

Gifted Children and Delayed Diagnoses of Disability

What delayed diagnosis may result in:

- A child who remains 'diagnostically homeless' – no standard diagnosis which operates as a shorthand way for a variety of professionals to communicate with each other
- Missed opportunities for early intervention and therapies and remediation of learning challenges
- No access to appropriate disability adjustments for classroom activities and for tests and exams – so no precedent set for later years – hard to get in Year 11 because application looks sus
- In the case of some disabilities, missed opportunity to trial a medicine and see if this is one of the children for whom it will indeed 'work'
- Prolonging of parents' wondering and worrying about what might be 'wrong' with their child, and prolonging of child's frustration at 'mystery' of why he feels he's trying yet getting nowhere. Postponement of relief which finally comes with an accurate diagnosis of 'something' – "So I'm not just 'lazy' after all"
- Lowered self-concept, social/emotional problems and behaviour challenges – gifted child identifies in adolescence with the 'dumb' kids, not the 'brainy' ones
- Reduced access to gifted programs or camps on the grounds of 'bad' behaviour or poor writing, and thus little time spent with IQ peers
- Lost potential – fewer tertiary opportunities, lower employment expectations, underemployment, "losing our brightest minds"
- A firm belief that "I'm a loser and I'll always be a loser, so there's just no point trying"
- Too late to reverse the damage when child is taken back to the psychologist or developmental paediatrician at around age 14, already sullen and disengaged and wanting to quit school

Why delayed diagnoses can happen – the ADHD example excuses:

1. My child is 'just' gifted – he's just bored and unchallenged and misunderstood at school – but he can sit still and pay attention really well when something interests him and when he really **wants** to
2. It's just 'overexcitabilities' or 'asynchronous development'
3. I don't want my child 'labelled' with anything that's called a 'disorder' or a 'disability' – at most it's a 'difficulty' or a 'difference' or a 'relative weakness'
4. I don't want my child to be found to have ADHD because there is so much stigma attached to it and I fear people will assume it means that I must be a bad parent
5. My child is well-behaved and quiet so she couldn't have ADHD
6. My child is just easily distracted but it's not ADHD – it's just a boy thing
7. I know in my heart that it's ADHD, but my husband/wife won't hear of it
8. Yes he seems to have ADHD but let's 'wait and see' if he 'grows out of it'
19. I don't want my child to have ADHD because the treatment for that is 'drugs' and I've heard so many bad things about them on TV – they make kids short and zombie-like, and they result in drug addiction and heart problems and suicide
10. I'm going to try and treat my child's symptoms with diet and vitamins and meditation and, if that doesn't work after a few years, then I'll accept that it's ADHD
11. I read in the newspaper that ADHD is being over-diagnosed
12. I saw a child with ADHD on TV, and my child looks nothing like that horrid kid
13. Behaviour management programs seem to work some days so he couldn't really have ADHD
14. My child is just lazy – by diagnosing children as having ADHD, we are just medicalising what used to be viewed as moral flaws – he just needs to be punished and he'll come good
15. If my child is diagnosed with ADHD then he'll be eligible for disability adjustments such as extra time for his exams, and he'll see that as 'cheating' and frankly so do I
16. His IQ test report didn't say anything about ADHD – so he couldn't have it
17. Even if he does have ADHD, surely with his IQ he's clever enough to just 'get over it'
18. If the school finds out my child has ADHD, he'll get the 'naughty' reputation and surely then he'll always get blamed for everything that goes wrong
19. I want my child to get a scholarship at an elite private school and he won't if they think he has ADHD
20. Yes he's been professionally diagnosed with ADHD, but there's no funding for that at school, so the teacher has told me to get a diagnosis of autism instead