually models that difficult feelings and situations can be discussed, that shame and guilt can be "worked through," and that repair of trust is possible, though not likely to be quick. These are important revelations to teens, who otherwise may not know that such a discussion and such outcomes are possible. Teens can be empowered by the discussion, take ownership of their future, and decide what to do about the situation. Betrayal of trust, in itself, is not a crime and does not automatically warrant expulsion from the group, but the ripple effect can be significant.

## Group Members Who Are Quiet or Shy

Groups can actually help affirm quiet personal styles by overtly recognizing quiet members' listening and observation skills, which gregarious members may not have. However, although listening can be as valuable as speaking in finding commonalities and gaining self-awareness, it is important for reticent individuals to be heard by their peers, even if only at modest levels. Earnest efforts to ask students who are quiet or shy for at least one or two comments each meeting can help them feel included and gradually increase their courage and willingness to share. The written exercises and activity sheets can provide them with a comfortable opportunity to share. Even uttering a simple phrase from a sheet can feel huge for a shy teen and may represent significant risk-taking. Small talk between a leader and a shy student while everyone is getting settled may also contribute to comfort and ease, which eventually might generate spontaneous comments. However, the value of communication with peers, in contrast to communication with the group facilitator, should not be underestimated. Gifted students with little social contact or verbal interaction with peers may feel poorly informed. Post-group feedback about group work has suggested to me that quiet group members gain as much or more than assertive members from the group experience.

## Group Members Who Dominate

One strategy for dealing with verbal dominators is to revisit the group guidelines (page 23) as a group, with no one identified as the target. Processing group discussion, after the fact, can also be used to raise awareness (for example, "How does it feel to be in the group at this point? How are we doing in making sure that everyone gets a chance to talk and that no one

dominates?”). If you notice someone rolling eyes when a dominant group member talks, call attention to that (for example, “I was just noticing a facial expression in the group. \_\_\_\_\_, would you be willing to tell us what’s on your mind? It might help us become a better group.”).

## Counseling Individual Group Members

When a level of trust has been established within a group and between members and facilitator, individuals with pressing needs sometimes, understandably and appropriately, seek consultation outside of the group if the leader is accessible. A trusted facilitator, sought out during a crisis, may indeed play a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of a group member. The following are general guidelines related to such situations. If you are not a counselor, refer to “Handling the Unexpected” below for additional information.

If you will not be on the premises every day, it is important to tell the group, at least at the outset of the group series, about times when you will be available. I do not recommend giving out your phone number or email, since it is easy for particularly dependent students, and those with poor boundaries, to abuse access. On the other hand, it may be possible (though not easy) for you to model boundary-setting if email or phone calls become invasive. As in everything, moderation is the key—and caution as well.

It is important to note that any emphasis at group sessions on outside conferencing can turn off members who do not want to connect the group to “counseling” and might also encourage some to steer their communication away from the group in order to have a special relationship with the facilitator. *Facilitators should certainly not refer to outside conversations in group meetings.* In addition, if members complain about the group to the facilitator between sessions, they should be encouraged to bring their concerns to the group, putting responsibility on the group for improvement and giving the group an opportunity to gain skills in resolving conflict.

## Handling the Unexpected

Most gifted students are appropriately discreet with what they share in small- and large-group meetings, especially when the facilitator does not pry for private information, does not appear to “need” it, and does not unduly reward those who share it. However, you can probably expect a highly charged moment to occur once in a while.

What happens when something shocking is said, when someone cries, or when intense conflict suddenly breaks out within the group? No one can predict these events, since every group has unique dynamics, and groups are full of surprises. However, with basic cautions in mind, you will learn to trust your instincts.

With experience, you will become increasingly ready and able to handle whatever comes up.

Have tissues handy for the student who cries, and simply convey a silent request to a nearby group member to pass the box to the member who needs it. It is important to respond to the expressed emotion with your facial expression and body language and accept the tears with poise. In fact, your empathetic composure will model for group members that it is all right to cry and express emotions genuinely, that others do not have to rush in to “fix” the situation, and that it is important not to be hyperreactive to others’ discomfort, because objectivity and ability to help may then be lost. When appropriate, ask the individual if he or she would like anything from the group. Overt support? Just listening? No attention, for the moment? It may be helpful to process an outburst, after the fact, asking the group questions like “How did it feel to have someone express emotion through crying?” or “Is there anything you would like to say to (student who cried)?” Then ask the latter, “What was it like for you to hear that?”

If a student makes a dramatic revelation, immediately remind the group about the importance of confidentiality and model poise. You might say, “It probably took courage for (name of student) to share that. She/he trusted you as a group. What was said should stay in the group. If you are tempted to share this with someone outside of the group, keep quiet. That’s very important. We want to protect our group.” Beware of exaggerated responses, nonverbal and verbal, which can promote the idea that a particular revelation is “too much to handle.” The sharer might, in fact, have been testing that belief.

If you work in a school and are not a counselor, consult with a school counselor or administrator to learn what to do in specific situations. For example, if a student drops a “bomb” (or even just a hint) about abuse or suicidal thoughts, you should know how to follow up (see “Dark Thoughts, Dark Times” on pages 226–231, for some guidelines). Your school or organization likely has guidelines specific to these issues. It is best to know them ahead of time. If students seek you out independently about a personal concern, remind them that you are not a counselor, but that you will certainly listen and that you may subsequently encourage them to see a counselor (or accompany them there), depending on what the concern is.

If you are a counselor, it is of course important to follow up a revelation about abuse or neglect with a one-on-one meeting with the student to determine if the revelation was made genuinely, and, if so, to validate the experience through supportive comments and call a child protection agency.

**Groups are ideal settings for practicing conflict resolution.** You can help those in disagreement talk it out and listen carefully to each other. If you’re a

counselor, you might gather material on conflict resolution to share with the students or simply apply your expertise. If you are not a counselor, ask your school counselor for strategies to help your group deal with disagreements and perhaps even consider having the counselor conduct mediation. Be aware that your own fears, discomfort, or emotionality about conflict might actually prevent members from handling contentious situations in a healthy, productive manner.

## Announcing the Session Topic

If your group is voluntary and a session topic is announced in advance, some teens may decide not to come if the topic does not sound interesting or relevant. You want group attendance to be consistent, and it is distracting and detrimental when all students show up one week and only two the next. Therefore, I recommend that you use a “trust me” response when students ask about the next session’s topic. Suggest that they show up and be surprised. Remind them that one can never anticipate the interesting directions a particular topic might take. Besides, many topics are more complex than they first appear.

## Journal-Writing

Depending on the purpose of your group, group members’ class and activity loads, the amount of access members have to you outside of group meetings, and time available for you to respond to the journals carefully and briefly in writing, you might consider including journal-writing in your group’s experience.

In general, however, I strongly recommend using the entire group time for open, semistructured discussion, with or without activity sheets. Adding discussion related to journals diverts time and attention away from the new focus, since journal entries are probably related to preceding, not present, topics. While I am a proponent of using journals to respond to literature in the classroom, I do not recommend personal journals there or during group work in schools and summer institutes because of the potential for voyeurism and for other reasons detailed below. I have known language arts teachers who faced irate parents when the latter found students’ personal journals and challenged the teachers for not informing them about the activity and for infringing on family privacy. For group facilitators who are not trained counselors, a great amount of personal information may be shared, placing a burden on them regarding what should be revealed and how to respond.

Keep the following points in mind if you consider using journaling as a strategy:

- Fundamentally, the emphasis in this group approach is on in-person *oral* expression—especially

important in an era where some teens may be connected mostly by technology.

- Some gifted teens eagerly write about their feelings. Through writing, they can articulate, clarify, expand on, and sort ideas and issues that are important to them. Shy group members, especially, may prefer writing to talking in the group.
- However, other gifted teens have a strong aversion to writing. Some highly talented visual artists, musicians, and kinesthetic learners, for example, find it difficult or bothersome to write. Regardless of impressive strengths in other areas, gifted teens may also struggle with poor small-motor skills or have learning disabilities that affect their ability to write. Some simply may not be highly verbal. For these reasons, adding journal-writing to a group experience might not be wise and may actually be burdensome.
- In schools where there is considerable journal-writing in language arts classes, students are less likely to welcome journals in the discussion groups, regardless of their writing skills. Journal burnout is possible.
- Teens sometimes need strong enticement to join groups, especially when groups are first being established in a school. Students are most receptive when the group experience does not seem like work. Journal-writing can easily be perceived as just one more classroom assignment in high-pressured academic environments. In addition, writing in English may be especially challenging for gifted immigrant students and may create enough discomfort that they will drop out of the group, thus losing an opportunity to make connections with other gifted students and develop oral language.
- Journals can give group members a chance to communicate privately with the facilitator about important concerns, but journaling should not replace talking, including in the group, especially if it runs the risk of becoming a “special” mode for someone and therefore be viewed by others as favoritism.
- With journals submitted regularly, recognize that you will need to mentally keep track of which information has been presented in the group and which in the journals. That can be a difficult dance. There is already much to keep track of. It is also unwise to share journal information with the group, even if the writer wants you to do that.
- You might simply encourage group members to keep a private journal at home, written only for themselves, as a way to reflect on group meetings.
- English/language arts teachers might use suggestions in sessions in this book as prewriting exercises or questions as writing prompts.

# About the Sessions

## Focus

Why have a focus for each session? Development is the common denominator for the sessions—not a particular issue, behavior, need, or goal, as is common in group therapy. Nevertheless, working with an explicit focus, or theme, is indeed worthwhile, since it provides a starting point for discussion and an excuse to rein in group behaviors, including dominance. It also encourages attention to topics that are important and developmentally appropriate, but perhaps a bit intimidating or uncomfortable. In addition, all gifted teens are not as flexible as they might appear, and product-oriented members may quickly tire of “not really doing anything.” To contain their anxiety or impulsivity, some might need the structure a topic provides. On the other hand, some teens are quite flexible, and, especially if they are verbal and spontaneous, may prefer a looser format. In fact, they might say, “Just let us come in here and talk about whatever we want to talk about.” The structure recommended here can accommodate a wide range of personalities and address many concerns. Even teens who resist structure usually find the variety of semi-structured approaches interesting and worthwhile. Consider carefully how much structure is warranted. Complaints may initially reflect only apprehension about addressing developmental concerns.

Individuals who like order and structure and are uncomfortable when there is no “map” or clear purpose usually want group time to be worthwhile in specific terms. Linear thinkers, sequential planners, and perfectionists, in particular, may object to meetings with little structure. If the group is a voluntary activity, a lack of focus may mean that students do not attend when something else seems preferable—including reviewing for an exam or eating with friends in the lunchroom. They may also object when assertive members set the pace and topic each time. Teens with new and dramatic needs each week can quickly dominate, and others may then either defer and listen or leave, frustrated that their own issues or interests are not being addressed. *Discussion groups should not be just for natural talkers.*

On the other hand, group discussions need not be rigidly programmed. Although *Get Gifted Students Talking* proposes a focus for each session, sometimes with several sessions building on a theme, direction can be changed nimbly during discussion. As facilitator, you can flexibly adapt the session to themes that emerge, yet still gently steer the group to closure, overtly acknowledging that the focus inspired unexpected directions. *Especially with topics that members are not accustomed to discussing, the focus is an excuse to persist with tough questions and issues, not just gripes and frustrations, gossip and banter.*

Having a focus can also help you communicate with administrators, parents, and other faculty about group topics and activities, an important consideration in today’s educational climate. Outsiders might assume that discussion groups are for teacher bashing, airing family secrets, or simply “hanging out”—the first and third of these being of particular concern when key gifted students have a reputation of being critical of teachers or for acting “entitled.” Being able to say to colleagues, “We’ve been talking about stress the past four weeks, a problem for most gifted teens” or “We’re focusing on self-awareness this semester,” or, more specifically, “We’ve been talking about bullying” helps to lessen anxiety or suspicion. Listing even a few topics underscores that groups deal with significant issues and are worth the time and energy that the logistical challenges of group work often require.

The sessions that focus on self-esteem and friendship in this volume look at those concepts from several angles, including developmental. I have found that focusing on self-esteem, motivation, or friendship as “the topic for the day” is often not productive in small-group work. That is not to say that enhancing these is not a worthy goal. However, meaningful discussion, connections with peers, new social skills, and information about development can all potentially enhance how gifted teens view themselves, peers, and schoolwork. Both self-esteem and motivation are probably related to developmental challenges, and friendship skills can be improved through making connections *about* development. Therefore, focusing on development-related topics makes sense if general goals include increased self-esteem, motivation, and friendship. I also believe that focusing on strengths (a hallmark of counseling), rather than on limitations, deficits, or problems, is key to helping gifted teens stay on, or move to, solid ground during adolescence—including socially and academically.

## Background Information

The background information at the beginning of most sessions is designed to help you prepare for the session and think broadly about the topic at hand; to provide basic information that might be useful during the session; to inspire further reading; to anticipate student concerns; and to help you determine a possible direction for discussion. *It is not appropriate to read this information to the group unless the session guidelines direct you to, since some of the information might actually prevent some teens from unselfconsciously exploring the topic.* A resource section in the back of the book provides trusted sources for additional information on some topics as well as resources that are appropriate to recommend to teens who request information.

## Objectives and Suggestions

The objectives listed for each session tell you what to work toward and what to expect if the general suggestions are followed. They may also help you communicate content to administrators, parents, and teachers who wonder what your group is doing. In the school setting, you may want to prepare a list of topics for parent conferences, for example. Like the background information, the objectives are not meant to be read to group members.

*The suggestions are just suggestions. Use all, some, or none of them, and adapt those you use to meet the needs of your group.* Time limits, group temperament, and group history are three of many factors you should consider when choosing which suggestions to follow. For most sessions, there are more suggestions than you will have time for. Teachers and counselors have told me that they appreciate having several suggestions to choose from.

## Activity Sheets

Several of the sessions include activity sheets that may be reproduced for group use. They can also be downloaded using the instructions on page 297 for easy printing and copying. In my experience, these brief written exercises do not make discussions too structured, and most teens do not resist them. However, receptivity depends on how the sheets are used.

Especially when activity sheets are not used at every meeting, groups of gifted teens have told me that they appreciate the handouts for giving them a chance to think quietly and focus at the outset of a meeting; to write, objectify, and edit their thoughts; and to ponder complex issues. Even highly verbal group members like being able to see expressive vocabulary that they then can use during discussion about feelings and concerns. For some, that may be a new language. Perhaps having time to pause helps them feel a sense of control, especially if they do not usually take social risks. The sheets also give everyone a chance to be heard. Introversion, relatively common among gifted individuals, is less of a problem when activity sheets are used, since shy members can share responses on the sheets without having to compete with assertive peers. Discussion can involve only a few or all the questions or items on a sheet, and group members can be polled efficiently or asked for specific answers to a few or all items. Even with those choices and limits, group members may communicate more, more complexly, and more openly about their social and emotional development with “the sheets” than otherwise.

Activities using paper, pencils, index cards, or other items that can be manipulated provide opportunities to consider thoughts and may help teens express feelings and opinions. On the other hand, with some teens, those items easily become paper airplanes, something to

“rattle,” and a distraction. If group members can contain disruptive impulses, soft balls, bendable plastic sticks, and small stuffed animals can give them something to “fiddle with” and provide safe distraction when topics evoke uncomfortable emotions. However, if your groups can handle discussion without these items, I recommend that you not make them available. I actually have never used them with groups of gifted kids, but I know that some facilitators regularly use them, especially at the middle school level. Manipulatives can indeed be helpful.

You may want to keep file folders in a secure place, bring them to the session if an activity sheet is planned, and have students add them to their folders at the end, ensuring that personal information does not end up on a classroom floor or circulating through the halls. (When activity sheets are likely to contain sensitive information, collect and shred them after a glance to see if anyone wrote you a note or made a request of you, or if anyone voiced an issue of serious concern, such as expressing a threat to themselves or to someone else. Out of respect for family and individual privacy, I believe these should not be stored.) At the final group meeting, members might simply, individually, take time to look over the file, consider the variety of developmental issues addressed, briefly share pertinent thoughts, and then shred the sheets as a group. The *process* of glancing over them, rather than the content, is the key—and is sufficient. Shredding them reinforces their right to privacy, acknowledges the developmental challenge of establishing a separate identity, and confirms the respect of the group facilitator for these elements.

Under no circumstances should the sheets be shown to school personnel. However, because you have been clear at the outset that abuse, neglect, and danger to self and others must be reported (see page 13), group members who share that kind of information on the sheets will be aware of your responsibility. Meet individually with students who indicate a threat to safety, remind them of your responsibility, check out the seriousness of the situation, encourage contact with an available counselor and accompany them to the counselor’s office (if you are not a counselor), and follow through, if appropriate, with a report to child protection services. In the case of suicidal ideation, make sure that you or a counselor contacts the student’s parents and provides appropriate guidance or, if parents are not available, acts to ensure the teen’s safety.

## Session Closure

Each session includes a suggestion for closure. It is always a good idea to end a session with a summary, whether you provide it yourself or solicit it from the group. Closure reminds the group that the discussions are purposeful, and that members have common



concerns and are heard. If an important new thought or issue is introduced in the closing minutes, it is still good to have deliberate closure, even if you suggest continuing with the new concern next time or express regret that there won't be time to pursue it. Normally I recommend that session topics *not* be continued into the next session. Each is meant to stand alone or be combined with another topic for one session. The purpose is to learn through the process, not to "cover content." *It is fine to conclude discussion on a topic before it feels "done."* You will have provoked thought and provided an opportunity for skill-building in that session, and that is the value. The topic may actually "run dry" after just a few minutes at the next meeting, if continued.

If you complete the session and closure and still have time left, you might use it to begin the next activity sheet (and file it), ask questions to encourage thinking about the next session, or just chat.

## Getting Started

### How to Begin

Begin the first meeting by letting students know how pleased you are that they will be part of the group. Remind them that the purpose is to "just talk"—about various topics related to growing up. Their contribution will be to participate in the discussions and support each other.

Explain your role in the group. If you are a teacher or other professional without counselor training, tell the students that during group meetings you will not be a "teacher" in the usual sense of the word. Instead, you will be a discussion leader or facilitator, and the focus will be on them. It will be *their* group, developing uniquely. You will be their guide, listening carefully, sharing insights when appropriate, and helping them connect with each other. Emphasize that you will all learn from each other.

Move next to introductions and a get-acquainted activity, such as the "Warm-Up" (pages 24–25). Tell the group to read through the sentence stems silently and slowly and then provide entire thoughts, when possible, rather than one-word answers. Then invite responses—either to one sentence at a time across the group or with each member, in turn, reading the entire sheet all at once. Or, if you prefer, go directly to another session you have chosen to begin the group experience. *During your first meeting, since it is important that group members learn what being in the group will be like, avoid becoming bogged down with rule-setting and warnings. Instead, conduct an activity that generates interaction and helps members become acquainted in a new way.* Explain that at each meeting they will similarly talk and do things together.

At some point during your first or second meeting, distribute copies of "Group Guidelines" (page 23). Go over the guidelines one at a time, with volunteers reading them. Ask if anyone has questions or if there is anything they do not understand. Tell the group that everyone—including you—is expected to follow these guidelines for as long as the group exists. Explain that they will be learning and practicing these skills for the duration of the group. Stay positive, indicating that the guidelines are simply common sense.

### How to Proceed

First-year groups, particularly at younger ages, often need more structure than more experienced groups. First-year groups of older teens usually attain depth more quickly than younger groups. It does take any group a while, though, to establish ease and fluidity in discussion, especially when members are not acquainted outside the group. When experienced, teens are able to deal with personal topics readily, and they are also likely to be patient and tolerant when a facilitator experiments with session format.

I encourage you to follow the suggestions in each session description for introducing the topic, generating discussion, and managing the activities. You may find it difficult to follow the printed text while leading the discussions. Rather than reading anything word for word to your group, familiarize yourself thoroughly with the content of a session before your meeting. Then you will have a general direction in mind and some ideas for other directions as well, while keeping an eye on the session materials, if necessary. Be prepared for the possibility that only the first suggestion will generate a discussion that lasts the entire session. Plan to be flexible, and never feel you need to finish all suggestions. Then move to a new session focus at the next meeting.

Be aware that even when gifted students in a school enjoy a group, they can forget to come to meetings—in spite of their exceptional abilities. If your group is voluntary, you may need to remind them for several weeks about meeting times and places. Eventually attendance may become a habit for most. However, in schools I have found it worthwhile and beneficial, because stable attendance is important for group cohesion, to send reminders to everyone (for example, a classroom "pass" in a teacher mailbox) for every meeting. At each meeting, students can fill out their pass for the next one, to be signed by you later, or you might send reminders electronically.

### Tips to Keep in Mind

1. Remind the group that anything said in the group stays in the group. Confidentiality is important regardless of whether sensitive information is

shared. Gifted teens usually take this “rule” quite seriously, given their rare place on the bell curve and their consequent sensitivities and concerns about trust and safety.

2. Ask open-ended questions to generate discussion. Questions beginning with *How, What, When, What kind,* and *Where* require more than a yes or no response and are preferable to closed questions beginning with *Do, Does, Is, Are, Have, Has, Was, or Were*. However, for reluctant contributors, closed questions such as “Is it more difficult now?” offer low risk when complex responses are not needed. In general, entire discussions can be facilitated without using questions. Statements might actually be more facilitative than questions (for example, responding with “School can be challenging,” “You’ve had a rough week,” or “I can hear that it was upsetting”). When someone feels validated, more ease and information often follow.
3. When a member offers a cryptic comment, which gifted teens are quite capable of offering, respond with “Tell us more about . . .,” “Put words on that feeling . . .,” “Help us understand . . .,” “What’s an example of . . .?” or “What do you mean by . . .?”
4. *Always allow group members to “pass” if they prefer not to speak in response to activity sheets, checklists, or discussion.* Be clear from the beginning that nobody ever *has* to speak, even though you hope you can all become acquainted through the discussions. Be aware that a student’s being able to say “I’d rather not” may represent a new ability to set a boundary in a life where others routinely invade personal space and privacy.
5. Don’t preach or moralize. Teens may be too familiar with those modes already. This group experience should be different. A facilitator providing information in a top-down, hierarchical mode is not the preferred approach. Ideally, the content should come from group members as they talk about growing up. Therefore, let your group “just talk,” and accept what they say. Feel free to say something like, “That’s an interesting view” or “Pretty risky, huh?” if they make comments that are not convincing, say something inflammatory, or share experiences related to unwise decisions or behaviors. By responding calmly, without judgment, you are establishing a rare context where teens can feel free to explore thoughts and developmental challenges with a caring adult present.
6. Take students seriously and validate their feelings. For some gifted teens, feeling validated might be a new experience. Paraphrasing (“You felt she didn’t understand” or “You had a long, difficult day”), checking for accuracy (“Did I hear you correctly? This happened a week ago?”), asking for more information (“Tell us more about that”), acknowledging feelings (“I can see how disappointing that was” or “It makes sense that you felt like that”), or simply offering an “Mmmm” and a slight head nod in response to a comment shows that you are listening and want to understand.
7. Relax and let the group be more about process than product—more about trip than destination. It may not always be apparent that something has been accomplished, but as long as members keep talking thoughtfully, you’re on the right track.
8. Beware of sharing your own personal experiences too often and in too much detail. *Always remember that the focus should not be on you, but on the group members. Each time you self-disclose, you take the attention away from them.* They will sense this and may tire of hearing about your family or your adolescence. Your personal experiences are also often not as helpful or pertinent as you may hope. I do not fill out the activity sheets myself and do not participate in a “go-around” with the sheets. Having a posture of limited self-disclosure from the outset establishes an appropriate facilitator role. If a group member asks you a personal question, consider saying something like this, without a critical tone: “This group is for you, not for me. I’m just the leader, and I want to do my part well. I’m eager to hear *your* thoughts.” If you fall into a habit of routinely offering personal information, you will soon notice that returning attention to the group members does not always happen smoothly or quickly.
9. Be prepared to protect members from each other and themselves. For example, pertinent to a situation already alluded to in “Handling the Unexpected,” if a group member begins with something like, “I’ve never said this to anybody—it’s about something pretty bad that happened to me,” you may want to encourage the individual to pause before continuing. To do that, reach out one hand toward the speaker, palm out, and ask, “This might be an especially sensitive and important comment. Are you comfortable about sharing this with the group?” Then ask the group, “Are you ready to be trusted? Remember what we said about confidentiality.” Then go back to the speaker: “Do you still want to share this with the group?” In doing this, you give the student time to reconsider (especially if the student prematurely assumed group trustworthiness), and you also remind the group about their responsibilities. After the speaker finishes, you might process the telling with the group: “How did it feel

to be trusted with that information?" Then, "I have confidence that you will remember how important it is for our group to be trustworthy." The focus remains on feelings and support.

10. In situations where members of the group verbally attack each other, you need to intervene (for example, removing the students from the room or calling for assistance, if the situation is dangerous, or perhaps simply holding up your hand, palm out, and saying firmly, "Whoa!"). The group can also process what has happened by sharing their feelings about the conflict. In fact, processing the experience can in itself defuse conflict. Whenever there is conflict, process it. ("What is/was that like for us to have conflict in the group?" "What did/does it feel like?" "What would you need to hear to help your anger fade?" "Is anyone able and willing to say that—from the heart?"). This is an excellent opportunity to practice talking honestly about feelings and to experience conflict resolution.
11. If anyone expresses emotion with obvious discomfort or tears, offer verbal support, a tissue (which should be handy), or touch (a pat on the arm, perhaps, if in proximity). Group members may follow your lead. However, be aware that some may not want to be touched at all. In fact, beware of assuming that a hug is "best." Even a hug may meet your or other group members' needs more than the sad teen's. For some, touch understandably means danger and discomfort. You might say, "It's okay to express emotion. Let us know if you need something. We'll continue now."
12. Listen carefully to whoever is speaking, but also monitor the nonverbal behavior of those who are not speaking. Are they showing discomfort (averted eyes, moving back, facial tics), frustration (agitation, head-shaking, mumbled negatives), or anxiety (uneasy eyes, unsteady hands, tense face), impatience, boredom, judgment? Depending on the situation and the student, you might want to ask sensitively about what you have noticed.
13. Be genuine in your comments and compliments. Watch for opportunities to tell group members that they articulated complex feelings and situations well ("You put words on a very complex feeling" or "You explained that very well"). Avoid insincere, noncredible "cheerleading" comments about members' strengths. Instead, be on the lookout for courage, compassion, kindness, wisdom, common sense, responsibility, and problem-solving abilities, for example. Gifted teens are as hungry as anyone for feedback about their personal strengths, and whatever positive support you give them will be

taken seriously. Elsewhere, for them, academic performance may be the main, or only, focus.

14. If you are in a school, you might want to update parents periodically on topics to be discussed in an upcoming series of group meetings. If you are in a summer program, a list of general topics might be included in orientation information for parents. They will probably appreciate that communication. If parents ask about what their child has said in the group, assure them that you would/will contact them if there is cause for alarm (such as suicidal or homicidal thoughts or a plan to commit a crime). However, in general, confidentiality will be honored, in order to protect privacy and trust in the group. Reassure them that the discussions are focused on growing up in a teen world, not on private family concerns.

## Endings

It's important to consider carefully how to end a series of small-group meetings, regardless of duration. Members will likely miss the group and feel a sense of loss. Especially if they have depended on the group for support, they may feel anxious about being without the group in the future. If they have made friends in the group, they may wonder if they will lose touch once the group disbands. It is wise to wind down purposefully. During the final two sessions, casually remind members about the upcoming final session.

"Ending" (pages 283–286) can be used to conclude a series. In addition, you can invite the group to talk about what they have experienced in the group. Asking them to write a paragraph during a final session can be helpful for them and provide feedback for you. When group attendance is voluntary, the prompt I use is "Why did you keep coming to the group?" At other times, I have simply encouraged members to talk about what they gained in insights, what they appreciated, what they regretted, what they learned about adolescence, what common ground they discovered, and what they observed about themselves and others during their time in the group.

When you first begin preparing the group for ending the experience, tell members what you have in mind for the final session, or ask the group for suggestions. You might plan a party, have food brought in, and/or take a group photo. *Be aware, though, that changing the "mode" of the group might create discomfort at a time already stressful because of the ending.* After all, the focus until then has been on discussion and topic-related activities. Even the addition of food or music changes group dynamics. Everyone must interact in a new way, with little time to become comfortable with it. According to my experiences with a variety of types of groups and duration, including

groups of gifted teens, this loss of typical format generally affects interaction negatively. With that said, use your own judgment. You know your group. And even with food and beverage added, *maintaining the familiar format and providing encouragement to talk about endings helps keep the ending purposeful and comfortable.*

Be sure to leave time at the final session for the teens and you to say good-bye. If they will likely not have much future contact with each other, provide a way for them to share home and email addresses and phone numbers and wish each other well. Be aware that you will be modeling strategies for ending something that has likely been a profound experience. For many people—adults and teens—endings are difficult.

## Evaluation

It is not always easy to “read” a group of gifted teens and to know whether they are moving in a positive direction. Individuals who readily and frequently give feedback cannot speak for everyone. Quiet members may be gaining insights that they simply are not sharing. A session that seemed to generate an indifferent or poor response might, in fact, have had impact. Groups are complex, and members differ in their needs and what they respond to. Therefore, I recommend having group members, in a long-term group, fill out an evaluation periodically. However, regardless of duration, an evaluation at the end of the experience is important.

On page 286 is an evaluation form to copy and use. Or you may choose to create your own form, tailored to your group and to what you hope to learn. Feedback provided on such evaluations can be invaluable when assessing current groups and planning for future groups. To administrators, teachers, or funders, evaluations can also help defend group work as part of a curriculum for gifted students, as part of a school counseling program, or as a program at some other facility focusing on gifted students.

## A Note for Parents

Parents and teens sometimes have difficulty starting and sustaining conversations. Teens may become increasingly private and reluctant to talk at home. Sometimes parents don't know what to talk about beyond schoolwork, family members, video games or other technology, chores, and food. They initiate conversations unsure about which subjects are “safe” and which are not. Sometimes all topics seem to be off limits.

*Get Gifted Students Talking* offers a potentially intriguing way for teens and parents to break down barriers to communication. It can help parents access what their teens are thinking and feeling, the issues

that are important to them, their current concerns, and their vision of the future. By scanning the background information and suggestions, parents can find possible topics and conversation-starters. They can also discover insights into developmental issues that they and their children may be wrestling with. It is easy to forget what adolescence felt like, and the session information can help parents understand the complexities of life for a gifted teen today. The sessions are appropriate for homeschooling parents as well as any family who might gather, for example, after a meal once a week or on a weekend afternoon to “just talk.”

Most of the sessions—especially those in the Identity, Relationships, and Family sections—can help generate family discussion. Some teens in my groups have asked for extra activity sheets to take home for their parents to fill out. Since many personal issues persist into adulthood, even young adolescents may be considering that some of their parents' issues are theirs, too. Such sharing can be helpful to gifted teens as they forge a separate identity and prepare to be launched into the next developmental stage.

Several of the sessions in the Stress section are also worth discussing as a family. Coping strategies, procrastination, and sorting out stress are particularly good topics for family sharing. Adults themselves are never done with such concerns, and it is good for them to acknowledge their humanness and ongoing development to growing children. Nonauthoritarian “realness” can help create dialogue, especially if adults do not dominate the conversation, if they are appropriately discreet with what they share, if they respect personal boundaries, and if they communicate genuine interest (without judgment) in the teen world.

# PERMISSION FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Dear Parent/Guardian/Caregiver,

I have invited your son or daughter to participate in a discussion group for gifted teens at school, and he/she has expressed interest in attending. The purpose of the group is to provide an opportunity to talk about growing up and to build skills in talking and listening. Such skills are important for relationships with peers, teachers, and parents now—and later with spouses and partners, friends, coworkers, and children. In general, the group will offer support for gifted teens as they deal with the challenges of adolescence and prepare for the future. Format and content will be based on *Get Gifted Students Talking* by Dr. Jean Peterson.

Adolescence can be stressful in even the best of situations. Not only are there physical changes, but also new emotions and new expectations. There are new activities, academic choices, and the future to think about. Social relationships are probably also changing. Stress levels may increase. Gifted teens face developmental challenges like anyone else their age. However, because of their exceptional abilities, their experience of development may differ somewhat from the experience of others. They usually appreciate being able to discuss developmental challenges with peers with similar ability, who can understand.

Our discussion group will focus on development. Even though we may discuss academic concerns now and then, the group will be different from the often competitive school world. Students will relax with each other and find out what they have in common, including the challenges of adolescence. They will learn how to support each other. They will become acquainted with classmates—for the first time or simply better than before.

If your teen participates, you may soon notice positive changes both at school and at home. Communication may improve. Talking about stress, developing strategies for problem-solving, gaining a clearer sense of self, feeling the support of trusted peers—all of these group experiences may improve your teen's overall well-being.

The group will begin very soon. If you give permission for your teen to be involved, and if he/she decides to participate, please sign below and return the form to me as soon as possible. If you have any questions, please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_  
(email and phone)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of facilitator)

\_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to participate in the discussion group.  
(Name of student)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian/Caregiver signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

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# GROUP GUIDELINES

The purpose of this group is to “just talk”—to share thoughts, feelings, and concerns with each other in an atmosphere of trust, respect, caring, and understanding. To make this group successful and meaningful, we agree to the following terms and guidelines.

1. Anything that is said in the group stays in the group. We agree to keep our conversations confidential. This means we don't share information outside of the group. We agree to do our part, individually and together, to make this group a safe place to talk.
2. We respect what other group members say. We agree not to use put-downs of any kind, including words, body language, facial expressions, and sighs. We agree to control our own behavior so that everyone feels valued and accepted.
3. We respect everyone's need and right to be heard. We agree that no one will dominate the group. We also understand that listening and alert observation are valuable skills. Someone who is shy may be a skilled observer.
4. We listen to each other. When someone is speaking, we look at him or her and pay attention. We use supportive and encouraging body language and facial expressions.
5. We realize that feelings are not “bad” or “good.” They just “are.” They make sense, under the circumstances. Therefore, we don't say, “You shouldn't feel that way.”
6. We are willing to take risks, explore new ideas, and explain our feelings as well as we can. However, we agree that someone who doesn't want to talk doesn't have to talk. We don't force people to share when they don't feel comfortable sharing.
7. We are willing to let others know us. We agree that talking and listening are ways for people to get to know each other.
8. We realize that sometimes a member of our group might feel misunderstood, or that someone has been hurtful accidentally or on purpose. We agree that the best way to handle those times is through talking—and listening. We encourage verbal assertiveness, not verbal aggression.
9. We agree to be sincere and genuine when speaking.
10. We don't talk about group members who aren't present. We don't criticize group members who aren't here to defend themselves.
11. When we do need to talk about other people, we don't refer to them by name. For example, we may ask the group to help us solve a problem we are having with someone, but we won't name the person. However, if the identity of that person is likely to be obvious, the situation is probably not appropriate to discuss in the group.
12. We agree to attend group meetings regularly. We don't want to miss information that might be referred to later. Most of all, we know that we are important to the group. If we can't attend a meeting, we will try to let our leader know ahead of time.

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# WARM-UP

Complete these sentences:

1. I think being in a group will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Something interesting about me is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. When I have free time, I like to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Something I have that is very special to me is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. You might be surprised that I'm good at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What am I not good at? I'm not good at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Probably the most exciting thing I've ever done is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. I'm glad that I can \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. I like people who \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(continued)

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## **WARM-UP** *(continued)*

10. I'm probably most relaxed when I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. I'm probably most tense when I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. If I could, I'd always get up in the morning at \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. What is going well so far at school this year is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Someday I probably will \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**FOCUS**

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**Identity**

# Identity

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## General Background

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Developing a personal identity is an important developmental task, and it may be a particular challenge for teens with exceptional talents and/or intellect. High achievers may have an identity as a stellar student, athlete, or musician, for instance, but may not feel the need or freedom to explore identity further. I have known high achievers who wondered, as they finished high school, who they were—besides an achiever. Gifted teens who have negative parental models may feel an urgency to be separate from family, therefore contemplating identity earlier than those with nurturing, competent parents. Similarly, for better or for worse, underachieving gifted teens—at least those for whom nonperformance is a choice (and not a paralysis of will)—may already have moved toward differentiating themselves from achieving parents, siblings, or friends, if, in fact, that is their situation.

In general, teens develop an identity through hearing what others say about them, identifying what they feel and value, and thinking about themselves in relationship with others. The messages they receive may be positive and helpful. However, even when performing well, some gifted teens receive mostly negative, critical messages as their “definition.” In addition, parents may not be positive models for relating to others, and the behavior of bright, capable teens in turn may preclude their receiving positive messages about themselves. They also may have little opportunity to talk about their doubts and fears related to identity.

During identity formation, confusion and doubt can lead to tension, sadness, acting out, underachievement, hyperachievement, perfectionism, and relationship problems. In contrast, knowing and being comfortable with the self may help gifted teens accomplish other developmental tasks, including finding career direction, establishing a mature relationship, developing autonomy, and resolving conflict with parents.

In group discussions, members can become more skilled at articulating thoughts and feelings. Discreetly talking about what is “inside” is practice for friendships and relationships in the workplace and at home. Sharing thoughts and feelings can also help teens discover what they have in common, learn that they are not as different as they thought they were, get feedback from peers and the facilitator, and answer a vital question: “Who am I?”

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General  
Objectives

- Gifted teens acknowledge that they face universal developmental challenges.
- They make progress in defining themselves as unique individuals.
- They discover what they think and feel by sharing thoughts and feelings with the group and receiving and evaluating feedback.
- They apply what others share to their own self-assessment.
- They recognize and accept their comparative learning differences.



## FOCUS

# Identity

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## Developing—Similarly and Uniquely

### Objectives

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- Gifted teens recognize and affirm that they and others are continuously developing.
- They recognize and affirm how they are similar to and different from age peers who are not identified as gifted.
- They feel connected to others with similar intellectual ability.
- They learn that their giftedness may make their experience of “normal development” different from the experiences of others their age.

### Suggestions

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1. To introduce the topic (and the group experience, if this is the first session), explain to members that the focus will be on development—figuring out who they are, where they are going, how to get along with others, how to manage conflict, how to move toward autonomy, and how to find satisfaction in life.

Ask the group to define *developing*, as it applies to what you just said. They might mention “growing up.” Ask what kinds of development they are currently experiencing.

You might mention four general areas: physical, cognitive, social, emotional. Ask for examples of each area, including how they think they have changed since last year. You might give a quick example of how you are different from a decade ago—to emphasize that adults continue to develop. (Then immediately refocus group attention on them.)

2. Ask how they know that everyone else in their extended family is, like themselves, continuing to develop (for instance: children leaving home, children first entering school, teen with a new driver’s license, grandparents retiring, mom starting a new business, dad promoted).
3. Ask them how they are the same as all others in their grade level at school. (All are facing developmental challenges, tasks, and changes.) Then ask how they might differ from others in their grade level. If they mention giftedness, explore whether intellectual or creative gifts affect the experience of growing up. If no one mentions differences, accept that. Accepting what they share will set the tone for the group experience—that is, you will not be judgmental and evaluative, and their opinions and thoughts will be received as valid.

Scholars who have written about characteristics of people with high capability have suggested that giftedness is connected to heightened sensitivity; to a strong sense of fairness; to a drive to accomplish things; and to intensity. Explain that you probably will discuss characteristics like these at a future meeting. However, ask here if they think these perceptions are accurate. Some gifted teens may resist the idea that they differ from others their age, depending on how much they have incorporated giftedness into their identity.

4. In order to explore similarities and differences within their group, invite students to line up along one wall of the room (or form an angle where two walls meet). Tell them they have just formed a continuum. Designate one end as “10—to a great extent/a lot” and the other end as “0—not at all.” Explain that you are going to read a series of statements. As you read each one, they should physically move to the point on the continuum that best represents where they think they belong.  
Read aloud each statement from “Uniquenesses and Similarities: A Continuum Activity” on page 31. After each statement, and after group members have found their places on the continuum, select only two to four teens to explain why they placed themselves where they did. Be sure not to ask the same few to report each time, and avoid spending too long considering individual statements. Their considering each statement and then moving physically on the continuum can enhance self-awareness even without discussion.
5. For closure, ask the group if they noticed any trends among themselves (similarly creative, flexible, impulsive, perfectionistic, organized, orderly?). Can anyone offer a general statement describing the group? Then, process the experience (see page 12 for guidance): “How was it to participate in this activity?” “What was the best part of it?” “What was the hardest?” If this is your group’s first meeting, explain that at each future meeting they will be discussing aspects of development, sometimes with activities. Thank them for being willing to take some risks and for letting themselves be known a little better by others in the group.

## UNIQUENESSES AND SIMILARITIES: A CONTINUUM ACTIVITY

1. I like tough challenges and feel best when I am challenged.
2. I am cool in a crisis, and I can even lead others in a crisis.
3. I can change direction easily when I am doing something—for example, if suddenly someone wants/needs to do something different or do it in a new way.
4. I am organized in every part of my life.
5. I am a dreamer, spending a lot of time in fantasies.
6. I work rapidly in whatever I do.
7. I am a highly creative person.
8. I am a perfectionist in almost everything I do. I like things to be “just right.”
9. I prefer to work alone, rather than with others, on most things.
10. I prefer to *be* alone, rather than with others, if I have a choice.
11. I am quick to respond to almost all situations.
12. I am impulsive, often wishing I had thought first before doing something.
13. I can work effectively without encouragement from someone else.
14. I like to work with my hands.
15. I am an avid reader.
16. I am quite critical of others.
17. I worry a lot.

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# Identity

## What Does *Gifted* Mean?

### Background

I like to begin a group series with at least one other topic before addressing giftedness, per se. Since the focus of this book is on development, discussing development in general—without considering achievement, lack of achievement, or the *gifted* label—conveys that development is a universal phenomenon and that it deserves discussion apart from a person’s place on a bell curve of ability. However, the label and the concept of giftedness are both worthy of discussion. The experience of development for gifted teens is likely to be qualitatively different from how others experience it, and the *gifted* label may feel heavy. The concept and label are also controversial. This session is an opportunity to explore, in a safe setting, how *giftedness* is interpreted and how giftedness is experienced.

### Objectives

- Gifted teens understand how *giftedness* is interpreted and how gifted students are identified in their school or other setting.
- They recognize that *giftedness* and *intelligence* are terms applied to abilities, characteristics, and skills that are valued in a particular culture or context.
- Through articulating personal strengths, members affirm capabilities, enhance self-esteem, and anticipate what might arise in job interviews and / or the college application process.
- They learn that it is all right to have limitations.
- They learn more about themselves and become better at realistic self-assessment.
- They learn to value their own and others’ strengths.

### Suggestions

1. Ask the group what they understand about giftedness. Let them be the teachers. It is important that you find out what they think before offering new information. Some may not have thought much about the concept, may not consider themselves gifted, and may not embrace the term, even if they have been identified for a program. Some may wear the label as a badge of honor; others may reject it.

Be prepared to explain the program philosophy and identification criteria used in the teens’ school(s) or district(s) (if you are aware of those). Offering the information in the box on page 33 may help establish a group climate that values genuine thoughts, feelings, and opinions and is not preoccupied with “right” and “wrong” responses.

Be aware that creating an atmosphere of unconditional respect and trust takes time. Receive whatever the students say without judgment or challenge.

## Important

Cultures differ in what is deemed to be gifted. One of my own studies found that US classroom teachers, when nominating children for a hypothetical special program, generally valued individual, competitive, conspicuous achievement—looking for verbal assertiveness, “standing out,” and a strong work ethic in classroom work, for instance. These are the values held by the US mainstream culture as a whole, according to anthropologists. In contrast, representatives of a Latino community most often mentioned arts as a means of expression (not as performance) and humility when identifying “gifted” individuals. In a black community, representatives mentioned selfless service to community and handiwork most often. In a Native American community, residents declined to identify anyone as gifted, because they did not believe in standing out, although they respected individuals who could be comfortable in both white and Native cultures “without assimilating.” Adaptability was most highly valued by recent southeast Asian immigrants, who often connected that to the importance of education in the United States. In a low-income white community, both adults and high school students placed the highest value on nurturing children and being of service to others. Overall, participants from nonmainstream cultures valued “nonbookish” wisdom, not knowledge. It is important to recognize that the cultural values of one group are not better or worse than others, just differing. Your group might find it interesting that all cultures do not necessarily value, and thrive in, a highly competitive school culture demanding that intelligence and talents be demonstrated.

2. Have students list on paper their personal strengths—what they can count on, have confidence in, or trust about themselves, both as they interact with others and when they are alone (read the following list, if examples are needed). You might ask, “What do other people value in you?” Encourage them to share their lists, beginning with “Let me tell you about my personal strengths.” Tell students they will need to speak or write about themselves with confidence during job interviews, on scholarship applications, and in college-application essays. Students whose cultures value humility, rather than self-promotion, may find this exercise difficult. Acknowledge potential cultural differences, but without making assumptions. US-mainstream-culture teens may not have considered that some cultures do not value standing out.

organized	a good listener	responsible
kind	compassionate	energetic
personable	even-tempered	patient
an eager learner	creative	athletic
a good dancer	helpful	good sense of humor
intelligent	not moody	verbal or mathematical skills
witty	mechanical gifts	musical or other artistic talent
comfortable and skilled with elderly people and/or young children		



## Important

Teens usually are willing to share their lists, even when the group is just beginning. Contributions help “build a group.” However, remind the group that they always have the right to “pass” if uncomfortable about responding to a question or participating in an activity.

3. Have students list on paper their characteristics and habits that keep them from being how they’d like to be (read the following list, if examples are needed). Encourage them to share their lists. If the students list more limitations than strengths, don’t be surprised. If time permits, ask the group for opinions about why teens might have “unbalanced” lists.

unmotivated	bad-tempered	trouble with authority
spreads gossip	disorganized	not a team player
impatient	irresponsible	bossy
messy	mean	easily distracted
trouble listening to others	critical	self-critical
naive	easily discouraged	impulsive

4. Some theorists believe that intelligence is a general quality. Others believe there are many kinds of intelligence. In *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Howard Gardner identified several intelligences, most of which are reflected in the first several items on the “Thirteen Intelligence Types” activity sheet (page 35). Group members can rank the items, according to the directions, or simply identify three they believe they are quite strong in, as well as at least one that is relatively less strong. (NOTE: The activity sheet lists more intelligences than Gardner identified because the goal here is to generate discussion of strengths and limitations related to effective living, not necessarily of intelligences, per se.)
5. In addition to #4, or as an alternate activity promoting active listening, divide the group into pairs and ask them to tell each other about something they enjoy or are good at. You might want to write prompts on a wallboard (for example, What do you know a lot about? How long have you been into it? Could it turn into a career? Do others share the interest? Has someone mentored you?). Then invite each group member to tell the group about the other partner’s strength or strong interest. Finally, ask students how they showed they were interested in each other’s information—even without talking.
6. For closure, ask students which strengths and limitations were common in the group. Then ask, “How did it feel to talk about your strengths and limitations?” If you included the partnering activity, ask the group how they felt during it. If you used activity sheets, dispose of them or have the group add them to their individual folders, which you will store securely.

# THIRTEEN INTELLIGENCE TYPES

Rank the following types of intelligence, from 1 (lowest) to 13 (highest), according to how you see your strengths and limitations.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Verbal (you are sensitive to the nuances of written and oral language)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mathematical, scientific (you enjoy working with numbers and symbols, readily recognize patterns, and are good in math and science)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social (you have good interpersonal skills, can read social cues, and find it easy to be around people)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Artistic (you appreciate color/hue, shape, line, spaces, and arrangement in many areas of schoolwork and elsewhere, including in science, and/or are good at visual art)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Physical (you are athletic, are coordinated, and have a good sense of how your body moves)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mechanical (you like to tinker with machines; you have a curiosity about how machines work)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Self-aware (you know yourself well; you interpret your emotions accurately)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Musical (you are attuned to rhythm, tone, counterpoint, and musical forms and/or perform music impressively)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Influential (classmates observe and admire you; they follow your example, regardless of whether it is negative or positive)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creative (you think outside the box, have unusual ideas, and create unique things)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Insightful (you are perceptive and can make sense of complex matters, seeing them in new ways)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Practical (you make good decisions, solve problems, use common sense, and are tuned in to the “real” world—the world that can be seen, touched, built, manipulated, or fixed)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Resilient (you show inner strength, no matter what difficulties you have to deal with)

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