

Born Smart

In the movie, *Bourne Legacy*, the main character played by Jeremy Renner is trying to get some pills. He's desperate. No one, not even the audience knows why he needs them since he seems healthy, strong and smart. Then we find out. Without the pills, he will lose his intelligence. In fact, his mental ability will fall far below that of ordinary people. Suddenly the audience understands why those pills are so important, and we watch in fear as he begins to lose his ability to understand situations, make decisions, and solve problems.

Society values intelligence, and the thought of losing it is terrifying for Renner's character, Aaron Cross, but also most people. We want to be smart. Yet, how much intelligence is the right amount? Is it ever possible to be too smart?

A very smart child is called a prodigy. A true prodigy is different from most children. He or she may show abilities at a very young age. Often they read years before most children, and they often show great math or scientific intelligence.

Tanishq Abraham is an example. Tanishq was born into an immigrant family from India. They currently live in California where his father is a software engineer, and his mother is a veterinarian. Tanishq showed his intelligence as a baby. He was able to read and remember details from children's books before his second birthday. His parents noticed his curiosity, and they began taking him to the library regularly. He was so hungry to learn that he started taking high school classes at five. By the time he was nine, he was taking college classes.

Tanishq is interested in science. He started by studying dinosaurs, but then he discovered astronomy. At the age of nine, he gave a presentation at a NASA conference. Now is planning to study biomedical engineering and has set his next goal. He wants to be a doctor by the time he is 20.

Another type of prodigy has great musical intelligence. While most people are aware of Amadeus Mozart the classical composer who was writing operas at the age of four, there are also many modern musical prodigies. Alma Deutscher is one. Many people call her a modern Mozart because she began playing the piano at the age of two and writing music at four. She completed a full-length opera, *Cinderella*, at the age of 10, which is one year earlier than Mozart who was 11 when he wrote *Apollo et Hyacinthus*.

Deutscher's gift is mysterious. Sometimes she hears music in her sleep. Once she woke up in the middle of the night with a complete piece in her head. She got up and spent the next three hours writing it down so she would not forget it. She also gets ideas while she is skipping rope. Sometimes an idea will come to her while she is talking to other people.

Both Tanishq and Alma have promising careers, and they are friendly, confident children. However, some people express concern that they and other prodigies do not get to enjoy life the way other children do. Instead of playing in the park, they spend much of their lives in the company of people who are much older than they are. In fact, both Tanishq and Alama were

home schooled as young children, which means they did not learn from teachers in classrooms like most children. Instead, their parents taught them at home.

These parents like the parents of many gifted children worry that they are doing the right thing. Very little is known about child prodigies, and there is not much support from educational institutions says the writer, Andrew Soloman. Soloman has written extensively on children with differences. He observes that gifted children often need as much support as those with disabilities such as autism or physical disabilities, but parents get little help because the public believes they do not need it.

Solomon has interviewed many families of prodigies, and he has seen different approaches. Some control every detail of their children's lives from lessons to meal times. Others, like the parents of Tanishq and Alma are more open to the child's desires. After much observation, his suggestion is that parents' most important task might be to simply know their child. Only then can they truly collaborate to provide the best possible support.

Today Alma's parents are very careful to plan activities with other kids her age. They want her to have fun. Tanishq's parents are constantly asking Tanishq how he feels about the time he spends in classrooms and libraries. Tanishq, who struggled to convince colleges to admit him as an advanced placement student, said in a TedX talk, "For me, learning about particle physics *is* fun."