

## **Q&A with Dr. Kathy Koch, author of *8 Great Smarts: Discover and Nurture Your Child's Intelligences***

### **Q: What are the 8 Great Smarts?**

**A:** The 8 Great Smarts are the multiple intelligences that people think with. Every person has all eight of the intelligences, but some are more awakened than others, and some are more dormant. If you're familiar with the theory that some people are right-brained and some are left-brained, many scholars no longer believe this theory explains as many differences among people as once thought. Many of us see the theory of multiple intelligences as a much more accurate understanding of different ways people learn and process ideas.

For example, someone is considered word smart if they think with words. Logic smart means they think with questions. Picture smart means they think with pictures and their eyes. Music smart refers to thinking with rhythms and melodies. Body smart means a person thinks with movement and touch. Nature smart means thinking with patterns. People smart refers to thinking with people. Self smart refers to thinking with reflection.

### **Q: Why are they important?**

**A:** Smart is a power word. Everyone wants to be smart. If some children believe others are smart and they're not, they can give up. They lower their expectations for today and tomorrow. They may not accomplish what God intended them to. This is also true of adults. Language is powerful. Words matter.

When you and your child understand there are eight intelligences, the questions change from "*Am I smart?*" and "*How smart am I?*" to the much more valuable "*How am I smart?*" It's no longer about the amount of intelligence, but instead about which intelligences are strengths. And, it's not as much about comparing with others as it is becoming who we were designed to be.

Children taught about the eight great smarts will apply themselves, have the confidence to tackle more challenging work, and learn more efficiently and strategically. They also may have healthier friendships, volunteer and serve more readily, more easily identify what they'd like to do after high school, and grow in their faith.

### **Q: So everyone is born with all of the distinct intelligences?**

**A:** Yes, they just have to be awakened, but they're there, built into each person at birth. God uses our nature (our genetic makeup) and nurture (experiences we have and attitudes surrounding us) to create us as He wants us to be. Dr. Gardner, the Harvard Professor who discovered the smarts, stated the idea this way: "I reject the 'inherited versus learned' dichotomy and instead stress the interaction, from the moment of conception, between genetic and environmental factors."

### **Q: It's not just what you're born with, then, it's what gets nurtured?**

**A:** Absolutely. If a child grows up with apathetic or absent parents, poverty, abuse, or any number of other negative factors, his or her smarts may remain weaker throughout life. This may be partly due to lies children believe about themselves when parented in these situations. "I don't matter." "I'll never amount to anything." "My ideas aren't important." A child believing these statements won't bother investing in himself to develop latent gifts. Nature and nurture together determine which intelligences will

interest your child. That's where strengths always start—with interest. Some smarts will become strengths, some may not develop much at all, and some will plateau at a point in between. When you exhibit healthy and positive attitudes and provide a variety of interesting experiences for your child, you cooperate with God in the development of his or her smarts and full potential. The nurture you provide is very important!

**Q: Talk about how this kind of thinking can help children when faced with a difficult problem.**

**A:** When something is hard for children who know they're smart in many ways, they can think about whether using a different intelligence would help. When they don't do well on an assignment or test, they know they can approach the content differently by studying with a different smart. Their default won't be to believe, "I'm dumb." Rather, they'll think, "I can improve by using another smart." Children who don't know they have multiple intelligences will often feel dumb when they get a "bad" grade and when tasks are challenging. They have nothing else to rely on. They believe their intelligence is fixed and causes all outcomes – those that turn out well and those that don't.

**Q. Can you give us some examples of how children can study with all 8 smarts?**

**A.** Sure. To use word smart, they can read, write, and talk about the topic. To use logic smart, they can ask and answer questions about the topic. They can do this by just talking to themselves, writing them out, or by talking with a friend or parent. To use picture smart, they can draw what they're studying. For music smart, they can put things they're trying to memorize to rhythms or melodies like we've done with "Mississippi" and the "ABC Song." Body smart involves movement and touch so they could act out the definitions of words, write their spelling words huge in the air to use many muscles rather than on paper, and more. Nature smart involves patterns so they can examine things closely for similarities and differences. Studying outside can help these children, too. To use the people smart, children can study with others or just even be in the same room with people while studying. To use self smart, children can quietly reflect deeply on what they're learning and look for personal and relevant applications.

**Q: You also believe in the importance of seeing God as the Ultimate in smarts.**

**A:** Oh yes. When presenting the smarts to children in a Christian context, I include this reality: "God is smarter than I am!" They laugh and sometimes cheer. Smart children understand that God will always be smarter than they are. In addition, smart children know they need the smartest God – the God of the Bible. I tell them that God could have created them to be like marionette puppets He controls. Instead, He gave them eight different intelligences and He trusts them to use their smarts to help and not hurt. That's humbling, isn't it? The smarts are great, but they're no substitute for God. None!

**Q: What are some ways for parents to identify their child's strengths?**

**A:** Your child's smarts will usually be apparent first as interests. Therefore, spending time with your children—to watch them and to hear them—is essential. When you and others notice their interests and nurture them by your positive responses, abilities will usually emerge and be strengthened. So, look for interests first. What does your son do in his spare time? What does your daughter spend her gift money on? What does your son keep talking about after school? Pay attention and ask yourself which smarts are represented. As you continue to be alert, you'll discover whether these were fleeting interests or whether they give birth to real strengths. Those will show up at school with grades, which assignments they want to spend more time on, and which classes they

freely participate in. Strengths will also influence which extra-curricular activities they'll want to participate in. Paying attention to how each child misbehaves can also reveal smart strengths. Do they talk too much? Word smart. Move more than is appropriate and touch everything? Body smart: Manipulate people—even you? People smart. Think they must have reasons for everything before they obey? Logic smart. You get the idea.

**Q: You talk about how there's potential danger in not harnessing a child's strengths.**

**A:** Strengths not harnessed can become weaknesses. Too much of a good thing isn't always a good thing. For instance, those of us with word-smart strengths can gossip well, tease well, impress with our vocabulary, and always want to have the last word. I tell children that just because we can do it doesn't mean we should. I know I didn't always use my smarts well. If my parents wouldn't have affirmed my healthy uses of my abilities and provided positive outlets for them, I might have gravitated more toward the negative. That would have been sad. More importantly, it might have meant I wouldn't have developed the strengths God chose for me (Ephesians 2:10). It's not okay if children are misbehaving because of how they are smart. Self-respect, self-control, and respect for others are always right. We can't excuse their choices because they have talent and ability. Identifying the smart giving birth to misbehavior helps you talk with your children wisely. When children understand the cause of their behavior, they are more empowered to change. You'll have more hope, too!

**Q: How can parents begin to encourage their child differently once they understand the 8 Great Smarts?**

**A:** Teach them truths from this book, talk about the smarts as situations present themselves, point out every day uses, and affirm them specifically with language that builds them up. *"You sight-read that well because you're music smart"* is much more valuable than, *"Good job."* *"You're self smart. That's why you came up with those unique ideas on your own. I'm impressed!"* is much more valuable than *"I never would have thought of that!"* or *"What made you think of that crazy idea?"*

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