

peptalk

Parenting Education

Practitioners Talk

Ideas and Information for Parenting Practitioners

Read for Emotional and Intellectual Development

by Linda Carlson

Reading *to* children, reading *with* children, and helping children select books are important for many different reasons. Two that educator Judith Wynn Halsted identifies in the latest edition of her *Some of My Best Friends Are Books* (Great Potential Press) are emotional and intellectual development.

These are significant considerations for those of us who are part of, or work with, families where children read at an advanced level, are intellectually gifted, or are intensely interested in a subject. These children may have needs not being met through school and the usual children's activities. Halsted's comments, however, have value for the parents of *all* children.

Feelings, values and decision-making can all be discussed in a non-threatening way by adults and children when the focus is characters in a book, she notes. "Parents . . . tell me that they find books to be wonderful bridges for communicating with their children."

When school and extracurricular activities don't provide the appropriate intellectual challenge, adults can use books and other publications to create individualized programs for kids.

The children most likely to need such individualized learning are:

- Curious and persistent
- Interested in many topics
- Quick to comprehend new concepts
- Creative and imaginative
- Goal-directed and have a long attention span

Why extra-bright kids need special help

The typical intellectually gifted child considers work very important; compared to other children their age, they are usually motivated to achieve mastery and they enjoy challenge. They often are also independent, non-conforming and more introverted. These differences, *not their giftedness*, are what so often causes self-esteem issues and social problems with kids their own age.

- Unusually intense about school projects, political or environmental issues, religion, world events, interpersonal relationships or abstract values

As Halsted points out, children with these characteristics may attend schools where intellectually challenging programs are not offered, or are not offered to every child who needs them because some children have learning disabilities or are:

- Nonconformist
- Rebellious
- From minority groups
- From homes of poverty

Reading vs. Comprehending

Both professionals and parents must be aware that even bright and avid readers are not always emotionally ready to understand the symbolism or the human relationships, despite being able to read and define the words. Halsted's suggestion: guide children to *fiction* at their emotional level and to *nonfiction* at their reading level.

How Bibliotherapy Helps

Bibliotherapy, which can be defined as "guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading," can be valuable in helping children of all kinds through the developmental tasks that everyone

must meet. For children and teenagers, these tasks are:

Middle childhood: achieving a sense of initiative

Late childhood: achieving a sense of industry

Adolescence: developing a sense of identity

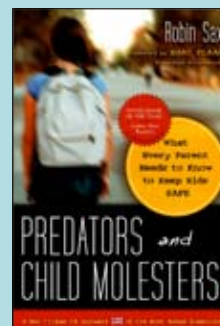
Guided reading can help bright and talented kids understand and cope with the burden of being different in a world that Halsted says is oriented to "average." It can help all children anticipate difficulties and

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Book Review

Predators and Child Molesters: What Every Parent Needs to Know to Keep Kids Safe
by Robin Sax

Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2009. 179 pp., \$17.98



Written when the author was a Los Angeles County deputy district attorney specializing in prosecuting sex crimes against children, this book is organized as 100 questions and answers. The scope of the molestation problem is obvious in the first pages, when Sax cites the number of known cases,

and the underreporting and then points out that there is only about a 3 percent chance of an offender getting caught—much less convicted—for a sex crime.

This is a straightforward guide to molestation, with brief factual descriptions that make it ideal for in-service as well as parent use. Because of the format, it makes finding answers to kids' questions easy for counselors. Parents could share some passages with primary-age children, and the entire book is appropriate for older high school students.

Sax defines child sexual abuse, which does not have to involve physical assault, and the difference between a pedophile, opportunist, molester and predator. She describes available treatments, lists the traits typical of molesters and explains why children are so vulnerable to assault. An excellent chart clarifies what to say to kids of different ages (including teenagers) to prepare them to avoid abuse—without your being alarmist.

Questions 33-100 address abuse: what signals possible abuse, whether to report suspected abuse—of other children as well as your own—to the police, how to talk to kids who say they've been abused, and what a police report and physical exam will involve. Sax explains why charges are not filed in some cases, and she describes what is required of children if an offender is prosecuted. How to talk to children who have been abused, regardless of whether the offenders have been prosecuted, and what the healing process will involve are also detailed. An appendix provides additional resources and Sax's own web site URL.

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