



SPECIAL NEEDS

Having A 'Gifted' Kid Is More Complicated Than It Seems



TIFFANY HUNTER



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There I was, sitting across from the private school's principal, conscious of the fact that I look more like a 16-year-old than a parent. I tried to keep a smile on my face; calm, cool and collected; not letting my crazy spill onto the desk in front of me. I had told her my son's backstory, or as much as I felt was necessary to share with a complete stranger. Yet I felt myself jolted by her words when she said, laughing, "What is gifted anyway?"



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I get it. **Gifted kids** are seen at best as antisocial nerds, and at worst, more for their overbearing parents than anything they've ever earned themselves. They are seen as "special" and "elite" — dirty words in this day and age. Everything in life will be so easy for them. And yet these parents have the gall to ask for *more* for them?

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And here was an *educator* repeating my worst thoughts back at me. Even with test scores in my hands, I suddenly felt like an imposter. Like a special snowflake mom wanting to take services from struggling children in order to give them to my child who already has "so much." To be fair, she meant it in the way that their program adapts to the child, but — and I mean this with the upmost respect to children with other types of special needs — I can't help but wonder if she would have said "What is dyslexia?" and laughed it off so jovially.

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So what is gifted? Gifted is sitting down with your child's pre-K teachers and being told that your 4-year-old is welcome to stay in the program, but that they just can't accommodate his advanced learning. That they'll try to prevent his downward spiral, but it's inevitable if he stays there. It's visiting private schools (that you could never afford) who refuse to accelerate because their programs go a *bit* beyond public school curriculum.

It's calling every school board in your province and wanting to cry every time they say they offer a gifted program with "depth and breadth" but eventually admit there's no real acceleration. It's deciding to homeschool because your smiling, carefree child is riddled with anxiety and suddenly refuses to read because "other kids don't read."

Gifted is being faced with the fact that your child will never be "normal." Sure, normal is overrated, but they may never get to do that school pageant or maybe even go to prom. It's watching them try to engage their friends in a discussion of their favorite thing in the world and seeing it dawn on them that they're different. It's every milestone being met with panic instead of pride because *you're not supposed to be able to do that yet.*

It's lonely. As a parent, you'll be accused of hotheadedness when the reality is you're so exhausted by the never-ending questions that come at all hours of the day and night, that you prop your kid in bed beside you with *Cosmos* or *Periodic Videos* on the TV because it's the only thing he'll watch long enough for you to get a 20-minute nap. It's asking, begging, pleading, for help and getting laughed at, being told to just let your kid be a kid, and beating yourself up because *you're* the one who offers to play dress up, but your child would rather you help them with their latest math equation. And what kind of a parent tells their kid to stop reading anyway? Even if you are already a half hour late.

Gifted is your child's educational needs not being met because of handwriting or age-appropriate behavior. It's being told school is just for socialization anyway, yet how much socialization is happening at a desk for eight hours a day? It's having your child's special needs completely disregarded because he's somehow perceived as "better," even though gifted children are the most at-risk group for dropping out of school. Gifted *isn't* a fast track to success. It isn't always classic book smart, and it isn't an angel child who is always perfectly behaved. Oftentimes, it's the opposite.

But gifted is something else too. It's seeing the joy in the simple pleasure of a book. It's finding the magic of science and math. It's marveling at questions from a preschooler that most adults wouldn't think to ask. It's people coming out of the woodwork where you least expect it to lend a hand. It's treasuring the people who *get it* without you having to explain it. For all of the hard, the gift is being touched when you find the good.

But you probably didn't want to hear about all of that. So how about this: Gifted is a neurological difference characterized by advanced cognitive ability. It is considered a special need. So how about we stop denying these children the basic services that any other child with special needs deserves and ensure they get it too. It isn't either-or. Shouldn't it be all?

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ABOUT THE WRITER



TIFFANY HUNTER |

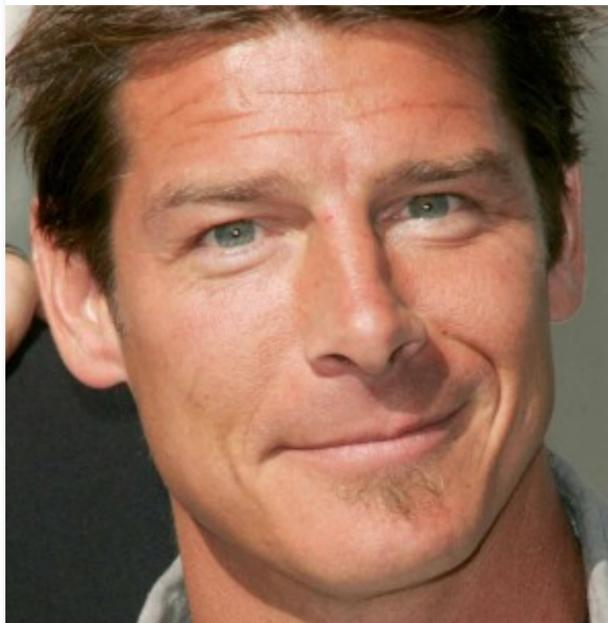
Tiffany Hunter is a stay-at-home mom and married to her high-school sweetheart. She enjoys knitting and reading, and would have made an excellent pioneer or 85-year-old. You can read her sleep-deprived ramblings at [Life At Tiffany's](#) and follow her on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

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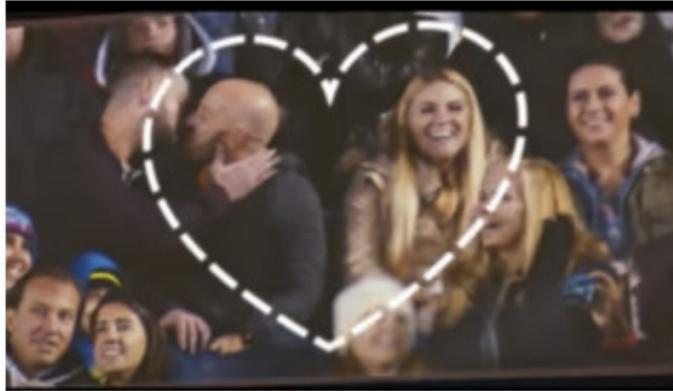
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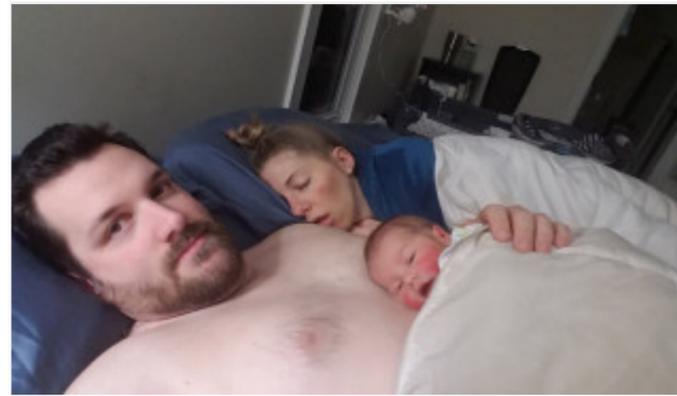
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