

Table 1.1. Forms and Expressions of Overexcitability

(Piechowski, 1999)

PSYCHOMOTOR

Surplus of energy

rapid speech, marked excitation, intense physical activity (e.g., fast games and sports), pressure for action (e.g., organizing), marked competitiveness

Psychomotor expression of emotional tension

compulsive talking and chattering, impulsive actions, nervous habits (tics, nail biting), workaholism, acting out

SENSUAL

Enhanced sensory and aesthetic pleasure

seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing, delight in beautiful objects, sounds of words, music, form, color, balance

Sensual expression of emotional tension

overeating, sexual overindulgence, buying sprees, wanting to be in the limelight

INTELLECTUAL

Intensified activity of the mind

curiosity, concentration, capacity for sustained intellectual effort, avid reading, keen observation, detailed visual recall, detailed planning

Penchant for probing questions and problem solving

search for truth and understanding, forming new concepts, tenacity in problem solving

Reflective thought

thinking about thinking, love of theory and analysis, preoccupation with logic, moral thinking, introspection (but without self-judgment), conceptual and intuitive integration, independence of thought (sometimes very critical)

IMAGINATIONAL

Free play of the imagination

frequent use of image and metaphor, facility for invention and fantasy, facility for detailed visualization, poetic and dramatic perception, animistic and magical thinking

Capacity for living in a world of fantasy

predilection for magic and fairy tales, creation of private worlds, imaginary companions, dramatization

Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension

animistic imagery, mixing truth and fiction, elaborate dreams, illusions

Low tolerance of boredom

need for novelty and variety

EMOTIONAL

Feelings and emotions intensified

positive feelings, negative feelings, extremes of emotion, complex emotions and feelings, identification with others' feelings, awareness of a whole range of feelings

Strong somatic expressions

tense stomach, sinking heart, blushing, flushing, pounding heart, sweaty palms

Strong affective expressions

inhibition (timidity, shyness), enthusiasm, ecstasy, euphoria, pride, strong affective memory, shame, feelings of unreality, fears and anxieties, feelings of guilt, concern with death, depressive and suicidal moods

Capacity for strong attachments, deep relationships

strong emotional ties and attachments to persons, living things, places, attachments to animals, difficulty adjusting to new environments, compassion, responsiveness to others, sensitivity in relationships, loneliness

Well-differentiated feelings toward self

inner dialogue and self-judgment

Some authors have referred to the overexcitabilities as *original equipment* (OE). Similar to aspects of temperament, overexcitabilities are often noticed quite early in life. For example, gifted children tend to be more active and more alert than most children and display a higher energy level, whether physical, intellectual, or emotional. Their intensity is greater than average, sometimes extreme, and an overabundance of energy enhances their experience. For example, a student described a personal reservoir of energy: "I get filled with energy when I need that energy. And, of course, I release it by doing the thing that got me excited in the first place" (see Piechowski, 2006, p. 40, for many more examples). This surplus of energy, or *psychomotor* overexcitability, has to be discharged through action.

Sensory experience for gifted children tends to be of a much richer quality because so much more detail, texture, contrast, and distinction come into awareness. Liking with passion what is pleasant and disliking intensely what is unpleasant characterizes *sensual* overexcitability. As one adolescent said, "I seem to notice more smells more acutely than a lot of other people. I love dark, musty smells and earthy smells, herbs and things like that. I love the smell of clean air in spring and tree blossoms and things