

# Athletics



Connecting gifted and twice-exceptional students with enjoyable physical activities is an important part of their overall development and wellbeing. Depending on the individual profile of the student, a number of options offer individual and team experiences that are excellent options for physical and mental health.

Whether the student is headed for the Olympics or the community ball field, athletic activity helps to sustain their physical health and emotional balance as well as establish important outlets for social interaction and talent development. Striking a healthy balance is essential for students to experience the joys athletics can offer.

## Athletics for Gifted and 2e

Whether supporting a student who is challenged by athletics or clearly gifted in athletics, unique challenges are involved for both the student and their family. Regardless of the student's athletic abilities, directing them toward activities that match their personal interests, passions and profiles can result in good physical and mental health as well as rewarding experiences that position them for success in other domains.

Although it is true that some gifted athletes, such as gymnasts and figure skaters, start at a very young age, the majority of gifted athletes who make it to elite status do not. Most experts agree early specialization in a sport does not directly correlate with elite performance but rather exposure to a variety of sports does. Time and patience as the student explores what they like and what feels right is essential but not always easy. Common recommendations for getting started include individual sports such as martial arts and cross country as well as team sports such as soccer and basketball. Connecting with coaches who understand and appreciate the student is also beneficial.

For gifted students whose intellectual abilities are developing faster than their emotional and physical abilities, engaging in organized sports and physical activities can be challenging. This asynchronous or uneven development may involve poor fine and gross motor skills that make finding the right fit difficult. Parents must closely consider the frustration experienced by the student as well as the potential impacts on their social and emotional wellbeing. Selecting sports in which the child is most likely to experience success based on their physical, social, and emotional development is essential, and healthy interaction with team mates and coaches should remain a priority.

For students who excel in athletics, the extraordinary commitments required of them and their families can be significant. They often are faced with long-term decisions and sacrifices of time, energy and money. Making it to elite levels, such as the Olympics and professional sports is an extraordinary accomplishment achieved by only a small percentage of athletes, and the pressures to perform can be overwhelming and even damaging. Balancing dreams with reality is important for keeping things in perspective as well as ensuring the child remains physically and emotionally healthy and secure. Support from physical and mental health professionals likely will be necessary.



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# Characteristics of Gifted Athletes

Regardless of when a student begins to engage with a particular sport or activity, deliberate practice, motivation and resiliency are thought of as essentials for reaching elite levels of play. Talented athletes are common within the gifted population and have been studied by researchers for decades. The presence or absence of a single characteristic could explain why some athletes make it to elite levels and others do not. Among the most common characteristics are charisma and leadership. Additional characteristics include:

- self-confidence
- coachability
- strong sense of motivation
- desire to succeed
- self-discipline
- optimism
- sense of belonging
- humility
- ability to manage stress
- low anxiety
- strong sense of focus
- trust in the process
- resiliency
- learning from setbacks
- vulnerability
- perfectionism
- competitiveness
- willingness to fight
- appreciation

## Supporting Student Athletes

Parents, coaches, counselors, and psychologists working together to understand how athletic pursuits are beneficial or otherwise impact the emotional balance and physical health of gifted and twice-exceptional students is essential. Steps for doing this include building strong and trusting relationships, establishing open lines of communication, keeping a healthy perspective on winning and losing, and balancing the pursuit with academic, social and emotional needs of the student.

It is essential to align the child's strengths and weaknesses with the demands of the sport as well as balance their quest for success with all other obligations. Finding the right fit may take time, and carefully monitoring the physical and mental health of the student can help to ensure the experiences are formative building blocks in their overall development. Athletics can be an outstanding outlet for gifted students, and ensuring the student experiences joy while engaging in the activity is a must.

To get started, parents can consider arranging lessons in the student's areas of interest and talent without narrowing things too early. Talking with a variety of coaches about their approach and philosophy also can go a long way in finding the right match for the student. Slowly introducing healthy competition and avoiding unnecessary pressure can help students build healthy perspectives and position them to enjoy their talents and interests intrinsically.

## 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 (having both gifted and less developed abilities), and 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.