

Asynchronous Development



Asynchronous development is a term used to describe the uneven development of cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities. It is often used to describe significant variations in skill level and ability in gifted individuals, such as advanced intellectual ability coupled with delayed fine motor or social skills or emotional regulation.

The inner experience for youth living with asynchronous development can take an emotional toll as they realize how different they are from their peers. With appropriate support, they can overcome self-doubt, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation to develop and leverage their strengths and reach their potential.

Asynchronous Development Explained

Teachers and parents may not understand why such a bright child cannot write an essay, finish math homework, make friends, be ready on time, or regulate emotionally for an entire school day or evening at home. In many cases, the adults in these scenarios believe the child is “too smart” to be lagging behind and become frustrated with underperformance.

Expectations may be unrealistic, and the pressure can be debilitating as the child struggles to reconcile the unevenness in their own makeup.

Asynchrony is prominent in the gifted population, so much so, that it is considered a defining characteristic of giftedness by many experts in the field. In schools unprepared to serve students dealing with asynchronous development, learning and

interacting can be especially difficult for the student and the teacher. The same is true for life at home. These students may be ready for intellectual challenges well beyond their peers yet struggle to convey what they know and learn within the confines of traditional education systems. As these youth operate with discrepancies in their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, their lived experiences and inner worlds become all the more difficult to unravel.

It is essential to understand a young person experiencing asynchronous development may be many ages at once. This is not necessarily a bad thing according to many experts. The purpose of delayed or prolonged development in the brain could be to allow a child more time to explore the world around them, create from their unique perspective, and grow into the individual they are designed to be. A focus on strength-based and talent-based teaching learning allows for the leveraging of gifts to achieve success and serves as a platform for lagging skills to develop. In addition, a focus on the positive can protect the child from needless anxiety and suffering brought on by deficit-based models where the concentration is on fixing what is “wrong” with them rather than fueling what is “right”.



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Characteristics of Asynchronous Development

Uneven or asynchronous development can be revealed in many ways and stages. Examples include:

- A second grader who thinks like a sixth grader but has the social skills of a kindergartener
- A third grader who reads at a high school level but struggles to meet grade level expectations in math
- A fifth grader deeply concerned with issues of social justice who lacks emotional control needed to succeed in the classroom
- A sixth grader who can discuss an area of interest at an adult level yet struggles to communicate with peers their own age

Asynchronous development is identified through cognitive and achievement assessments and neuroeducational and neuropsychological evaluations conducted by clinical experts. The resulting recommendations for counseling, therapies, and interventions provide families with the direction and resources needed to help their child both in and out of school. Given asynchronous development is common in gifted students, assessments and evaluations are an essential tool for advocacy.

Serving Students Experiencing Asynchrony

Tolerance and setting aside assumptions that the student should behave in a certain way can be challenging yet essential. Creating psychologically safe environments is especially important for students experiencing asynchronous development. In addition, they need time and support to develop and grow. This is best achieved with a focus on strength and talent-based activities and targeted support for developmental needs.

If learning disabilities are discovered, understanding how to qualify for special education services or classroom accommodations is critical for parents and advocates. If assessments reveal giftedness, knowing whether specific mandates for gifted education are in place within a given state and school system, what services school systems are required to provide, and how students qualify for access to gifted programming is essential; This journey is best traveled with clinical professionals and education resources who have expertise in assessments and the laws in place to identify and appropriately serve these youth.

Resources for Parents & Educators

- 2e News
- Bright & Quirky
- Davidson Institute for Talent Development
- GHF Gifted Learners (formerly Gifted Homeschoolers Forum)
- Hoagies' Gifted Education
- Let's Talk 2e
- National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)
- Renzulli Center at University of Connecticut
- Roeper Review
- Summit Center
- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

About Summit Center

Summit Center, founded by Drs. Daniel B. Peters and Susan Daniels, provides educational and comprehensive assessments, consultations, and counseling for children, teens, adults, and families. We work with clients who are neurodiverse, gifted, talented, twice-exceptional (have both gifted and less developed abilities), and/or are asynchronous in their development. Summit Center has assembled an expert team of professionals and specialists dedicated to using a strengths-based approach to help our clients reach their fullest developmental potential.