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Evolving Parent Associations: From Helping to Empowering

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○ Start of Parent Associations

Counseling in parent associations is in many cases **giving** information and **helping** parents of highly able children to deal with **problems**.

For many parents such a group or **counselor is necessary** and brings **relief** and a sense of **belonging**.

Activities gather the highly gifted children with **peers** and parents get home with **new positive experiences**.

In some parent associations we can see an **evolution, a new attitude**: Less helping and more empowering, less answers and more questions, less "in school my child had the problem..." and more "as a family we are working on...".

How can we use this **additional viewpoint** and involvement to empower parents?

What are the **long-term benefits**?

How does this go with other parts of parental work, i.e. **communicating with schools and teachers** of their highly able children?



DGhK (German association for gifted children)

Founded on the initiative of Ms. Annette Heinbokel in 1978 in Hamburg by experts to support parents

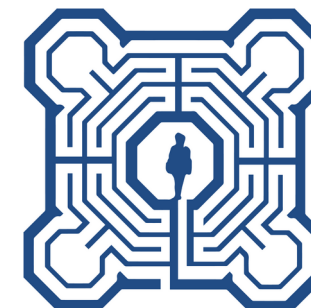
Modelled on and first supported by NAGC, UK (today: PotentialPlus)

Main actions:

- **Giving reliable information:** magazine; website; trainer network; communication with other specialists (scientists, teachers, psychologists,...)
- **Offering peers and a sense of belonging:** open and free of charge meetings, activities for children, parents and families; feeling normal; no more need to explain special needs
- **Counseling parents in their actual personal situation:** individual solutions; sharing experiences; understanding and empathy

Trained counselors

- as leaders of the group for meetings (parents, families, children), organizing talks (experts)
- as experts for special issues of parents of highly gifted children
- organized in regional groups to know about each other, building a network
- offered on a voluntary basis





SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted)

Founded by James Webb in the United States

Offering SENG Model Parent Groups (SMPGs), later SENG Community Groups (SCGs)

- **courses** (8-10 weeks) in a fixed group
- based James Webb's book "**A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children**" and articles by other authors
- special training for facilitators mandatory

trained facilitators

- As group leaders, not as experts!
- Working in pairs

Common rules for every meeting

- We're the guides, not the experts
- There are no wrong answers
- What's said here, stays here



○ Shifting the focus

individual problem → learning from experience and community → focused on resources and family-life

- **Less confrontation and more collaboration**

"The teacher has to..." → "What did other parents do in a similar situation?" → "What could be my (supporting) part?"

- **Less answers and more questions**

"You should go to an IQ-test to see, if he's gifted (or not)" → "What/Whom do you need the test for?" → „What do we already know? How can we benefit from the test?"

- **from problem-orientation to solution-orientation**

"My child doesn't/can't/won't ..." → "What worked for others?" → "How can we see our progress/learning?"

- **more family-focus**

"The school has to..." → "Where is my parental influence?" → "How can we improve our family life?"

○ Answering the Leading Questions

- **How can we use this additional viewpoint and involvement to empower parents?**
 - Let them see their expertise and role as parents
 - Offer networks of parents for supporting each other
 - Associations offer facilitators and room for improvement
 - More long-term involvement
- **What are the long-term benefits?**
 - Shifting the mindset, supporting a growth-mindset
 - Positive views on experiences and possibilities
 - Forcing self-efficacy and positive activities
 - Parents as role-models for their highly able children and for other parents
- **How does this go with other parts of parental work, i.e. communicating with schools and teachers of their highly able children?**
 - communicating with schools of their children without fear or anger but with self-esteem instead
 - Becoming partners of the teachers: collaboration with a parental focus
 - Looking for what is possible, what they can do

Additional Questions

- **You describe a shift from “helping” parents to empowering them. In practical terms, what does an empowered parent do differently when facing challenges at home or at school?**
 - Help is useful, when you need resources. Empowering parents means showing them their own resources.
 - When parents get stressed, the usual reactions are “fight, flight or faint”. Empowerment is stress-reduction.
 - A main resource are good experiences. Empowering uses activating those experiences.
- **How can parent associations support families to become more confident advocates without making parents feel that they must solve every problem themselves?**
 - Biggest benefit: community building, access to experiences of other parents of gifted children
 - A sense of belonging, being part of something bigger
 - Being an educator for my “family affairs” could make me a partner for schools with “educational affairs”
 - Seeing the importance of social-emotional issues (more at home) in addition to cognitive issues (more in school), i.e. for learning and personal growth
- **You explained that parent associations can help families establish a sense of belonging. How does this new sense of community help to empower parents to make positive changes in the lives of their gifted children?**
 - Parents also need peers, just like the children. “Looking for friends” is a shared task
 - Learning and trying new ways are essential, mistakes are normal, no one is perfect
 - Parents try out new things, they report to other parents, the community appreciates experiences



Contact and Material



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DGhK: www.dghk.de
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My (German) articles about work with parents:

- [Und was ist mit den Eltern? 40 Jahre Beratung in der DGhK:](http://martina.rosenboom.de/publikationen/Und_was_ist_mit_den_Eltern-40_Jahre_Beratung_in_der_DGhK.pdf)
[http://martina.rosenboom.de/publikationen/Und was ist mit den Eltern-40 Jahre Beratung in der D GhK.pdf](http://martina.rosenboom.de/publikationen/Und_was_ist_mit_den_Eltern-40_Jahre_Beratung_in_der_DGhK.pdf)
- Die Bedürfnisse und Einflüsse der Eltern hochbegabter Kinder:
[http://martina.rosenboom.de/publikationen/Die Beduerfnisse und Einfluesse der Eltern hochbegabter Kinder.pdf](http://martina.rosenboom.de/publikationen/Die_Beduerfnisse_und_Einfluesse_der_Eltern_hochbegabter_Kinder.pdf)
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