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## PREFACE

The suicide of bright, talented, 17 year old Dallas Egbert in 1980 led his parents to inquire about programs designed to meet emotional needs of gifted children and their families. It soon became apparent that such programs rarely existed, even though the need for such services seemed clear. Prompted by their quest and by their contact with us, we began a program. The intent has been to increase the awareness of parents, teachers and others working with gifted children particularly to recognize that these children and their families have special emotional needs and opportunities that are quite often overlooked and, thus, neglected. Most often this neglect results "only" in unfulfilled potential and missed enjoyments — but sometimes it leads blatantly to misery and depression. Loving our children just is not enough. As in other jobs that require management roles, we have to know what we are doing!

On the Phil Donahue show in January, 1981, Dr. and Mrs. Egbert, Dr. James Webb and others discussed these emotional needs. Responses from over 20,000 persons across the country confirmed the extent of neglect, lack of understanding, and the prevailing myths regarding gifted children and their families. Through the courtesy of Joyce Juntune (who also appeared on this Donahue show) most of these letters went to the headquarters of the National Association for Gifted Children, and

were answered by her. Ms. Juntune, who is the Executive Director of NAGC, continues to give valued advice and support concerning our fledgling program.

Early in 1981, we began to implement a modest program to meet some of the emotional needs of gifted children and their families. Assistance was provided by the Dallas Egbert Fund established by the Egbert family at the Wright State University Foundation in Dayton, Ohio, and by the School of Professional Psychology at Wright State University which generously opened doors to inaugurate this effort. With community cooperation, a developing program was established.

What have we done? One aspect of the program involves formal intellectual and personality assessment and intensive treatment by psychologists at the Wright State University School of Professional Psychology who consult individually with the gifted children and their families.

Another aspect provides consultation to psychologists, teachers and other professionals individually and through workshops. We have responded to numerous inquiries from professionals throughout the country who seek assistance in nurturing the emotional development of gifted children and their families. It has become apparent that professionals lack useful training on this subject.

Foremost, we are working directly with parent groups through a series of guided discussions. The series consists of ten major topics that are of concern to the gifted child's family. Generally, one topic is discussed in each session. We provide some basic written material noting key points relevant to the topic, encourage parents to share their common concerns, and offer professional comment, advice, discussion, and guidance. Through this approach, parents can share ideas and experiences, and learn from each other how to appreciate and encourage each child. They can anticipate problems and find solutions, and, we

hope, prevent difficulties from occurring. Parenting requires skills that few of us are trained for or practiced at. Raising one or more gifted children can be even more demanding. As one parent noted, "Gifted children really don't change your life style; they destroy it!"

In the parents' group meetings, we have probably learned as much from the parents as they learned from us. We are deeply indebted to them for their sharing, courage and support. We all are learning to flow with, rather than fight against, a child's special abilities. Parents' comments about needs in their own families have contributed to developing this handbook. They join in our effort to help other parents and persons involved closely with gifted children.

Perhaps these pages will prompt others to establish similar parent groups elsewhere. Such parent groups could be a valuable addition to any gifted program. When gifted and enrichment classes do not exist or where they may be curtailed due to fiscal cutbacks within the educational systems, then programs for nurturing parent techniques become particularly crucial.

This book has five sections, Chapter I gives an overview of giftedness along with underlying myths and stereotypes that exist about gifted children. When some of the behaviors of these children are explored, it becomes apparent that they often are out of step with others and even within themselves. We lay groundwork for steps that can be taken to encourage self-esteem, self-respect and a strong self-identity. The concepts may help parents anticipate, prevent or inoculate their children against many of the particular stresses that they are likely to encounter.

The second section, Chapters II through XII, focuses more specifically on characteristics, on frequently occurring problems, and on particular suggestions for modifying behaviors. Where possible, we suggest ways of building on the strengths of gifted

## CHAPTER I

### WE DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM HERE! ... OR DO WE?

Recently, a nine year old girl was asked how a submarine and fish were different. After a moment she replied, "A submarine has lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise, but a fish only has tartar sauce." There are myriad stories which illustrate that gifted children often think differently from other children their age. On the one hand, this trait is delightful and surprising; but on the other hand, creative thinking may generate misunderstandings or problems for the gifted child and his or her family.

Our educational system has often generated mediocrity except for gifted athletes. From kindergarten, children are bombarded with pressures that urge them to modify their behavior and intellectual development toward the average of the group. Gifted children throughout our society may be trapped in an intellectual wasteland — a world that can be cruel to the gifted (Garfield, 1980).

Services to gifted and talented children are viewed as a low priority at federal, state and most levels of government, and by educational administrations. Even where there are legal or administrative mandates for providing services, the lack of trained personnel and funds cause programs for gifted children to be miniscule. In the years 1975-1980 federal expenditures for handicapped children were 200 times greater than those for gifted children (Lyon, 1981). The 1979 federal budget provided