



Chasing a  
Child's Potential

# TWICE-EXCEPTIONAL LEARNER OVERVIEW



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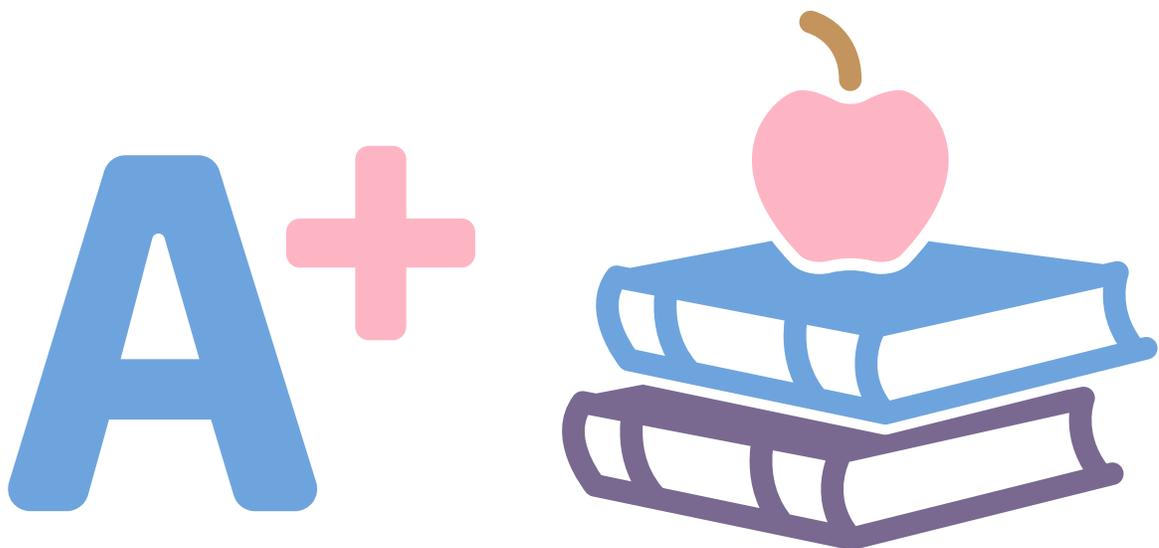


## Twice-exceptional learner overview

Is it possible to be gifted and learning disabled? Yes! We all have our own unique strengths and weaknesses, but some students have *exceptional* strengths and weaknesses, and those can create real problems in the academic setting. We often refer to students who have intellectual giftedness *and* a learning disability as twice exceptional, or 2e. What this means is, the student has two "exceptions," or two aspects, of their cognitive makeup that need to be addressed at school. They're intellectually gifted as measured by some sort of intellectual assessment battery, and they display underachievement in some area of learning. This book, then, is specifically about those twice-exceptional students who have giftedness and a learning disability.

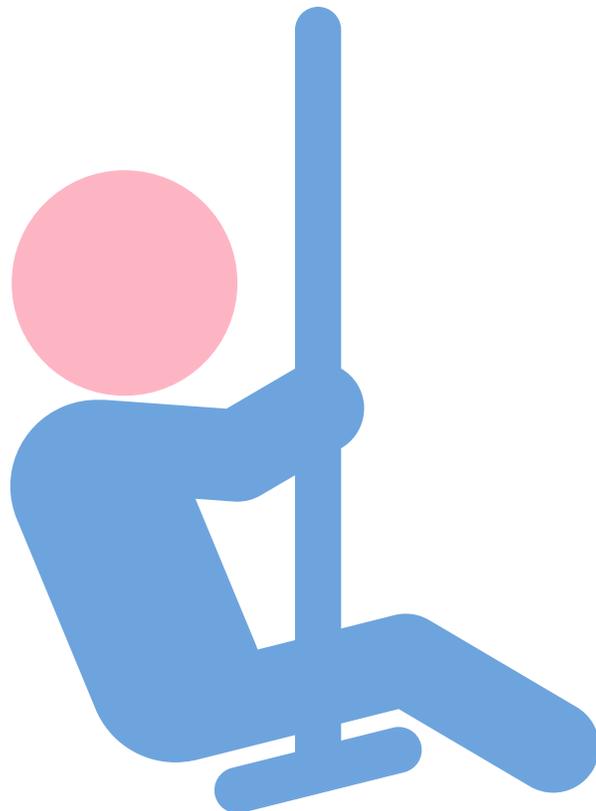
## What it means to be gifted

Let's begin with a discussion of what it means to be "gifted." The term "gifted" is vague and there is no one, agreed-upon understanding of what it means. In general, though, it means that a student has intellectual abilities above and beyond those expected given his or her age. There are many different ways of defining giftedness. You may want to do a quick internet search and see how it is defined by your school district.



# What it means to be learning disabled

The next question is, what does it mean to be learning disabled? A learning disability is a neurological condition. It means that something is going on with the structure or functioning of the brain that makes learning basic things like reading, writing or math particularly difficult for someone. There can also be subtle processing difficulties including problems with memory, organization or planning. Either way the student is not achieving up to expected levels given how intelligent he or she seems. So, as can be seen, it is possible for someone to be both gifted and learning disabled, and many people are.





## Famous 2e learners

Look at this list of high achievers who are said to also have had learning disabilities. Some of the names on this list might surprise you.

Whoopi Goldberg

Tom Cruise

Stephen Hawking

Dustin Hoffman

Thomas Jefferson

Albert Einstein

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Ludwig Van Beethoven

Cher

Winston Churchill

George Washington

Richard Branson

Walt Disney

Alexander Graham Bell

Jay Leno

Charles Schwab



## Overlooking 2e learners

Research is showing that anywhere from two to five percent of students in school right now would qualify as twice exceptional. Students who are twice exceptional can be difficult to identify for a few reasons. First of all, very bright students can often compensate for their learning challenges through other means. For that reason, they are often not identified until a little bit later in their schooling. Second of all, a student with a high IQ may be underachieving, but still be achieving at grade level. That gap between what they are capable of and what they are achieving is a problem. We want them to be achieving at levels that are commensurate with their IQ. So a student who is underachieving but very bright may still be achieving at grade level and therefore be overlooked.

## Overlooking 2e learners (continued)

Another reason that these students are often difficult to identify is they are often very verbal and pretty quick learners. Since we tend to judge how bright people are by their verbal skills and how quickly they learn, we assume all of their skill areas are equally as strong. This is often not the case. It is very important that if you think a student is underachieving, you start asking yourself about the possibility of a twice-exceptional learner.



# What to do with a 2e learner

The fundamental question becomes what do we do about students who are twice exceptional? There are several key things to do:

1. Be aware of and advocate for their needs.
2. Get a good evaluation.
3. Pursue a dual-classification that includes both giftedness and a learning disability.
4. Focus attention on developing their strengths and talents.
5. Understand the areas of disability and how they manifest for this student.
6. Teach compensation strategies.
7. Encourage students to advocate for and be aware of their own learning needs.





## Be aware of and advocate for their needs

The number one thing involves understanding, buying in and believing this is possible, and then advocating for the student. They're learning what their strengths and challenges are and we need to provide them with an opportunity to get help when they need it and ask questions. Students need to feel respected and know they have a voice. If you have a warm environment for these students and you listen to them, you'll be able to provide a safe place for them to learn and grow.

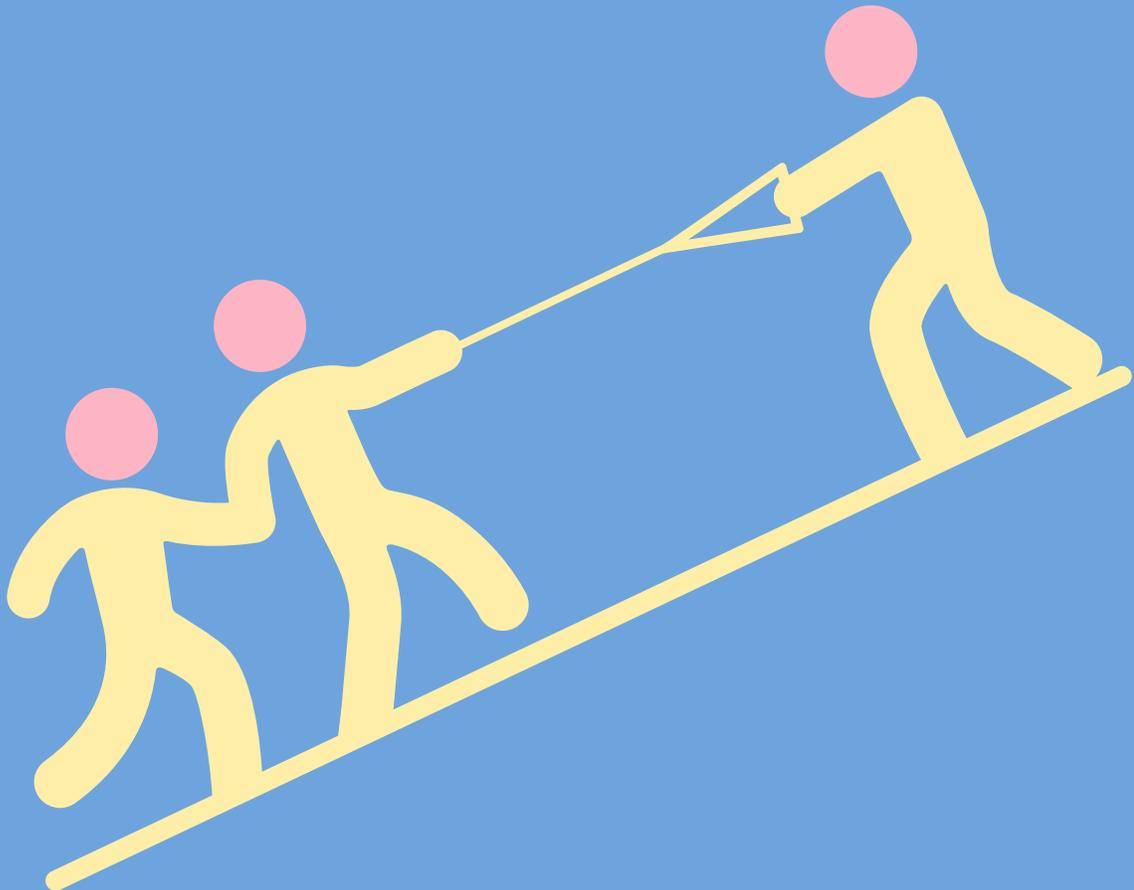


## Get a good evaluation

The second important way to help a 2e student is to pursue a good evaluation. That assessment will be a bit different than other types of assessments. For a twice-exceptional learner, you want to find an evaluator who understands the student has real intellectual strengths *and* real weaknesses. In other words, the goal of the evaluation is to understand this individual child's profile of strengths and challenges and not just look for something that might be wrong. Traditional evaluations are focused on finding a diagnosis. In this case you need to be sure the evaluator is seeking to understand the child's strengths and weaknesses, and appreciates the entire profile of the child. This may mean seeking an opinion from a private psychologist, your pediatrician or an independent learning specialist.

# Dual classification

The third thing we can do for students who are twice-exceptional learners is to make sure they are qualified as both gifted *and* learning disabled. If you are pursuing services through school, make sure both enrichment opportunities and remediation/accommodation supports are provided to the child, as both will be necessary.



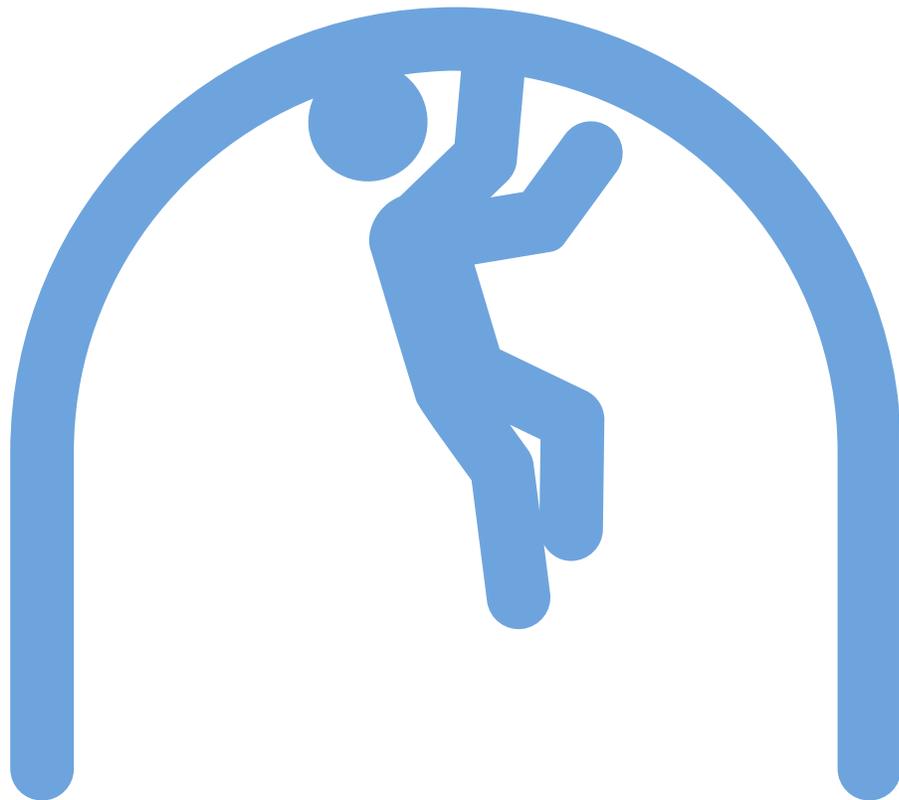


## Developing their strengths and talents

The fourth way we can serve these students is by focusing our attention on their strengths. Give them opportunities to show mastery over the things they are good at, leverage those strengths to shore up the challenged areas, and minimize the focus and attention on the things with which they struggle.

## Understand the areas of disability and how they manifest for this student

The fifth way to help 2e students is by understanding their weaknesses and how their disabilities manifest. A student may be diagnosed with dyslexia, which most of us think of as a reading disorder, but the reality is that dyslexia often impacts writing as well. Be aware of this student's particular weaknesses, and how they manifest in this child.





## Teach compensation strategies

The sixth way to address the needs of a 2e learner is to teach the child remediation strategies first and then shift gears into teaching compensation strategies. In other words, once the child's weaknesses have been remediated to a level of what we consider proficient, then move on to teach compensation strategies. Show students they can continue to grow and achieve their goals, but in a slightly different way.

## Encourage students to advocate for and be aware of their own learning needs

The seventh and final way to support students who are twice exceptional is to teach them how to advocate for themselves appropriately. Focus on teaching them about themselves. What are their own strengths and weaknesses? The good news is, if these children are identified early and receive an appropriate education, the outlook is very good.



## Again here are the seven things we can do for the twice-exceptional learner:

1. Be aware of and advocate for his or her needs.
2. Get a good evaluation.
3. Pursue a dual classification that includes both giftedness and a learning disability.
4. Focus attention on developing their strengths and talents.
5. Understand the areas of disability and how they manifest for this student.
6. Teach compensation strategies.
7. Encourage students to advocate for and be aware of their own learning needs.



## Closing

I'm sure you and your twice-exceptional students will find this information helpful when you're out there, chasing a child's potential.



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