



## What Does It Mean To Be Twice Exceptional?

Twice exceptionality (2e) is defined by the Twice Exceptional Community of Practice (2eCoP) as when an individual demonstrates “evidence [of] exceptional ability and disability which results in a unique set of circumstances.” Twice exceptionality is not a diagnosis; it is a conceptual way of identifying, understanding and supporting the social, emotional and academic needs of a uniquely gifted learner.

Skill development of 2e learners is typically uneven, or asynchronous. Asynchrony usually exists between intellectual and physical development, and between intellectual development and the ability to use or express that intelligence. Twice-exceptional students demonstrate superior ability in one or more areas (specific academics, intellectual ability, creativity, leadership, visual or performing arts) and one or more social, emotional or academic challenges. These may be caused by a neurobiological disorder or an emotional, sensory or learning disability. Specific areas of challenge may include physical disabilities; sensory sensitivity; autism spectrum disorder; emotional and/or behavioral disorders; psycho-social issues; ADHD; learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc.; receptive and/or expressive language disorders; processing delays; difficulty with executive function.

Because of these dual exceptionalities it is critical that twice exceptional individuals are recognized and accommodated for both their strengths and challenges – and one should never be compromised for the other. It is only through this conceptualization, or “dual lens view” that appropriate academic, social and emotional supports and opportunities can be provided for the twice exceptional (2e) learner.

Twice exceptionality can be difficult to understand and identify because most twice exceptional students use their strengths to compensate for what they can't do. When that happens, their abilities and disabilities mask each other, often resulting in average performance or underachievement. The challenge of identification can be attributed to a number of causes – the sheer variety of strengths and abilities one might possess, the number of potential learning challenges or deficits and finally the variety or combination and how those combinations are expressed or exhibited in each learner.

Behavior problems may occur due to underlying stress, boredom, frustration and lack of motivation. When 2e learners don't get the supports and interventions they need, and more often than not are identified by their deficits rather than their strengths, the result is learned helplessness and low self-esteem. Typical gifted/2e characteristics also include sensory sensitivity, asynchronous (uneven) development, and perfectionism. Many gifted/2e kids hate labels in their clothes and seams in their socks, are sensitive to loud noises, and are picky eaters due to sensitivity to smells, tastes, and textures of particular foods. Asynchronous development among skills including intellect, emotional maturity and physical development often underlie surface problems of inconsistency in social skills and academic performance. Perfectionism may lead to unrealistic expectations and the unwillingness to try something new for fear of failure.



## Common characteristics of 2e individuals will include not all, but many of the following:

- High verbal ability
- Strong mathematical reasoning
- Keen visual/spatial skills
- Good problem solving skills
- Excels at puzzles/mazes
- Highly developed critical thinking skills
- Insightful
- Ability to concentrate deeply in areas of interest
- Strong sense of curiosity
- Inattentive
- Disorganized
- Difficulty with sequential tasks
- Poor writing skills
- Reading problems – comprehension, retention
- Difficulty with memorization, computation, phonics and/or spelling
- Risk-averse in school or with areas of challenge
- Impulsive with little thought for consequences
- Requiring a lot of teacher support, scaffolding
- Stubborn and inflexible
- Emotionally immature
- Easily bored
- Narrow but deep areas of interest
- Questions rules/authority
- “Outside of the box” thinker/very imaginative
- Emotionally sensitive
- Places unreasonable demands on self, perfectionistic
- Socially awkward, poor social skills
- Unusually compassionate
- Morally sensitive
- Heightened appreciation for fairness and justice
- Highly developed sense of humor
- Emotionally intense
- Relates better to adults than peers