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Tourette and High Abilities

When potential and complexity coexist

"Exceptional talent doesn't always come in plain packaging. Sometimes, it is accompanied by involuntary movements, unexpected sounds and a deep sensitivity that defies the environment."

Understanding what High Intellectual Abilities are

Today, we no longer view high intellectual abilities (HIA) as a fixed label or a matter of test scores, but rather as a broad and diverse potential that can express itself in many ways throughout life. This potential is not defined solely by high cognitive ability—it also involves the child's interaction with their environment, their motivation, creativity, curiosity, and emotional sensitivity. HIA tends to emerge when children are in environments that allow them to develop their skills, explore freely, and learn with meaning.

Instead of relying on rigid categories like "gifted" or "IQ above 130," it is more helpful to observe whether the child learns at a rapid pace, shows a constant drive to explore new ideas, sees the world with depth and nuance, or displays a heightened emotional or aesthetic sensitivity.

Rather than classifying children into "types" of HIA, it's more accurate and respectful to describe each child's unique profile—acknowledging their strengths and the particular ways they learn, create, and relate to others.

Busting common myths about HIA

Before moving forward, it is important to dismantle some misconceptions that circulate around high abilities:

❌ *Having ACI is the same as having high academic achievement.*

➤ Not always. Many children with ACI do not conform to the traditional school format and may become bored, frustrated, or demotivated.

❌ *A child with ACI has everything easier.*

➤ Not necessarily. Their emotional intensity, sensitivity, or divergent thinking can create particular challenges for them.

❌ *High abilities are surpassed over time.*

➤ It is not something that disappears. It is a particular way of processing the world, which evolves with the person.

❌ *Only children from families with resources have ACI.*

➤ High abilities do not depend on the socioeconomic environment, although this influences their detection and development.

❌ *They don't need support because they're already brilliant.*

➤ Precisely because of their complexity, they need emotional and educational support adjusted to their profile.

Detecting at home: signs and early guidance

Many parents begin to suspect their child may have high abilities when they notice signs such as intense curiosity, an advanced vocabulary for their age, deep or unusual questions, or remarkable creativity. When these indicators appear, it is advisable to:

- Observe how this potential manifests in different settings (home, school, play, emotional responses).
- Share and compare impressions with the child's school or educators.
- Avoid projecting expectations or pressuring the child to "prove" anything.
- Request a psychoeducational assessment if needed.

More important than assigning a label is gaining a deeper understanding of how that child learns, feels, and connects with the world.

How to talk about it with the child?

If high abilities are confirmed through an assessment—or there is a well-founded suspicion—it's a good idea to share this with the child in a natural, age-appropriate way. You might say something like:

"We've noticed that you have a very special way of learning and understanding things. Let's find ways to help you enjoy that even more."

Avoid phrases that might create excessive pride, pressure, or feelings of isolation. It's not about being "better," but about recognizing what makes them unique—and supporting them so they can enjoy and share their gifts with others.

Supporting from Home: How to Nurture and Enhance Their Development

- Create a stimulating environment filled with books, games, nature, science, and art.
- Listen to their ideas, questions, and emotions without judging or minimizing them.
- Make room for their interests, even if they seem unusual or intense.
- Set clear behavioral boundaries, but don't restrict their thinking.
- Validate both their abilities and their emotions—feeling understood is just as important as learning.
- Encourage them to share what they know, without imposing it—knowledge grows when it's enjoyed in community.

When there is Tourette's in addition to high capacities: a doubly unique profile

There are children who, in addition to having a high intellectual potential, live with a diagnosis of **Tourette's Syndrome** or other neurodevelopmental conditions. We call this profile **double exceptionality**.

These children may reason brilliantly and, at the same time, have difficulty self-regulating their behavior, managing frustration, or functioning fluently in school settings. Many times, their environment does not know how to read that combination of strengths and challenges.

It is essential to carry out a comprehensive evaluation, which considers both difficulties and abilities, and that allows the design of an educational intervention **focused on their interests, passions and emotional well-being**.

It is not a matter of separating "what works" from "what does not", but of seeing the child in his or her totality and **using his or her talents as a way of accessing what is difficult for him**.

Regulatory approach and educational care in Spain

The Spanish legal framework recognises high abilities as a specific need for educational support. The LOE (Organic Law on Education) establishes the obligation of early detection and adaptation of educational measures for these students. In addition, autonomous communities such as Madrid, Andalusia or Castilla y León have developed specific regulations.

Financial aid and available resources

The Ministry of Education offers a **NEAE (** Specific Educational Support Needs) scholarship that includes:

- Up to €913 for educational enrichment programs (non-therapeutic).
- A fixed allowance of €400 to support schooling, regardless of income.

These grants require:

- Report from the school counsellor.
- Justification of the chosen program.

They are not intended for clinical psychological therapies, but for educational activities that stimulate the student's potential.

Can Tourette's enhance certain cognitive skills?

So children with Tourette's have higher abilities than the rest?

There is no scientific evidence to show that people with Tourette's have a higher prevalence of high intellectual abilities compared to the general population. This belief, although widespread in some family or clinical settings, **is not supported by representative population studies**.

Where does this myth come from?

It probably arises from several factors:

- Some children with Tourette's, especially without comorbidities, may excel at verbal reasoning or inhibitory control tasks, which can be mistaken for an HIA profile.
- They often display divergent thoughts, intense interests, or creative expressions that may seem "out of the ordinary."
- Families and teachers, when observing a great effort to self-regulate, tend to interpret this intensity as synonymous with superior talent.

However, **having outstanding skills in some areas does not necessarily imply a global profile of high ability**. Comprehensive evaluation remains critical.

Some research has found that, in children with Tourette Syndrome without other co-occurring conditions (such as ADHD or ASD), the ongoing effort to manage their tics may help strengthen certain cognitive functions. This daily self-regulation can translate into specific advantages:

- **Greater impulse control:** By learning to suppress their tics in social or academic settings, some children develop a stronger ability to inhibit automatic behaviors. *Example:* While other children might impulsively shout out an answer, a child with Tourette may have trained themselves to pause and think before responding.
- **More efficient grammatical processing:** Some studies have shown that these children respond more quickly and accurately in tasks involving sentence completion or error detection. *Example:* When asked to complete a sentence like "The girl eats…," children with Tourette may choose the correct option more quickly by effectively filtering out incorrect ones.

These abilities are not universal or guaranteed, but they suggest that Tourette Syndrome, far from being solely a limitation, can be accompanied by adaptive cognitive strategies. This perspective invites us to see the child in a more holistic way—acknowledging both their challenges and their internal strengths.

Can OCD influence cognitive profile?

Although obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) does not directly enhance cognitive development, some studies suggest that certain OCD profiles may exhibit heightened cognitive activation—especially in tasks involving logical reasoning, attention to detail, or verbal memory. This is partly due to the individual's tendency toward hypervigilance, control, and mental rumination.

Clinical example: A child with both Tourette Syndrome and OCD may have a highly analytical cognitive style, capable of solving complex math problems or recalling sequences in great detail… yet simultaneously feel blocked by mental rituals or intrusive thoughts that interfere with their performance.

It's important to keep in mind:

- Not all children with OCD demonstrate cognitive advantages. In many cases, the disorder interferes with sustained attention and mental flexibility.
- When OCD coexists with high abilities, it can create "twice-exceptional" profiles that require highly tailored emotional and educational support.

Therefore, beyond simply measuring intellectual potential, it is crucial to assess how that potential interacts with the child's emotional experience and environment.

What happens if the Total IQ is invalid?

In some cases, the Total IQ (FSIQ) score obtained from tests like the WISC-V is not interpretable due to significant discrepancies between index scores (e.g., between Verbal Comprehension and Processing Speed). This is common in children with neurodivergent profiles such as Tourette Syndrome, where cognitive abilities may be unevenly distributed.

In such situations, many professionals prefer to consider the **General Ability Index (GAI)** as a more reliable indicator. The GAI is derived from subtests that assess verbal and visual reasoning and is less influenced by factors such as anxiety, motor slowness, or challenges with sustained attention.

When can the ICG be used to recognize ACI?

When the **GAI** is greater than 130 and there are clear qualitative indicators of high ability—such as curiosity, creativity, and complex thinking—it may be considered sufficient to identify a high-ability profile, especially when the Full Scale IQ is distorted by contextual or neurodevelopmental factors.

This criterion is accepted in many autonomous communities and is supported by guidelines from the Spanish Ministry of Education, which emphasize comprehensive clinical interpretation over a single numerical score.

➡️ In children with Tourette Syndrome—who may perform lower in processing speed or working memory—the use of the GAI helps prevent their true potential from being underestimated.

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What does a child with Tourette's and high abilities need?

- A **comprehensive look** that is not limited to symptoms or academic performance.
- Coordinated interventions between family, school and professionals.
- **Constant emotional validation** : knowing that you are not alone, that you are not "weird".
- Recognize that **every child with HIA is different**. The important thing is not the label, but their life experience.
- **Observe carefully and without judgment:** what are you passionate about, how do you learn, where do you feel comfortable?
- Promote **spaces where they can share** with other children who have similar interests.
- Celebrate their originality, **without demanding more or less** than what they need to grow in balance.

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