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Challenges Raising a Gifted Child:  
Stress and Resilience Factors within the Family

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## **Abstract**

The research on families of the gifted is extremely limited. In the past, families of the gifted have been studied mainly for two reasons: to discover how family life creates or supports giftedness or eminence, or to understand how one gifted child affects siblings. Few studies, however, have examined the impact of gifted children on the lives of parents. Most studies highlight that many gifted have unique needs and vulnerabilities. Although there is limited empirical research on the experience of parenting a gifted child, there is clinical and anecdotal evidence that the role presents unique parenting challenges. This article presents preliminary research data on the experiences of parenting a gifted child within the family. The authors embrace a risk and resilience model, supported by clinical data obtained from families with a gifted child seen at a leading Centre for Gifted Children in Milan.

*Keywords: families, resilience, clinical intervention*

## Challenges Raising a Gifted Child: Stress and Resilience Factors within the Family

### Introduction

The scientific literature suggests that gifted and talented children usually do not experience more difficulties as a group than typically developing children (Neihart, Reis, Robinson, & Moon, 2002; Neihart & Yeo, in press). However, giftedness seems to add complexity to individual development; this implies that gifted children face unique psychological issues (Morawska & Sanders, 2009a, 2009b; Neihart, Pfeiffer, & Cross, 2015; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000) “that do not arise only from giftedness itself “ (Neihart & Yeo, in press). Studies in the field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Suldo, Hearon, Shaunessy, Dedrick, in press, Wright & Lopez, 2009) and resilience (Gamezy & Rutter, 1983; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2007; Rutter, 1987, Werner & Smith, 1982) highlight that the trajectory that lead to a child’s well-being and healthy adjustment can be influenced, in a positive or undesirable way, by the dynamic interplay between individual, family and environmental factors. The children ecosystem is one of the most important factor in promoting resilience, without the opportunity to access to a healthy environment a child or adolescent could use maladaptive coping strategies to preserve well-being (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 2001; Ungar, 2013).

In particular, family resilience scholars emphasize the substantial role of families as one “context” able to enhance promotive processes that foster children positive outcomes in the face of ordinary stresses and difficulties (Masten & Monn, 2015). The quality of parenting is related to the development of competence in children, including academic achievement and social competence (Masten & Coastworth, 1998). Giftedness can be viewed as a dynamic attribute that emerges, during the time of the developmental trajectory, in the dynamic and complex interplay between the characteristics of the child and the family. Thus,

family well-being and parenting practices are critical issues to explore, especially in the gifted field where there is a lack of research about the experience of parenting a gifted child (Morawska & Sanders, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Reichenberg & Landau, 2009).

The specific purpose of the investigation reported in this article was to explore the nature of difficulties experienced by parents raising a gifted child. We also investigated the resources that parents of a gifted child rely upon in everyday family life. Qualitative data, collected in a clinical centre in Italy that specializes in parent guidance and psychological support of gifted children and their families, will be discussed. We acknowledge at the start that we embrace a relational-systemic epistemology and view our findings through the lens of a stress and resilience perspective (Bonfiglio, Renati, Farneti, 2012, 2014).

### **Premise: State of the Art about Giftedness in Italy**

In the last decade, scientific literature started looking at giftedness as a social construct (Borland, 2005, 2009; Pfeiffer, 2013a, b; Philipson & McCann, 2007). This new zeitgeist implies that the meaning of the concept *gifted* is highly sensitive to the culture, belief system, and policy of the country (Borland, 2003). Although the concept of giftedness may “not be real”, it is nonetheless a useful construct and its effects are tangible; it engenders myths and narratives which play a significant role for the developing child and his family system. Additionally, the construct influences educational policies and clinical practice. This is why we begin with a brief overview on the state of the art of gifted education in Italy. In Italy, gifted education is a relatively new field and it has developed slowly over the last 10 years. In a report on Gifted Education in Europe published by Monks & Pflüger in 2005, Italy was one of the most underdeveloped countries in Europe; the authors noted that “There is no law in Italy concerning the gifted student. They are officially ignored” (p. 89). Two years later a comparative study conducted by the Eurydice network about educational provisions for gifted students in Europe (2007) found that, in Italian schools, the needs of gifted students

are not integrated in curricular activities. Even today there is a neglect of gifted students and their special needs: no official educational provisions for gifted students are available and there are not approved identification protocols. Furthermore, there are very few educators or psychologists trained to work with gifted children or their parents.

Italian families of the gifted report they feel alone and neglected, and seek support in order to respond to the social, emotional and educational needs of their challenging kids (Torriani et al., 2015).

### **Parents, the other side of giftedness**

There is considerable scientific evidence that parenting practices plays a central role in child development (Magnuson & Duncan, 2004), and in supporting the development of positive coping strategies in the face of stress (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 2001; Stone et al., 2015). Current studies underline the finding that gifted student's happiness and well-being are influenced by factors within families; gifted adolescents' life satisfaction is related to their perception that their parents are warm, responsive, and emotionally supportive (Suldo , Hearon, Shaunessy, Dedrick, in press).

There is a dearth of research on the experience of parenting gifted children. Relatively few studies have been conducted on parents of the gifted (Jolly & Matthews, 2012; Morawska & Sanders, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Reichenberg & Landau, 2009; Silverman, 2013). The great majority of the published reports are focused on the role of the family in the development of talent, stressing how parents can support gifted children in educational contexts and in achieving academic success (Herzog & Bennet, 2004 ; Gross, 1999, Wu, 2008). Some studies have focused on parent satisfaction with gifted school programs (Chapey et al., 1987; Huff et al., 2005) and on their perception and identification of intellectual giftedness (McBee, 2006, 2010). Few scholars have investigated family relationships and the needs of the parents,

especially in relation to children's behavioural and emotional issues (Jolly & Matthews, 2012).

We know that family matters and that giftedness is a family issue. In fact, “Whether giftedness is identified and labelled, there is no escape from the impact of giftedness on the family or the impact of the family on giftedness” (May, 2000, p. 59). Parents face unique challenges in raising a gifted child (Alsop, 1997; Moon, Jurich, & Feldhusen, 1996; Rimm, 1995), and require guidance and support with parenting practices (Huff, Houskamp, Watkins, Stanton, & Tavegia, 2005; Silverman, 1993, 2013). Gifted and talented children have unique developmental needs, particularly evident in the social and educational realms (Morawska & Sanders, 2009a). For this reason, Pfeiffer (2013b) and others have argued that the gifted are a special-needs population.

Dirks (1979) found that being a parent of a gifted child presents with challenges every bit as great as those faced by their gifted child. Parents of the gifted have to deal with unique concerns related to parenting beliefs, values, and management, such as family roles and adaptations, sibling relationships, parental self-concept, neighbourhood and community issues, educational concerns, and child development (Keirouz, 1990). More recent literature has discussed the needs related to parent’s understanding of giftedness (Reichenberg & Landau, 2009), and how best to attend to their child’s social-emotional development (Pfeiffer, 2013b). May (2000) has written that parents of the gifted request counselling because they are worried about identification, labeling, and placement. Also, parents can perceive themselves without resources to successfully deal with unique gifted developmental issues, such as heightened intensities, perfectionism, or difficulties in building social relationships with peers (Fornia & Frame, 2001). In addition, the identification of the gifted child can put parents, metaphorically, in front of a mirror and they can become threatened about their own abilities relative to their child’s. If we look at the family as a complex

system, the special needs of the gifted child may be a source of unique stress for parents and siblings, especially when asynchronous development is substantial. This is also, of course, evident and well-documented within families with a special-needs child who has a disability.

### **Parenting the Gifted: a Risk and Resilience Viewpoint**

The construct of resilience is one of the most salient and challenging terms in contemporary psychology (Lutar, Cicchetti, Becker, 2000, Masten, 2001). The strength-based model of resilience examines positive resources and coping factors rather than deficits (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 2001). The application of this framework has been extended to the study of family systems (Allison et al., 2003, McCubbing & McCubbing, 1996, Walsh, 1998, 2002), increasing the appreciation of strength-based intervention models that focus on fostering family protective factors in order to promote the activation of family resilience processes (Simon et al., 2005), favourably impacting family relationships (Patterson, 2002).

Children are embedded and raised within multiple complex systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a, 1979b, Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006), and interdependent relationships (Weisner, 2005). A systemic and ecological perspective highlights the contextual, transactional nature of development and the synergistic, two-way process of influence between parents and child (Cicchetti, 2006; Gottman, Katz & Hooven, 1996; Granic & Patterson, 2006; Masten, 2006; Minucin, 1985, Sameroff, 2004).

The parent-child relationship is rooted in family dynamics, established and reinforced very quickly (Mc Hale, 2007; Mc Hale, Fivaz-Depeursinge, Dickstein, Robertson & Daley, 2008). The relationship is also influenced by the parent's early, family-of-origin experiences (Morman & Floyd, 2006; Stern, 1995). Children are also agents of emotional influence for their parents (Cook, 2001), a bi-directional phenomenon with important implications for parenting practice.

In the specific case of parenting a gifted children, it is important to underline that from birth the child presents challenges for their parents (Ruf, 2009). From the beginning of their life, many intellectually precocious children are very active and require much stimuli. Moreover, parents may have to deal with asynchronous development, intense behavioural reactions, academic underachievement, and school difficulties. Also, many parents of gifted children lack deep knowledge about developmental issues related to their gifted child or suitable and adaptive strategies to promote their successful adjustment and well-being (Pfeiffer, 2013b; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000). Many parents of the gifted are not well-prepared to deal with their special child's needs, and come to feel alone and without support from others – other families or professionals in the community (Alsop, 1997; Feldman & Piirto, 1995). This sense of intense loneliness and frustration can and often does lead to parental stress.

Parenting stress has been defined as, “The aversive psychological reaction to the demands of being a parent” (Deater-Deckard, 1998, p.315). Although a moderate amount of stress is considering normal (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990), parents who experience high levels of, or chronic, stress can be expected to suffer emotionally, and be less responsive to their child's needs. Parenting stress has been shown to impact the quality of the parenting (Abidin, 1992; Belsky, 1984; Rodgers, 1998), and adversely affect the parent-child relationship.

From a risk and resilience viewpoint (Black & Lobo, 2008), stress related to parenting is a risk factor that can have a deleterious effect on a child's well-being. In situations where there are multiple risk factors, parenting stress can adversely impact the child's developmental trajectory and lead to negative outcomes, such as behavioural problems in the classroom, diminished social competence, and feelings of rejection, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal (Anthony et al., 2005; Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman, 2005; Hart & Kelley 2006; McKenry & Price, 2005; Rodriguez, 2011).

The objective assessment of risk and protective factors is not easy, and clinicians should adopt a binocular perspective, with one lens focused on the child and the second lens observing the environment and proximal socio-relational contexts of the child and family. This multi-dimensional perspective enables the practitioner to conceptualize and design systemic interventions that take into account multiple, interacting factors (Roisman, 2005; Rutter, 1993). The presence of one or more protective or prophylactic factors does not automatically lead to an adaptive response (Pfeiffer & Reddy, 2001); if the number or potency of risk factors exceeds the impact of the protective factors, the probability to activate a resilient process generating an adaptive reaction within the family decreases (Johnson & Wiechelt, 2004).

In this brief discussion we have attempted to convey the complexity underlying the conceptualization and design of family interventions useful to trigger resilient processes; the clinician needs to understand a transactional model if they hope to be helpful. General system theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) and the subsequent advent of non-linear systems theories (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) enabled scientists and clinicians to expand their view of individual adjustment and mental health – complex relational processes that depict life within the family. By expanding the analysis perspective beyond relational dyads, one becomes aware that resilience is a process marked by a complex network of relations and experiences spinning throughout an individual's life-cycle and also on a cross-generational level (Hauser, 1999).

On the basis of these ideas and assumptions, we designed a pilot resiliency-oriented intervention model (Bonfiglio, Renati, & Farneti, 2012, 2014) that reflects three levels: vertical, horizontal and cross-domain. At *vertical level*, the intervention is tailored for each family taking into account the peculiar risks and protective factors of the specific family. With the parents' active participation, the clinician identifies stress indicators within three

areas: individual, familial, and social. For each indicator of stress, the clinician defines a feasible and measurable objective on the basis of the family's resilient characteristics (risk and protective factors) and analyzing the attempted solutions (Haley, 1976; Watzlavick Beavin & Jackson, 1971). Families, supported by the therapist, identify specific prescriptions for themselves based on their specific resources. Prescriptions are constantly monitored so that timely feedback and adjustments can be provided. More details are found in Bonfiglio, Renati, & Farneti (2012, 2014).

The *horizontal level of intervention* refers to experiential moments in group activities, and is structured in a way that allows family members to work on the risk and protective factors characterizing the problematic situation shared by family members. The interventions are carried out within specific settings designed to facilitate and foster the activation of the implicit associative processes by the risky situation (stressor) and specific protective factors related to the activity being performed, in order to generate functional coping and regulation strategies. These interventions incorporate resources, such as therapeutic groups and/or activities such as tutoring or mentoring. At the horizontal level, both direct forms of learning (achieved by doing) and indirect learning (through observation) are intentionally stimulated.

The *cross-domain intervention* pertains to the context within which the model is applied. The physical and relational space the therapeutic program develops within must be structured and managed in a way that allows it to become a "container" of resources. According to this perspective, the intervention is structured in order to provide a continuous and constant monitoring and supervision of the work carried out by specialists. Emphasis is put on the communication, support, coordination and reflection of systems. The staff, activities, rules, values, team meetings, activity planning, physical environment etc. represent crucial context-related protective factors. At this level the intervention targets the organizational system and consequently the workers who represent one of the key components of the work setting. Indeed,

some actions (implemented both at the vertical and the horizontal level) are tailored to the workers' characteristics. In particular, actions of supervision and training specifically related to the theme of resilience.

In order to develop effective clinical interventions for families of the gifted, it is crucial to understand the nature of the unique sources of stress that parents have to deal with and the resources they can use in order to successfully cope and moderate the effect of the stressors. Based on these assumptions, we undertook a pilot research project to explore the potential sources of stress and resources, as perceived by a community sample of Italian parents of gifted children who were seen at a mental health facility in Milan, Italy.

### **Method**

This pilot study examined parent's perceptions of their daily stresses and how they attempted to cope with these challenges. Of course, perceptions of stress is a subjective phenomenon; for this reason, we undertook a qualitative research approach through narratives that we felt could facilitate the expression and understanding of the real life experiences of the community participants (Brymann, 2004). The theoretical relevance of perceptions to understand the consequences of stress is well documented in the literature (e.g., Lazarus, 1966; Cox, 1980). The purpose of our pilot study was to collect interpretative data from parents encouraging the free expression of personal meanings associated with parenting stress. We defined a stressor as any reference to sources that elicit emotional, physical and/or physiological distress for the parents. The key idea was that the parent can perceive specific situations, child behavior, and even characteristics of the child as sources of stress. In other words, stress was operationally defined as subjective negative experiences due to an encounter with a stressor.

### **Participants**

Participants constituted a community sample. Parents with a gifted child were recruited on a voluntary basis through the *Phronesis Center for Potential Development and Resilience Nurturing* in Milan, and by the *Step-Net Italian National Association for Gifted and Talented Children*. The eligibility criteria were the presence in the family of at least one child between 6-10 years with a formal cognitive assessment that documented their gifted status.

There were 49 parents (Father=23; Mother=26), mean age 44 years (SD=5,37). All of the parents were Italian; 82% came from the north of Italy, 14% from the middle of the country, and 4% from the island. Eighty-two percent of the parents were married; 10% were cohabitant, and 2% were divorced. Sixty-seven percent of the families consisted of at least two children. The majority of the parents were well educated, holding a University degree (62%). All the families were middle or upper class. All of the participants declared concerns about parenting a gifted child. Informed consent was obtained from all participants; parents were not provided a honorarium.

### **Procedure**

Participants completed a semi-structured interview. The interview was divided into two sections: the first section covered sources of stress at child, family and social levels, and the second section covered resources<sup>1</sup>. The meaning of the term “resources” and “sources of stress” were carefully explained to the parents by a trained researcher before starting the interview. The administration took place during a 5-month period between summer and fall 2015. Each interview was administered individually and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Each interview was analyzed using an inductive coding approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All interviews were coded independently by three coders, all psychologists who had been trained in a qualitative process of coding. They also were familiar with giftedness and

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed information on the interview questions can be obtained from the first author

resilience framework. Coders independently read each interview and coded narrative units into specific predetermined, theoretically-guided categories. Categories were created based on the main level of factors present in the resilience literature: individual level, family level and social level. Any disagreement between coders was discussed in order to achieve consensus between reviewers. Statements for which agreement was reached were included and aggregated according to categories, identified by the coders. The results are described using the major categories identified in the interviews.

## **Results**

### **Sources of Stress: Child Level**

The major category of child-generated stressors was problems related to gifted children's oppositional behavior and difficulties in accepting rules and routines (34.7%). For example, one parent of a seven-year old gifted child stated, "Our family life is really hard, everyday our time schedule is destroyed by him. We have to repeat many times what he has to do in order to respect times and daily routines... he does not take care of the needs of the others... he argues: he does not accept to receive a "no" as a answer. We feel unable to manage him." Parents emphasized the difficulties that they have in helping their gifted child managing emotions (24.5%). For example, one parent stated, "Our daughter has a unique way of feeling, seems that she absorbs the emotions of other people..."

The parents also described their difficulty handling concerns experienced by their gifted child that in most cases led to negative emotions such as anxiety, inhibition, and sadness (24.5%). One father of a seven-year old gifted child, for example, stated, "It is very hard for me see my child suffering in that way, I'm feeling unable to support him... and this greatly troubles me." A lack of persistence seemed to be another recurring issue that creates apprehension in parents (14.3%). Difficulties in social relationships was also identified as a

source of stress by 8.2% of the participants. One mother of an eight-year old gifted child stated, “I don’t know how to help him, why he is not able to stay in touch with his peers. I would like him to get along better and be more flexible.”

### **Sources of Stress: Family Level**

The main source of stress at the family level was a lack of a parenting alliance (44.9%); participants in our pilot study also repeatedly indicated the difficulties that they have in finding helpful educational strategies. In many instances, participants indicated that their partner did not always share the same approach to child management or how they viewed their child’s giftedness. In some but not all instances, the mothers attributed more importance to the giftedness issue and how it impacted many aspects of their child’s behavior. For example, one mother of a nine-year old boy noted, “Our son is gifted and this is why he is so intense and frustrated about school. He is bored and this is why he is an angry child... I’m frustrated because no one understands.”

Another reported category of family-level stress for parents was the management of family routines (32.7%). A parent of a seven-year old, for example, stated, “Is very hard to organize our family’s schedule; our son moves at different rhythm! His focus and attention can, at times, be very intense on something we don’t have any idea about...we find ourselves always angry and in a hurry.” Managing sibling relationships was another category of family-level stress (22.5%). Parents of an eight-year old offered, “There is a tremendous amount of competition between our kids...we are exhausted by this, and worry about their relationship... The little one has many problems in school, but then he was identified as gifted... all of our energy has been dedicated to him, and we realize we ignored our other child! ... and now we feel guilty. It is not simple to balance our attention, our gifted child seemed so needy, especially in relation to social and school issues.”

Twelve percent of the sample reported difficulties with their extended family, including challenges communicating with relatives about their child's giftedness. Parents of a ten-year old indicated, "Our family doesn't understand, they think we like to push our (gifted) child to be smart. ...They don't understand how difficult it is to be the parent of a special child like this! Everyday is a challenge for us." Financial issues was cited by 8.2% of the parents; this included problems supporting the needs of their gifted child. For example, parents of an eight-year old gifted child reported, "Our son was very intense and the regular classroom in our local public school was too much for him... ...the noise, the peers, and a curriculum that didn't challenge him at all. We tried to get him help by enrolling him in a private school, but it is very expensive. Our choice is to invest our money trying to support his educational needs but we don't know for how long we can really do this."

#### **Sources of Stress: Social Level**

School was identified by almost 50% of the parents as a major source of stress. A recurring issue was the absence of a supportive school-family alliance; this was described by a number of participants as having a negative effect on their child bonding with the school. Parents of a six-year old lamented, "Our son is in the first grade and from the first day the teacher started telling me that he is smart but not teachable! ...she says that he disturbs lessons, is often out-of-his-seat, and so on... ...Now the situation has fallen apart, our relationship with his teacher is terrible, and we are angry and tired!"

Thirty-nine percent of the parents described feelings of aloneness and inadequacy in their parental role. One mother of an eight-year old shared, "Other parents think that we believe that our child is better than other kids... ...they don't invite us to eat pizza with the class, they simply think we are arrogant and ambitious! No one asks me how I feel. Sometimes I would like to yell! We are isolated and I feel alone!" Twenty-five percent of the parents that we interviewed described a lack of support from friends and institutions. This

apparent social isolation, in some instances, appeared to be related to the dearth of child relational experiences (12.2%). One mother of a nine-year old stated, “My daughter is different, even a bit strange, other kids never call her. She doesn’t seem interested in her peers... ..she feels comfortable at home with us. Other parents think that she is bizarre! It is very difficult to tolerate this attitude. I’m asking myself how I can protect her but I don’t really have a good answer!” Noteworthy, only four percent of the parents perceived their jobs as a source of stress. One father of a seven-year old explained, “We would like to be able to spend more time with her, playing, listening to her. But our jobs are really quite demanding, and we need to work in order to give her the opportunity to support her potential. Her school is clearly not prepared to support her special needs!”

### **Parent Resources**

The four most frequently-cited individual resources that the parents in this sample reported employing to cope with everyday family life stressors included: being available (26.3%), being patient (26.1%), providing nurturance and love (26.1%), and not giving up (i.e., persistence) (17.4%). At the couple level, the major parent resources that the participants employed together included: good communication (30.4%), shared cooperation (21.7%), and intimacy and love (13%). At social level, parents identified their own parents (i.e., the gifted child’s grandparents) as an important, primary resource in face of everyday stressor (47.8%), both for emotional and concrete support. They also identified specialized community centers and associations for the gifted as a fundamental source of support (43.4%).

### **Discussion and Implication for Clinical Practice**

Parents of gifted and talented children face many of the very same parenting challenges that all parents have to face and successfully navigate (Pfeiffer, 2013b). However they also have to deal with unique concerns about their gifted children’s psychosocial and

intellectual/academic development that are unique sources of parenting stress (Keirouz, 1990; Morawska & Sanders, 2009; Pfeiffer 2013b; Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000). Furthermore, researchers have indicated that many of these families tend to be child-centered (Bloom, 1985, Olszewski-Kubilius, 2008), and this finding is consistent across different cultures (Chan, 2005; Dwairy, 2004).

There is some research evidence that long-range outcomes for the gifted depends on the family environment (Olszewsky, Kulieke, & Buescher, 1987, Winner, 2000). Other research suggests that differing parenting styles can have either a positive or negative impact on gifted adolescent mental health (Dwairy, 2004). Thus, it is important for applied researchers in the gifted field to explore the experience of parents of the gifted to better understand the unique stressors that they face and the resources that they find crucial in order to portend favorable life outcomes. This type of research has clear implications for designing helpful clinical interventions to effectively meet the special needs and challenges of families with a gifted child.

A family resilience framework provides a useful heuristic for thinking about how certain family practices can potentially enhance the well-being of all the family members (Walsh, 2003). The family resilience literature emphasizes the importance of supporting the development of strength-based interventions to foster family protective-factors across individual, family and community levels (Berzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Simon et al., 2005). Bronfenbrenner's (1979a) ecological model reminds us that individual characteristics are mediated by the multiple contexts in which children negotiate their developmental processes. Self-esteem, problem solving skills, ways of coping, and emotion regulation are important protective factors that influence important academic and life outcomes.

The purpose of our pilot study was to explore the potential sources of stress and resources of the parents of the gifted through a resilience framework and ecological lens. As

we report in this article, the sources of stress expressed by our group of parents is particularly interesting from a family therapy perspective: the key stresses included a lack of parenting alliance, difficulties managing family routines, challenges handling sibling relationships, and less-than-adequate family communication.

It is important to note that our cohort of parents had difficulty completing the resources section of the questionnaire; most of the parents did not write about resources – leaving blank some sections of the questionnaire. Most of our volunteer participants were parents who were in a ‘critical moment’ of their family life; many reported struggling with the challenges of dealing with their gifted son or daughter’s behavioral problems.

The preliminary findings of our pilot work provide initial insights into the development and tailoring of clinical interventions for parents of gifted and talented children. *A systemic perspective* seems to be essential in work with these families. In part, because external system influences, such as school, neighborhood and peer networks can and often does impact in deleterious ways the healthy development of gifted children (Moon, Kelly, & Feldhusen, 1997; Pfeiffer, 2013b).

Family therapists are encouraged to explore their own prejudices (Cecchin, Lane, Ray, 1994) and attitudes about gifted children and their families in order to identify and reject myths, and accurately recognize the unique needs of this special population. Understanding the impact that giftedness can have on the whole family system can be facilitated by asking them, “To what extent is any issue simply what all families must comfort, and to what extent is this issue unique because of the presence of a gifted child?” (Colangelo, 1997, p.359). A therapist who is conscious of his own prejudices can move on and be open to curiosity (Cecchin, 1987), and become, themselves, a protective factor for the family. Helping the system to collaboratively explore hypotheses that increase the number of options and possibilities that the family has provides opportunities for identifying new resources and

coping strategies, leading to greater resilience. This can enhance a facilitative cycle that sustains family resilience processes. Sincere curiosity leads to hope and change. To intervene in the life of a family with a gifted child struggling and in distress by employing a positive, resiliency psychotherapeutic model holds great promise (Cowen et al., 1992; Parker et al., 1990). The therapist aims at creating a “safety” network, both internal and external to the person or the family. Once a person is “wrapped” in this network, her/his likelihood to manage in an adaptive way greatly increases.

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