EMBRACING INTENSE EMOTIONS:
NURTURING EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT IN GIFTED CHILDREN

LEARNING TARGETS
In this session, you’ll learn the following:
• Discover new information about iGen and Gen Alpha
• Understand a different model of empathy and emotional intelligence
• Connect empathy research to GT research around brain development and OEs
• Learn specific strategies to address empathy and EQ development, and balancing OEs in gifted youth

THOUGHT TO PONDER:
“Over the last five years, I’ve noticed a significant shift—children are more tolerant but less emotionally flexible. Social-emotional learning is receiving more and more attention, and yet children are less and less resilient. It’s a paradox.”

–Christine Fonseca, The Caring Child (2019)
Turn to your neighbor and discuss the following questions:

1) What has changed with today's children?
2) What does it mean to be empathetic?
3) Are there any pitfalls to empathy development in GT children?

WHO IS TODAY'S GIFTED CHILD?

NEURODIVERSITY

- “Big” brain (grey matter)
- Connected brain (white matter)
- Efficient brains
- Sensitive brains
- EQ brains
- Resilient brains

TRENDS IN IGEN

1. Growing Up Slowly
2. Screentime
3. Digital Me
4. Insecure – A New MH crisis
5. What Religion?
6. Safety and Community
7. Working Life
8. Indefinite Future
9. Highly Inclusive
10. Independent Politic POV
BEYOND IGEN – GENERATION ALPHA

- Increases in technology use
- More tolerance
- More “voice” in the home
- Evidence of increased stress/anxiety responses

UNDERSTANDING EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT:
A NEW MODEL

EQ: UNDERDEVELOPED SKILLS OVERALL

- Empathetic Response:
  - “I feel nothing for you, me, or anyone”
- Parenting Style: Neglectful/Absent
- Discipline Approach:
  - Ignore, non-responsive
- Potential Problems
  - Attachment problems, difficulties with social connections and EQ dev
- Needed Skills
  - Cognitive, Social, Emotional – start with attachments/relationships
**EQ: LOW COGNITIVE/HIGH SOC-EMO**

- Empathetic Response:  
  - "I feel for you and often become distressed by your emotions"
- Parenting Style: Permission/Indulgent
- Discipline Approach:  
  - Do for you; make excuses, lenient
- Potential Problems  
  - Overwhelm, anxiety; enmeshment, poor boundaries
- Needed Skills  
  - Focus on flexible thinking, theory of mind, rational problem-solving

**EQ: HIGH COGNITIVE/ LOW SOC-EMO**

- Empathetic Response:  
  - "I understand your feelings, but do not feel them; I will tell you how and what to feel"
- Parenting Style: Punitive/Authoritarian
- Discipline Approach:  
  - Do to you; punishment, judgmental
- Potential Problems  
  - High threat awareness, rigid thinking, poor attachments and relationships
- Needed Skills  
  - Focus on social and emotional skill development

**EQ: HIGH COGNITIVE/ HIGH SOC-EMO**

- Empathetic Response:  
  - "I feel with you and hold no judgments about you or your feelings"
- Parenting Style: Authoritative/Relationship-Focused
- Discipline Approach:  
  - Do with you; trusting and connected
- Potential Problems  
  - None
- Needed Skills  
  - Continue growing skills to handle life's ups and downs

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**INTENSITIES AND EMPATHY/EQ DEVELOPMENT**

**PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER**
## Intensities and Empathy Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Intensity</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Potential Concerns</th>
<th>Potential Strengths</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual</strong></td>
<td>- Reviews pictures for a long time - High level of concentration on preferred activities - Detailed visual recall - Enjoys learning for the sake of learning</td>
<td>- Under-development of social-emotional skills and processes - High level of anxiety - Crime against weaker environments, high threat awareness</td>
<td>- Strong learner - Good memory - Innovative problem solver - Quick thinker - Other: ___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
<td>- Positive approach to life - Empathy - Compliment and layered emotions - Physical reaction to emotional stress - Ability to develop deep relationships</td>
<td>- Can lead to under-development of cognitive regulation and processes - Can lead to under-development of “theory of Mind” attributes - Can lead to enmeshment and emotional distress</td>
<td>- Zest for life - Empathy - Resilience - Compassion - Other: ___________</td>
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### Specific Strategies to Help GT Children

- Appreciation for arts - Appreciation for nature and beauty - Slightly impacted/fluenced by sensory stimulation - Strong sensory memory

- Can become hyper-sensitive to environment - Can heighten threat perception leading to inhibitions in empathy skills

- Appreciation for beauty and "awe" - Strong affective memory - Awareness of sensory details - Other: ___________
### EQ Development:

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<th>Skill</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Student Outcome</th>
<th>Instructional Activity</th>
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<td><strong>Cognitive Regulation:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attentional Control</strong></td>
<td>The ability to attend to relevant information and goal-directed tasks while resisting distractions and shifting tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Working Memory/Planning Skills</strong></td>
<td>The ability to maintain and manipulate information over a short period of time, including identifying and organizing the steps or sequence of events needed to complete an activity or achieve a goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inhibitory Control</strong></td>
<td>The mental ability to switch thinking about two different topics to thinking about multiple topics simultaneously. The ability to shift or reframe thinking from one important affect, task, or situation to another.</td>
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| **Flexibility**              |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
|                             |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Cognitive Skills**         |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Abstract Thinking**        |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Spatial Reasoning**        |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Symbolic Thinking**        |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Convergent Thinking**      |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Divergent Thinking**       |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Creativity**               |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Emotional Intelligence**   |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Interpersonal Intelligence** |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |

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| **Emotional Presentation:**  |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Empathy and Perspective Taking** |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Relationship Building**    |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |

| **Emotional Regulation:**    |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Emotional Expression**     |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |

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| **Emotional Presentation:**  |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Empathy and Perspective Taking** |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
| **Relationship Building**    |                                                                          |                                                                                |                                                                                        |
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<td>Interpersonal Processes: Understanding Social Cues</td>
<td>Processes through which one interprets cues from the social environment, including causal attributions and inferred intention for others’ behavior</td>
<td>Ability to generate and utilize effective strategies/solutions to deal with challenging interpersonal situations</td>
<td>Upvalued characters, Map emotional games, Develop social story scripts, Explicit social skills training, Social norms games, Create problem-solving games that require cooperative behavior, Tolerance a diversity of views, Community-building activities, Group classroom activities</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Processes: Prosocial and Cooperative Behavior Skills</td>
<td>Ability to generate and utilize effective strategies/solutions to deal with challenging interpersonal situations</td>
<td>Understanding that anger/conflict are normal aspects of life, Develops appropriate self-advocacy skills, Evaluates potential consequences, Identifies strengths in others, Shows a willingness to grow from mistakes</td>
<td>Mindfulness activities, Growth mindset activities, Kindness activities, Mindfulness activities, Strengths-based practices, Installation of values and character strengths, Identity strengths, Resilience activities, Strengths-based practices, Community-building activities</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Processes: Conflict Resolution/Problem-Solving</td>
<td>Ability to generate and utilize effective strategies/solutions to deal with challenging interpersonal situations</td>
<td>Understands that anger/conflict are normal aspects of life, Develops appropriate self-advocacy skills, Evaluates potential consequences, Identifies strengths in others, Shows a willingness to grow from mistakes</td>
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FINAL THOUGHTS

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DEVELOPING EMPATHY IN GT CHILDREN

- Do “With”, not “For”
- Insist that students “do” for themselves when possible
- Balance understanding with accountability

TEACH BALANCE

- Screen time balance
- Healthy lifestyle choices
- Time in nature
- Time to create
- Time with human connections

TEACH PATIENCE

- Cultivating relationships
- Long-term projects of meaning
- Developing passions and purpose
- Reframing meaning

TEACH RESILIENCE

- Social skills
- Service
- Healthy habits
- Flexible goals
- Optimism and mindset
- Emotional agility

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HOPE . . .

- Realistic
- Not afraid to work hard
- Innovative
- Tolerant
- Conscious consumer